

Perceptual acts and sensational states

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Plan for today

- A. Sketch my view
- B. Give some motivation
- C. Fill out the view with special attention to epistemology

A. SKETCH OF MY VIEW

Experience as action

- The mental occurrences in one which are like something (at t) are the actions one performs (at t)
- What those occurrences are like = which kinds of actions they are
- I mean *all* (roughly) the things we would ordinary call 'actions'
- Examples: playing chess, writing a PhD thesis, moving one's arm, thinking about philosophy, having a conversation, tasting the pepperiness of a wine
- The actions are the best deservers of the name 'experience'

Some phenomenological gesturing

- The kind of act gives ‘contour’ to the stream of consciousness
 - Actions are not ‘objects’ but ‘forms’ of consciousness
 - Actions provide the ‘subjective’ rather than ‘qualitative’ aspects of the stream
 - So in a way the position has affinities to the Rosenthalian family of views
 - Still, the position is not an (X)OT view

Revising a contemporary dogma

- Representationalism, qualia theory, direct realism, enactive theory etc are cast as theories of consciousness.
- What they are really theories of is **sensational states**: seeing (as of) a red-17 thing, having a peppery-17 taste, pain-17 (maybe also emotions, etc)
- I believe in these things, but I don't think they deserve the name 'experience'. I don't think they are like anything; I don't think their kinds are what anything is like.
- After all, they are not actions!

Perceptual acts and sensational states

- Of course sensational states are 'close' to the stream of consciousness.
- There is a distinctive class of 'perceptual acts' which interface sensational states and the remainder of the stream of consciousness
 - Looking, feeling, tasting, smelling, listening
 - Under the causal influence of one's sensational state; part-constituted by one's sensational state

B. MOTIVATION FOR MY VIEW

The gorilla argument

- Roughly: what is it like to see (as of) a gorilla (in a certain completely determinate way) (or have a pain of a certain sort)?
- Nothing:
 - Two subjects can be the same in what it is like for them while one sees a gorilla and the other does not ... if neither is 'attending to' the gorilla
 - Two subjects can differ in what it is like for them while each sees a gorilla ... if neither is 'attending to' the gorilla
- 'What it's like-ness' is *essential*, so if F *might* be like nothing it *must be* like nothing.

Sharpening this up

- Jane and Fred have the same kind of total sensational state:
 - Both see a red tomato and have pain in their hand
 - All requisite qualifications: normal subjects, normal enviro, same shape and shade tomato, same kind of pain, same part of hand
- Ed sees red but has itch rather than pain; Cain has pain but sees green rather than red
- Jane and Cain ‘attend to’ pain while Fred and Ed ‘attend to’ red
 - Assuming they are ‘attending’ with great intensity, the sensations are ‘mild’, etc
- (The totality of) what it’s like for Fred = what it’s like for Ed <> what it’s like for Jane = what it’s like for Cain
 - Hence the totality what it’s like for one does not supervene on the kind of one’s total sensational state (Fred/Jane) and there is nothing it is like to have pain or see red
 - Hence the kind of one’s total sensational state does not supervene on the totality of what it’s like for one (Fred/Ed or Jane/Cain)

Two key claims

- I. What it's like for Fred = what it's like for Ed
- II. Fred's kind of sensational state = Jane's kind of sensational state
 - Despite the prima facie plausibility of these claims, obviously there's room for quibbling
 - I'm inclined to think the attraction of the overall position might stanch the impulse to quibble

'Attending'

- The appeal to this notion is largely pedagogical, but you might think the needed modification to the dogma is small: just reduce the sensational state to the scope of the 'attentional spotlight' (Jesse-style)
- But I don't think there is any such thing, or any act of 'attending': I accept *adverbialism* (there are attentive and inattentive actions)
- Some of these are my perceptual actions: ways of looking, feeling, tasting, smelling, and 'sounding'
- Still, you might think 'looking attentively' = 'shining the attentional spotlight in the visual field'
- But remember: I think *all* actions are experiences.

Playing Defender

- Here's an argument for that:
- An arcade game from 1980, where you fly a spaceship around blasting aliens to save the humans they are trying to kidnap
 - Combines perceptual, motor, and reasoning streams, each of which is plausibly 'like something';
 - P = what the perceptual stream is like, M = what the motor stream is like, R = what the reasoning stream is like
- But what it is like to play Defender isn't a mere aggregate of P, M, and R:
 - Having P without M and R would be bizarre; having M without P and R would be bizarre; and having R without P and M would be bizarre. None of these streams of experience makes sense without each of the others
 - What it is like to play Defender is not the same as what it is like to have three bizarre streams going on at once (eg the perceptual stream from Pac-Man, the motor stream from Space Invaders, and the reasoning stream from Asteroids simultaneously).
- Rather, it seems to involve P, M, and R under an 'umbrella' that makes sense of each of them and their coordination; the umbrella is *playing Defender*.
- So what it is like to play Defender is irreducible to what anything else is like. So *playing Defender* is a kind of experience. Without loss of generality, all kinds of action are kinds of experience.

