

Study Questions for Theory of Knowledge: Maclachlan's Philosophy of Perception.

Chapter 2

After stating his indirect realist theory of perception, M states the following objection:

A1. If (a) M's theory is correct about what goes on when I hear my foot, then (b) I hear a noise and I infer that this noise is made by my foot. (8)

A2. (b) is introspectively false.

A3. Hence, (a) is false (i.e., M's theory is not correct about what goes on when I hear my foot).

A1. is M's view, it can be defended by textual quotes from the text on p. 8. In his discussion on p. 9, M has a critic in mind who advances this argument. A2 can be supported by straightforward cases of our hearing a foot and immediately recognizing it as such where no explicit process of inference takes place. The hearing and identification of the foot are instantaneous.

M's only recourse is to attach A2. He defends the truth of (b) by claiming that this inference is "nonverbal and virtually automatic." (9) You should be able to state the above argument, explain its premises, and offer M's evaluation. I have not said much about the issue of an inference present in all cases of hearing, as M claims. What do you think of this? Is M correct? He claims that in the case of hearing something unfamiliar or making mistakes in identifying what we hear, this inference is made explicit and so his view accounts for all cases of hearing "... whether the inference is swift and spontaneous or slow and deliberate, the movement of thought is essentially the same." (10).

His view can be generalized as follows: in the case of hearing, when I hear x (a physical object), then what I hear is y (noise) and I infer that y is caused by x. The difference between x and y is that y is **directly** perceived and x is **indirectly** perceived.

Chapter 3

M applies what he has developed for hearing to seeing. His preliminary case is that I see my neighbor working in the garden. There are three ways to understand this:

- a. If I see x, then I see a physical object.
- b. If I see x, then I see the surface of a physical object.
- c. If I see x, then I see patterns of light.

M believes that each is incorrect. How does he counterexample a. and b.? What considerations does he find in favor of c.? (Later, he will reject c.)

Chapter 4

At this point in the text, he is trying to give his opponent's view the best chance. This opponent claims that sense experience of the external world involves some sort of direct perception of the external world. The difficulty is to describe that part of the external world which is the object of one's direct perception. On p. 26, M argues that sounds that we hear are not identical to sound waves.

- S1. If (a) the sounds we hear are identical to sound waves, then (b) when we experience a certain sound, the physicist will detect a certain sound wave and when we experience different sounds, the physicist will detect different sound waves.
- S2. (b) is false.
- S3. Hence (a) is false.

M explains that the consequent of S1 states that there is a correlation between these two items such that when we hear identical/different sounds, there are sound waves with identical/different frequencies. M does make the correct point that S1, as a conditional, claims only that identity requires correlation and that correlation does not require identity. So even if there is correlation, there may not be identity. You should be able to explain this argument. This will involve using the text on pp. 27-28, to support premise S2. How would you evaluate it?

Chapter 5

M appeals to the above argument from chapter 4, appropriately rephrased for vision. His support for S2 comes on pp. 34-35 and pp. 36-37. You should be able to restate this argument as applied to vision and explain it. How would you evaluate it? In the section entitled "EXPERIENCED ITEMS ARE ALL OF THE SAME KIND" what is the issue? How could a critic of M's argument use it to avoid the argument?

Chapter 6

M argues against naïve realism.

- N1. If (a) naïve realism is true, then (b) we directly perceive external objects. (43)
- N2. (b) is false.
- N3. Hence, (a) is false.

M states (1) as an account of naïve realism: (b) is a necessary condition for the truth of the view. So, we know that M's target must be (b). Oddly, M claims that (a) handles hallucinations better than modest discrepancies between what we see and what is there, see p. 45. I don't think that this is correct. M's main support for N2 is the issue with modest discrepancies. Let's rephrase N(1) as follows:

- N(1)* If (a) naïve realism is true about what goes on when I see a broken stick (in a glass of water), then (b) I directly perceive a broken stick.

