

Camouflaged Physical Objects: The Intentionality of Perception

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ABSTRACT: This paper is about perception and its objects. My aim is to suggest a new way to articulate some of the central ideas of direct realism. Sections 1 and 2 offer from different perspectives a panoramic view of the main problems and options in the philosophy of perception. Section 3 introduces the notion of “camouflage” as an interesting and promising alternative in order to explain the nature of the intentional objects of perception. Finally, section 4 makes use of this new notion in the analysis of the relationships between the intentionality of perception, the intentionality of thought, and the intentionality of language.

Keywords: “camouflage”, direct realism, intencionality, perception.

“... objects hang one in another, like the links of a chain.”
(Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 2.03)

1. *Objects of perception*

Consider this very simple perceptive statement:

- (1) I see a red apple there on that round table.

According to 1, what is seen is a red apple, and it is seen there, on a certain table with a round shape. These objects can be called *the intentional objects of perception*. The main problem in the philosophy of perception is to understand such intentionality, to explain how it is possible.

1.1. *The external, the public, and the empirical*

We could say that intentional objects of perception are intended to be constituent elements of an “*external world*”, a four-dimensional world that is not determined by our subjectivity. But a couple of remarks would be needed. Firstly, intentional objects of perception are not only placed in an external world like some kinds of neutral occupants. They constitute the intended external world we experience. Without the perception of objects, there would not be any phenomenological external world at all. Secondly, under the label “our subjectivity” we ought to include not only things like conscious thoughts, conscious beliefs or desires, conscious feelings, etc., but also things like the more basic, non-conscious structures of our mental life, and counterfactual truths about what we could perceive. The inclusion of our non-conscious mental life is important in order to exclude from the external world everything that can be an unconscious, transcendental, etc., projection of our subjectivity. The reference to counterfactual perceptions serves to exclude from the external world everything with an



existence reducible to what we would perceive in other non-actual times or situations. And the reference to “our” subjectivity is important in order to make room for the possibility that the external world is determined by other especial kinds of subjects -- for instance, by God--.

That intentional objects of perception are taken as belonging to an external world is intended to entail certain important features. Mainly, 1) that those objects are able to have an enduring, continuous history, 2) that they are re-identifiable and perceptible by more than one sense, and 3) that they are able to support a distinction between appearance and reality, giving content to a certain notion of objectivity. The fact that our subjectivity does not determine the externality of the world in which the intentional objects of perception are usually placed would make those features possible.¹

Phenomenologically, intentional objects of perception like the red apple or the round table involved in (1) are elements of an external world with the above mentioned features. But this is not all. We also understand the perceptible external world as constituting a certain kind of “*public world*”, a world of common reference in thought and speech. It is not only that the intentional objects of perception have to be re-identifiable and perceptible by more than one sense, as happens when those objects are taken as elements of an external world, they also have to be re-identifiable and perceptible by more than one subject. The external world that can be perceived must also be a public world. Furthermore, it can be argued that the externality of the objects of perception must be the basis of our referential powers. The idea is that we begin to think and speak in a public world of common reference constituted by the external objects we are able to perceive --objects like the red apple and the round table involved in (1)--, and that every other reference --for instance, references to theoretical entities like quarks, atoms, etc., or references to subjective states, etc.-- needs to be anchored in the primary common references we are able to make to items of that public world. In short, only perception can furnish us with our basic common referents in thought and speech.²

There is a last qualification that we need to make in relation to the world constituted by objects like the red apple and the round table of (1). We have said that phenomenologically these objects of perception are constituents of an external world. We have also said that we usually take that external world as being a certain kind of peculiar and primary public world. It must be added that we usually conceive that external and public world as being also an “*empirical world*”. The empirical world would be the source of empirical justification for all our knowledge claims about any domain outside mathematics and logics. In this regard, statements like (1) enter into the epistemic space of reasons for and against other statements. Even the more theoretical claims of

¹ Certainly, not every bit of experience would offer us objects of perception. Bodily sensations and pains, for instance, appear to involve no object distinct from themselves. In any case, many other kinds of experiences would clearly have intentional objects.