Some little arguments

- The Dennett-Martin argument
 - Consciousness is ‘revealed’ (in the good case?)
 - If consciousness is revealed, reflection on an experience settles questions about its kind
 - But reflection on a sensational state doesn’t settle questions about its kind
 - Dennett: Chase and Sanborn; Martin: sense-data v direct realism v representationalism
 - Hence sensational states are not kinds of experience
- Nonperceptual phenomenology
 - There seem to be a lot of experiences that are not sensory: ‘cognitive phenomenology’, ‘phenomenology of agency’, and the like
 - Under the current dogma, this is hard to incorporate
 - People debate over it at conferences
 - But it is obvious!

Some little arguments

- Temporality
 - Experience has a flow
 - Sensation doesn't
 - Hence sensation isn't experience
- Value
 - Being a zombie would be as bad as death
 - But it's hard to see why sensation makes life worth living (Johnston's bandaged eyes notwithstanding)
 - Hence sensation isn't experience

Some little arguments

- Subjectivity and subjects
 - ‘Experiences’ in the interesting sense are occurrences with ‘subjectivity’
 - Not easy to say what that means, but somewhat plausible to think that subjectivity is a sort of ‘refraction’ of subjecthood
 - Eg, if O is of kind K and K’s most natural determinable is G, then O is subjective iff just the things undergoing a G are subjects iff being a subject = being a [G-undergoer] iff what I am essentially is a [G-undergoer]
 - Less plausible that what I am essentially is a sensation-sufferer than that what I am essentially is an agent

C. FILLING OUT MY VIEW

Questions about perceptual acts

1. Can we say more about what these acts are like; in particular, how does the constitution work, in detail?
2. How does the causation work, in detail?
3. In what sense are perceptual acts 'acts'?
4. How does this affect epistemology?

What are the acts like?

- Five super-families, LFTSS
- These can be determined in various ways in accord with various overarching purposes, as in the sort of watching and listening that goes with playing Defender. We also observe ordinary vocabulary like 'scrutinize' and 'watch' as concerning fairly general kinds of perceptual act.
- A simple case, have QR as part of sensational state, take it up within action by looking in an unspecific way 'over in that direction'. Result: QR 'constitutes' one's act of looking so that one is 'R-looking'; if instead have QG, take it up within action, one is 'G-looking'.

Why believe in such constitution?

- Recall Jane and Cain: each of them has pain, but Jane sees red while Cain sees green.
 - What it is like to be them is the same: they are both feeling pain
 - But we think there is a modal difference: what it is like to be them if they were doing different things would be different
 - If they were looking at colors, Jane would be looking at red, while Cain would be looking at green; in that case, what it would be like to be them would be different
 - Positing the full sensational state allows us to provide a psychological explanation of this modal phenomenon:
 - The sensational state can constitute the perceptual act.

Causal pull

- Consider Jane and Sue, each of whom is sitting in a cafe from noon to 1; from 12:15 to 12:45 each of them is chatting
 - Jane has pain in her hand for the hour; Sue has no pain.
 - While chatting, Jane is distracted from the pain, so what it is like to be her = what it is like to be Sue for this half hour
 - But at 12:45, Jane's friend leaves, and she is no longer distracted from her pain. So now what it is like to be Jane <> what it is like to be Sue. Why?
 - Positing the full sensational state including Jane's pain at 12:30 as psychological but not conscious allows us to provide a psychological answer to this question.
- We can say that the sensational state exerts a causal pull over one's perceptual acts: but so do other ongoing actions, and when their pull is not very strong the sensational state may be entirely outside one's stream of consciousness.
- The more 'intense' the sensation, the stronger its causal pull.

How are perceptual acts 'acts'?

- Worry: thanks to the causal pull, they aren't always performed 'under the guise of the good'.
- True, but ...
 - Principle: if something is an act and of kind K, anything of kind K is an act
 - This lets even the ones that are set off by attn capture count as acts
 - Principle: anything which can rationalize in the manner of an act is an act
 - They do, in ways I now explore

'I'm A-ing because I'm G-ing'

- That's when I A under the guise of the good: I am A-ing because I see some good in it, and what I see in it is that it helps my G-ing along.
- We can put this in the idiom of decision theory:
 - At the time I commenced A-ing, doing that was the live option which would maximize the expected excellence of my act of G-ing
 - That's a credence-weighted average over worlds of how well (in terms for a G) one's act of G-ing goes if one commences A-ing:
 - Roughly, $\sum_w [C(w/I \text{ commence A-ing} \ \& \ \text{perform a G-ing}) V_G(w)]$
- This optimization needn't reflect any explicit judgement or evaluation; rather, in typical cases the certainty that one is G-ing is grounded in the fact that the stream of consciousness is a G-ing.