N(2)* (b) is false.

N(3)* Hence, (a) is false.

A naive realist is committed to N(1)*, because what is seen (described in the antecedent) is supposed to be directly perceived (and, so, described in the consequent). The problem is then what is directly perceived is also supposed to be a description of an external object. To see this look at the following two cases of seeing a stick before and after it is placed in a glass of water:

1. If I see a straight stick, then I directly perceive a straight stick.

But if I put it in water, then I get the following:

2. If I see a broken stick, then I directly perceive a broken stick.

The problem is that the stick is not broken; consequently, for a naïve realist, I cannot directly perceive a broken stick (if it really is straight); so (b) is false. This is a typical case of a visual illusion: what I see does not match the world. This supports N(2)*, above. If we alter (b) so that it is true by substituting ‘straight’ for ‘broken,’ the result is puzzling. How can I see a broken stick (in the antecedent) by directly perceiving a straight stick (in the consequent)? It seems to be more accurate to say that I see a broken stick, but infer by the situation that I am *really* seeing a straight stick. This fits the pattern in M(1), above.

On p. 46, M offers the time lag argument, see “therefore,” 7 lines up from the bottom of the page. The conclusion is the following: “... what is directly perceived cannot be the external state or event that originated the process.” M’s argument is best constructed as a modus tollens as follows:

- T1. If (c) what is directly perceived is the external event that originated the process, then (d) when I see a distant star, what I directly perceive is the shining star that originated the process of light waves hitting my retina.
- T2. (d) is false because when I see some distant stars, that particular shining star no longer exists.
- T3. Hence, (c) is false.

M uses the argument from modest discrepancies and the time lag argument to reject naïve realism. Please evaluate M’s case.

Chapter 7

M then proceeds argues against direct realism. The above criticisms of naïve realism work because what is seen is what is directly perceived and what is directly perceived is an external object. This “equation” breaks down in the case of simple illusions. A realist can reply to M as follows. When I see a broken stick, I directly see a stick as broken. This is simply how it appears to me. Sticks have various properties of being able to

appear to different ways given different conditions of lighting and reflecting media. The same stick can really appear both straight and broken under different conditions. What is directly perceived is not simply the physical object, rather it is a property of the physical object. The direct realist claim analogous to N(1)* above is the following:

DR1. If (a) direct realism is true about what goes on when I see a broken stick (in a glass of water), then (b) I directly perceive a stick appearing to be broken.

M here cannot claim that (b) is false. M's critique of NR does not work on DR. Also, the time lag argument can be rejected as follows, recall the first premise:

T1. If (c) what is directly perceived is the external event that originated the process, then (d) when I see a distant star, what I directly perceive is the star's emission of light.

M cannot go on to claim that (d) is false because the star's emission of light continues even if that particular shining star no longer exists.

Up to this point, none of M's arguments are effective against direct realism (when taken to concern a direct perception of the appearance of objects). M's case then must rest his appeal to a unified account. Consider the following:

- a. Seeing the moon come out from behind a cloud.
- b. Sensing the sun - with my eyes closed - come out from behind a cloud.
- c. Feeling the sun on my back as it comes out from behind a cloud.

The issue is whether my perception of the sun is direct – as in DR1 - or mediated by inference – as in M(1). M's point is that these three cases illustrate very different perceptions of the sun, however, the direct realist's account of what is going on is identical in all cases. The following direct realist claims are true in the above cases a. through c.

DR1. If (a) direct realism is true about what goes on when I see the sun, then (b) I directly perceive the radiation from the sun.

T1. If (c) what is directly perceived is the external event that originated the process, then (d) when I perceive the sun, what I directly perceive is the sun's radiation.

M's critique of direct realism is that these three cases are very different experientially, yet the direct realist has the same story to tell in each case. As a result, according to M., direct realists do not accurately capture our diverse experiences in these three cases. The best account is one which appeals to our sensations.