² Moreover, it could be argued that the nuclear meaning of the word “world” is given by what we can find in the perceptible, external and public, world.

physics would have to be credited by statements concerning things that we are able to perceive. In the end, only perception provides us with epistemic justification in matters of empirical knowledge. So, the externality offered to us in perception would have a crucial role both with respect to our referential powers and with respect to the possibility of achieving empirical justification.

1.2. *The subjective and the internal, the narrow and enriched senses of the physical*

In relation to the three notions we have introduced —the external, the public, and the empirical—, there are a number of contrasts and connections that allow us to take other notions and nuances into account.

According to our characterization, the external world is in clear contrast with our “*subjective worlds*.” These subjective worlds would be constituted by everything that is determined by our subjectivities in the full sense above explained. Nothing belonging to these subjective worlds could belong to the external world. Because of that, those subjective worlds also could be called “*internal*.”

It must be noted that even though they are internal, these subjective worlds could also be, in a derived way, public worlds thanks to their connections to the external world. It must also be noted that the contrast is not between the external world and our subjectivity as such, but between the external world and some products of our subjectivity. We have described the external world that we perceive as a four-dimensional world not determined by our subjectivity. If certain lack of self-determination is assumed, that characterization is compatible with the claim that our subjectivities are four-dimensional objects of the external world. However, even if we accept this claim, nothing that is determined by our subjectivities could be placed in the external world.

No less important is the notion of “*physical world*.” This is the world that our basic sciences try to understand and describe. In a *narrow sense*, the physical world is constituted by the theoretical entities and properties postulated by our most fundamental theories. So understood, it is in sharp contrast with the external, public and empirical world we perceive. While this world contains every perceptible item, every possible object of perception, the narrow physical world is full of non-perceptible entities and properties. Nevertheless, the narrow physical world could also be, in a derived way, a public world. Moreover, the external, public and empirical world could also be understood as being no more than a part of the physical world. This would force us to reformulate the notion of physical world. The physical world in an *enriched sense* would be constituted by the theoretical entities and properties postulated by our basic sciences —quarks, atoms, fields, forces, etc.— and, as a special part of it, by the external, public and empirical world given to us in perception —i.e., by things like the red apple and the round table mentioned in (1). The physical world in that enriched sense would have a non-perceptible face as well as a perceptible face.

1.3. *The real world*

What about the so called “*real world*”? The narrow physical world could be a part of the real world. Another important part of the real world could be the external, public and empirical world offered to us in perception. Yet another part of the real world could be the subjective, internal world of each one.

I say “could be” because it is possible to claim that the real world is identical to the narrow physical world, or that it is identical to the world we can perceive, or that it is identical to our subjective worlds. The first case is known as eliminative physicalism. The second case could be called “macroscopic ordinary eliminativism”. The third case leads to --more or less solipsist or absolute forms of-- idealism. There would be other interesting combinations among the physical world, the perceptible world and the subjective worlds. For instance, some instrumentalisms and pragmatisms only accept the subjective and the perceptible worlds as real. There are also some physicalisms that only accept subjective worlds and the external physical world in the narrow sense --i.e., an external physical world not containing any perceptible item-- as real. Moreover, many philosophical accounts try to construe the real world exclusively with the materials of an external physical world in the enriched sense --i.e., with the materials of an external physical world constituted by the theoretical entities and properties postulated by physics and by the macroscopic ordinary objects of perception, eliminating any reference to the subjective or purely internal.

All the distinctions we have introduced frame a very common conceptual geography. But it is very important to make it explicit in order to appreciate with clarity that the position of the external, public and empirical world given to us in perception is *highly unstable*. Indeed, we usually understand that the narrow physical world is a *proper* part of the external world and we are tempted to consider that the other part of the external world is constituted by the objects we can perceive. However, it is very difficult to conceive that external, public and empirical world as not belonging *either* to the subjective *or* to the physical in the narrow sense. In general, it is very difficult to conceive anything between the subjective and the physical in the narrow sense and, as we are going to see, that instability has crucial consequences in the philosophy of perception.