External world epistemology

- ‘I judged it was red because I was R-looking’
 - $\text{Sum}_w[\text{CR}=\text{C}(w/\text{I judge it's red \& am R-looking})$
* $V_{\text{[R-looking]}(w)} >$
 - $\text{Sum}_w[\text{CG}=\text{C}(w/\text{I judge it's green \& am R-looking})$
* $V_{\text{[R-looking]}(w)}$
- Worlds: w. R-JR, x. R-JG, y. G-JR, z. G-JG
- $\text{CR}(x) = \text{CR}(z) = 0 = \text{CG}(w) = \text{CG}(y)$
- $\text{CR}(w) = \text{CG}(x) = \text{GOOD}; \text{CR}(y) = \text{CG}(z) = \text{BAD}$:
namely, my credence that I a good case or a bad case in regard to R-looking

External world epistemology

- $$\begin{aligned}
 \text{EV(JR)} &= \text{CR}(w)V(w) + \text{CR}(x)V(x) && + \\
 &\text{CR}(y)V(y) + \text{CR}(z)V(z) && \\
 &= \text{GOOD}^*V(w) + 0^*V(x) && + \\
 &\text{BAD}^*V(y) + 0^*V(z) && > \\
 \text{EV(JG)} &= \text{CG}(w)V(w) + \text{CG}(x)V(x) && + \\
 &\text{CG}(y)V(y) + \text{CG}(z)V(z) && \\
 &= 0^*V(w) + \text{GOOD}^*V(x) && + \\
 &0^*V(y) + \text{BAD}^*V(z) && \text{iff} \\
 \text{GOOD}^*V(w) + \text{BAD}^*V(y) &> \text{GOOD}^*V(x) + \text{BAD}^*V(z) \\
 \text{GOOD}^*(V(w) - V(x)) &> \text{BAD}^*(V(z) - V(y)) \\
 \text{GOOD}/\text{BAD} &> (V(z) - V(y))/(V(w) - V(x))
 \end{aligned}$$

External world epistemology

- So one should judge that it's red rather than green iff
$$\text{GOOD/BAD} > (V(z) - V(y))/(V(w) - V(x))$$
 - The LHS represents how confident one is that one is in the good case.
 - What does the RHS represent? Recall that it's green at y and z; in z one is right while in y one is wrong; it's red at w and x; in w one is right while in x one is wrong. So the numerator measures one's premium on getting it right in the bad case, while the denominator measures one's premium on getting it right in the good case. So the ratio is something like one's sense of the relative importance of getting it right in the bad versus good cases.
- For example suppose one is 90% certain one is in the good case. Then LHS = 9; one then has justification to judge that it's red *unless* getting it right in the bad case is at least 9 times as important as getting it right in the good case.
- Some times it is! That is the essence of signal detection theory.

‘This looks red’

- Going by looking: this is red
- When someone says this, this communicates that their act of looking was of a kind that, given their credence of being in the good case and their epistemic priorities, the optimal judgement is that this is red
 - The general story is more complex but of a common pattern.

Internal world epistemology

- Knowledge of perceptual acts is like knowledge of actions in general, grounded in their supplying the form of the stream of consciousness.
- It is interesting though that typically our talk of such actions is quantificational ('this looks red'). This may be due to the fact that the sensational state makes them determinate and distinct from one another 'without our intervention'.
- Not like Chalmers's view: we don't turn attention to QR or QG. These things cannot, or cannot easily, become objects of consciousness. However they can easily be incorporated into forms of consciousness, which are thereby 'formally known' (though not thereby easily made into objects of consciousness).
- This explains transparency.

Cognitive penetration

- The search for independent justifying perceptual content is fruitless:
 - Cognitive penetration is the order of the day in perceptual justification. There is no answer to what one should judge independent of one's confidence that one is in the good case.
 - How things look just concerns how one takes things to be by looking, all over again.
 - Note moreover that for spectral inverts, the 'good' and 'bad' cases are reversed.
 - Moreover, so is 'evaluative penetration'. There is no answer to what one should judge independent of one's sense of the relative significance of getting it right in the good versus bad cases.

Action unmediated by judgement

- Can imagine live options that are not judgements being immediate responses to perceptual actions.
 - For example, in an athletic, musical, or video-gaming context one minutely adjusts the motion of one's limbs or digits in response to one's sensational acts
 - We could think of the perceptual acts as being aggregated together with goal-oriented acts: making this jump-shot, playing this piece, beating the high-score at Defender
 - I optimize my beating the high-score at Defender in light of PHI-looking by flying my spaceship over there.
- The judgemental middleman between sensation and action one usually finds in philosophy is cut out