1.4. *Direct realism, naïve realism, indirect realism and idealism*

For direct realist theories of perception, the intentional objects of veridical perception include elements of an external, public and empirical world that is *also* part of the physical world, and these objects are perceived directly or immediately. A certain part of the physical world is directly perceived in situations of veridical perception, and that part of the physical world constitutes the external, public and empirical world we are faced with in experience.

Direct realism does not claim that we always perceive the physical world exactly as it is. That position would be held by “*naïve realism*”. And direct realism does not need to be naïve. It can only maintain that, being my perception veridical, the red apple and the round table of (1) are directly perceived objects of the physical world. Naïve real-

ism rejects any distinction between appearance and reality. Direct realism can accept such distinction. It can accept the possibility of hallucinations, perceptual illusions, and every other kind of perceptual error.

Direct realism does not need to assume either that when some object is directly perceived, there is no part or aspect of the object that is not directly perceived. Direct perception *cannot* require this. One has to be able to directly perceive an apple, perceiving only a certain side and from a certain perspective. We perceive only a certain side of the apple, and we perceive it from a certain perspective, but we perceive the apple. Perceiving implies perceiving certain sides and aspects but not others, and perceiving them from certain points of view and not from other ones.

Both idealist and indirect theories of perception would reject that the intentional objects of perception --like those mentioned in (1)-- can be placed in the physical world. Strictly speaking, intentional objects of perception do not belong to any physical world. What about the supposed externality, public nature, and empirical value of the world of objects we are able to perceive? Idealism construes these features as involving no physical reality at all. They are understood as a mere projection of the subjects, as something completely determined by them. In other words, the intentional objects of perception would be "*absent objects*" in the physical world. That physical world simply does not exist at all. The real world is exhausted by the subjective, internal worlds.

For indirect realism a physical world does exist and it is indeed an external world, but its objects are always physical in the narrow sense and very *different* from all we can perceive. Here, the intentional objects of perception would be also "*absent objects*" in the externality of that narrow physical world. However, in veridical perceptions the intentional objects of perception would be able to indicate, or suggest, the presence of certain "*hidden objects*". Indirect realism postulates a route from intentional objects of perception to certain external objects of the narrow physical world. When our perception is veridical, the intentional objects of perception are connected with certain narrow physical objects. Intentional objects of perception are *intermediaries* between the subjective, internal worlds and certain "hidden" external objects of the narrow physical world. In veridical cases of perception, we *indirectly* perceive those "hidden" physical objects in virtue of *directly* perceiving some *distinct* kinds of items: the *internal* intentional objects of perception.³

1.5. Problems for idealism, direct realism, and indirect realism

One of the main problems for idealist theories of perception is to make sense of the differences between perception and things like thought, imagination or projection. For idealism, the external, the public, the empirical and the physical have to be construed from the recourses of the subjective, internal worlds. One of the main problems of di-

³ In order to indirectly perceive something it would be necessary to perceive it by means of some other *distinct* thing. This point is crucial for indirect realism. If it only required the mediation of other *non-identical* things, then we would perceive everything indirectly simply because perceiving always implies perceiving certain sides, but not others, and from certain points of view but not from other ones.

rect realist theories of perception is to justify the claim that the intentional objects of perception can belong adequately to the physical world. And the main problem of indirect realist theories of perception is to find a formulation that does not derive toward idealism or direct realism. For indirect realism there is an external, but narrow, physical world, there are subjective worlds, and there are perceptual intermediaries between them. Among other things, those intermediaries must be able to give sense to the phenomenological externality, public nature and empirical value of the objects of perception. The crucial question would be: *where can those intermediaries lay?*

Indirect realism is a very unstable position. It is faced with a *trilemma* concerning the location of the intermediaries:

1. If the intermediaries are explicitly placed in a world that is *not external*, then we become very close to idealism. We would be adopting an idealist stance with respect to the externality, public character and empirical value of the world offered to us in perception, and the only epistemic road to the external physical world would have to be grounded in “a priori” procedures, in “conceptual” contributions, or in a “space of reasons” *disconnected* from the physical.
2. If the intermediaries are finally placed in a world that *is external and physical in the narrow sense*, then we become very close to direct realism. Intentional objects of perception would be external and narrow physical objects directly perceived, and they would make us able to indirectly perceive *other* external and narrow physical objects.
3. If the intermediaries are intended to be placed in a world *that is external but not physical in the narrow sense*, then we arrive at a very odd position. Among other things, we would have to explain the relationships between that externality, full of public nature and empirical value, and the externality of the narrow physical world in a way that does not *collapse* into 1 nor 2.

Strictly speaking, idealism would be an ontological thesis about the non-existence of any external world. Therefore, in option 1 we would *not* have idealism *tout court*. Option 1 can assume the existence of an external physical world. However, the move from the intermediaries to that physical world is taken with *exactly the same epistemic recourses* that are typical in idealism. The physical world becomes nothing more than a postulation, or a conceptual intake, or the conclusion of an argument.

Something analogous happens with option 2. In option 2 we do *not* have a direct realism *tout court* either. The “proximal” physical objects directly perceived can be *very distinct objects* from the physical objects that are taken to be the “distal” physical objects indirectly perceived. Many indirect realists have maintained this view. Some external physical objects are indirectly perceived through the direct perception of certain states of our brain, being these last states external narrow physical items quite *distinct* from

the former ones.⁴ Is that distinction always so sharp as to avoid any collapse into direct realism? We will discuss these and other related questions after examining one of the main ways to introduce perceptive intermediaries: the argument from illusion.

2. *The Argument from Illusion*

Intermediaries are intended to be between the internality of the subjective and the externality of the physical in its narrow sense, and this is the main source of the *instability* we can detect in indirect realist theories of perception. The distinction between the internal and the external is dependent on a distinction between what our subjectivity determines and what it does not determine. But in this sense there can be nothing between the “internal” and the “external.”

We can illustrate the instability of any position intended to rest between idealism and direct realism by briefly examining some of the main reactions to the, so called, *argument from illusion*. A brief presentation of the argument could be the following one:

Step 1: Perceptive illusion is always possible.

There is no physical feature that may not be perceived differently from the way it really is.

Step 2: “The sense-datum inference”

When something perceptually appears to have a certain feature, we are immediately perceiving something that actually possess that feature.

Step 3: Application of Leibniz’s Law to illusory situations

According to 1, it is always possible for the physical object not to possess the features that it appears to have. But, according to 2, in such illusory situations we are immediately perceiving something that has those features. Hence, what we are immediately perceiving in illusory perceptual situations cannot be the intended physical object. We can only immediately perceive the sorts of things introduced in step 2.

Step 4: Generalizing step

We cannot make any epistemic difference between illusory perceptual situations and veridical ones, and this enables us to generalize the result of step 3.

⁴ Russell (1927) argued for this thesis. An important consequence of the possibility of formulating this kind of indirect realism would be that the intermediaries can be physical. In what follows, we will return to Russell’s account.

Conclusion of the argument:

In all perceptual situations, veridical as well as illusory, we immediately perceive the sorts of things introduced in step 2, and at best only indirectly perceive the intended physical objects themselves.

2.1. Acceptance of the argument: the theory of sense-data

Step 2 has been called “The sense-datum inference”. The argument from illusion has been presented by many authors as a crucial argument against direct realism and for the introduction of sense-data as necessary intermediaries of every perception⁵. The fact that the physical world, in its narrow sense, can always appear to us other than the way it really is would not be compatible with the direct realist claim of directness. And sense-data, playing the role of perceptive intermediaries, offer an explanation of that fact.

The theory of sense-data has a long history⁶ that I am not going to reconstruct here. The only point I want to note is that even though some proponents of the theory were enthusiastic of having discovered a new realm of reality that was external but not physical, it is very difficult not to see sense-data *either* as something internal, in the sense of being determined by our subjectivity, *or* as something having the externality of the physical in its narrow sense. In other words, every non-physical item seems to have an internal, subjective character and every externality seems to be a physical externality. But, if sense-data are considered as something internal, or subjective, then we are deriving towards an idealist perspective of the sort we have described. And if sense-data are considered as having the externality of the physical, then we are deriving towards a position very close to the theses of direct realism.

2.2. Against step 1: “new realism” and moderate new realism

One radical way to face the argument from illusion would be rejecting step 1. At the beginning of twentieth century, this was the alternative adopted by some authors, a perspective called “new realism”⁷. According to it, the features of which we are aware in illusory perception are as much ingredients of the physical as those involved in veridical perception. In a more moderate form, it could be maintained that some of the features we are aware of in illusory perceptions really have a non-subjective physical basis grounded in the physical situation of perception, and that with respect to them we could maintain a direct realist stance.⁸

⁵ Another notable argument against direct realism is the argument from hallucination. It has the same structure with the modified claim that hallucination, and not only illusion, is always possible. There are many other arguments against direct realism that in one way or another could be reduced to these two.

⁶ About it, see Hamlyn (1961) and Robinson (1994).

⁷ See Holt, et al. (1912)

⁸ One can find this moderated position, for instance, in Armstrong (1968).

How to evaluate these moves? The extreme version would entail an implausible “pan-realism” very close to *naïve* realism. In its moderate form, the position entails the *relational* character of many perceptible qualities and, also, a *bifurcated* conception of experience. The last point would be crucial. In veridical situations of perception, we were perceiving features of the physical world. In illusory situations of perception, we were merely imagining that we are perceiving, or having false beliefs about our perceiving something. But the first cases would place us in a direct realist perspective, and the second ones would place us in the perspective of idealism.

2.3. *Against step 2: the language of appearing, verbal dispositions*

The language of appearing was introduced by Chisholm⁹. The idea is that ordinary language has resources for accommodating perceptual illusions without postulating any kind of sense-data. We speak of things “looking” a certain way without entailing that the objects actually are the way they “look” --or “seem”, or “appear”. Step 2 would be *fallacious* because it moves illegitimately from an “appearing” to an “is”.

Let us put aside the problem of whether there are, or not, purely perceptive cases in which that inferential move could be legitimate¹⁰. The main problem of the appeal to the language of appearances is that it has a mere *negative* import. We do not have any explanation of what can constitute the apple looking red rather than some other colour, neither why I take it to be red and not, for instance, green or blue. Moreover, if we try to offer answers to those questions, then we have only two kinds of explanatory frameworks. In one of them, appearances would be explained with the help of subjective features, including qualitative states, beliefs, etc. In the other one, appearances would be explained with the help of the materials of the physical world. Hence, we would be lead to the subjective or to the narrowly physical.

The problem of *instability* is even more explicit if we reduce talk about appearances to certain behavioral, mainly verbal, dispositions. This was the suggestion of Quinton¹¹ and it has been defended recently by Dennett¹². In that case, we would be forced to take a decision over the subjective or physical character --always in its narrow sense-- of those dispositions.

2.4. *Against step 2: primed predicates, adverbialism, representationalism*

It can be argued that talking about appearances entails talking about things that are not physical objects in the narrow sense, nor sense-data, nor verbal dispositions. We can adopt a special *notation* for those peculiar objects, and speak for instance of red’ as part of the intentional object of the perception described in 1. Primed predicates

⁹ See Chisholm (1957 and 1965).

¹⁰ There would be many non purely perceptive uses of “appears” --or “seems”, or “looks”-- with respect to which it appears to be legitimate going from an “appearing” to an “is” - for instance, the one suggested in this statement. The “language of appearances” approach needs to distinguish those non-purely perceptive uses from the purely perceptual ones, and to argue that the “sense-data fallacy” is really a fallacy concerning the last uses. Both claims have been controversial.

¹¹ See Quinton (1955).

¹² See, for instance, Dennett (1993).

would be the perceptual correlates of some predicates applied to physical objects in the narrow sense. There would be the narrow physical features of being red, round, etc., and the qualities of being red', round', etc.¹³ As a minimum, primed predicates would serve to describe the *sensory* qualities of sense-data. But they can be used to describe also the *sensible* features of which we are immediately aware when something physical in the narrow sense perceptually looks to us in a certain way. This proposal was introduced by Sellars.¹⁴ He maintained that primed predicates would constitute families of resemblances and differences which correspond to the families of resemblances and differences that narrowly structure the physical world.

The argument from illusion is not avoided by this approach. It would be very easy to reformulate the argument in terms of physical predicates and their correlated primed predicates. In any case, the point I want to emphasize is that primed predicates refer to a highly unstable reality. If we reject that they are referring to something external but not physical, they have to be understood as referring to something subjective or to something narrowly physical. But, in the first case, we would be assuming a certain kind of idealism and in the second we would be very close to direct realism.¹⁵

The same result is obtained under an *adverbialist* reading of primed predicates. Adverbialism in this field questions the "act-object" analysis of perceptive consciousness, typically adopted by sense-datum theories. According to this analysis, perception would be a relation between our consciousness, understood as a pure receptivity, and a variety of different objects, having to do every difference between two perceptions only with the distinct natures of their objects. Adverbialism rejects that analysis. There would be no need to postulate any sort of sense-data as the intentional objects of our perceptions. Perceptions are not relational states but monadic states. To see, for instance, a red colour would be to see redly. Red' would be a way of seeing.¹⁶

Without sense-data as perceptive intermediaries, perhaps adverbialism has more chance of breaking with the argument from illusion. In any case, we can repeat our diagnosis with respect to its *instability*. Adverbial states can be considered subjective or narrowly physical. Hence, we are again very close to idealism or to direct realism.

The same result is obtained if we interpret primed predicates as referring to the properties of certain mental representations, in contrast with the properties of what is represented. 'Red' would simply be a property of certain mental representations of red. This approach is followed by authors like G. Harman.¹⁷ Here, the intentional contents of perception, described perhaps through primed predicates, would be consti-

¹³ See Jackson (1977), Sellars (1975b) and Tye (1989).

¹⁴ See Sellars (1963).

¹⁵ Sellars himself maintained that in the last analysis primed predicates would be shown to describe certain physical features of our brain.

¹⁶ See Ducasse (1942) and Sellars (1975).

¹⁷ See Harman (1990).

tuted by purely representational facts. There is no need to insist that if we make pressure over the nature of those facts, we are led to the same situation of *instability* as before.

2.5. *Against step 2: the dual component theory, conceptualism, non-conceptual content*

The most widespread reaction to the argument from illusion is a distinction between sensation and perception. Perceptions always would have two components: *sensations* and *concepts*. Sensations transmit the sensory materials, but sensations by themselves are dumb. Only concepts, beliefs, or thought, give them voice; and only concepts, beliefs, or thought, constitute the intentional objects of perception from the materials of sensations. Sensations without concepts are dumb and concepts without sensations are blind.

This theory is usually called *the dual component theory of perception* and it is linked to the Kantian distinction between sensibility and understanding. Two classical authors for the theory are T. Reid and Schopenhauer, who maintained a causal version. More recently, non causal versions have been defended by Sellars and McDowell.¹⁸

In the end we are faced with two options. On the one hand, we have a strong form of *conceptualism* according to which there cannot be perception, or experience, without concepts. On the other hand, we have a soft form of conceptualism that admits some kind of *non-conceptual content* in sensation. McDowell is one of the main defenders of the strong form of conceptualism. It is clear that this position is suspected of being quite close to idealism. Is the soft form of conceptualism in a better position? I think that it is not. If non-conceptual content is analyzed merely as something closely analogous to conceptual content, as something pre-conceptual or sub-conceptual that cannot be identified but by reference to concepts, we would be in the same idealist situation as before. If non-conceptual content is analyzed in terms of discriminatory behavioral dispositions, we are faced with the further problem of locating those dispositions in the subjective *or* in the physical worlds. If we accept that sensations themselves are able to select a non-conceptual content we would be abandoning the dual component theory. Sensations would not be so dumb. Moreover, in this case we would again be making room for the question about the subjective *or* physical character of such non-conceptual content.

¹⁸ Reid is previous to Kant. With respect to the other authors, see Sellars (1963 and 1975a) and McDowell (1994). The theory is often presented as a kind of direct realism. Certainly, if the intentional contents of perception are constituted by concepts, beliefs, or thought, then perception could have the same kind of directness that thought has with respect to their objects. However, it is highly questionable that the intentional objects of perception so construed are able to be physical objects in the sense required by direct realism. Let us consider a typical claim of some versions of the theory. Perception would involve 1) sensations, 2) a certain conception of an object, and 3) a belief in "it's" existence. What could be the reference of that "it"? In order to have a direct realist position, the "it" would have to refer demonstratively to some physical object. But that "it" can only refer to something physical in the way mere non-demonstrative thought is able to refer. Here, we can only have demonstrative thoughts referred to our sensations or non-demonstrative thoughts referred to physical objects. This point is very well argued in Smith (2002).

2.6. *Against step 4: Austin*

Step 3 of the argument from illusion is quite uncontroversial, it only consists in the application of Leibniz' law. So, let us go to step 4. Austin's resistance to admit the generalizing step is well known. Even though the other steps of the argument are assumed, he maintains that the argument can be stopped at this point.¹⁹ Austin suggests that pure cases of illusion do not occur very often. Moreover, the subjective indiscernibility between them and cases of veridical perceptions is also questionable. So, the argument falls short of its conclusion.

What Austin offers us is a *bifurcated* conception of experience quite similar to the one we can find in "new realism". In veridical situations of perception, we perceive features of the physical world. In illusory situations of perception, we perceive nothing. We are merely projecting, or we are imagining that we are perceiving, or we are having false beliefs about our perceiving something. The sort of reaction to the argument from illusion exemplified by Austin's bifurcated conception of experience perfectly illustrates the *instability* of any supposed perceptive intermediaries and the need to assume some kind of direct realism or some kind of idealism, without any other possible choice.

3. *Another way of formulating Direct Realism*

We have considered some of the reactions to the argument from illusion placing especial emphasis on the unstable character of the positions achieved. Our commentaries will be enough to show that one way or another we are always led towards something very close to idealism or towards something very close to direct realism. However, we are not led towards those perspectives *tout court*, there are some differences.

Concerning idealism, as the result of postulation, or of a certain reasoning, or conceptual contribution, we can maintain that an external physical world is offered to us in veridical perceptive experiences. Hence, we can reject idealism *tout court*. Concerning direct realism, we can make a distinction between what we have called the "proximal" physical objects that would constitute the intentional objects of direct perception and the "distal" physical objects that are indirectly perceived. Hence, we can reject direct realism *tout court*. On the one hand, my argument is that the difference between the positions we have described as close to idealism and idealism *tout court*, is minimal. On the other hand, I believe that under certain conditions the distinction between the positions we have described as being close to direct realism and a direct realism *tout court* could be dissolved giving rise to an adequate new formulation of direct realism.

First, let us consider idealism. The difference between admitting that the external world is present in our veridical perceptive experiences only in the sense that it is the result of a certain postulation, or the result of a certain chain of reasons, or the intake of certain conceptual contributions, etc., and rejecting that external world because all we can experience is determined by our subjectivity and we cannot find conclusive

¹⁹ See Austin (1962).

reasons for the presence in our experience of any other component, is really minimal. In order to avoid idealism *tout court*, we have to admit a reality that we can never experience, and for which we only have at best presumptive but not conclusive reasons. But this would be a claim that many idealist *tout court* would admit as well.

Now, let us go to direct realism. How could it be defended the possibility that, in situations of veridical perception, the “proximal” intentional objects of direct perception, when they are understood as something narrowly physical, are not something distinct from the “distal” narrow physical objects? More concretely, how could it be defended that something having to do with certain neurological facts is part of the physical apple and part of the physical round table mentioned in 1?

3.1. *Camouflaged objects*

I am going to argue for the possibility that in certain conditions, the distinction between the positions we have described as being close to direct realism and a direct realism *tout court* could be dissolved. And this will suggest a new way to articulate the central thesis of direct realist theories of perception that intentional objects of perception can belong to an external, public and empirical world that also is part of the physical world.

How could the “proximal” intentional objects of perception be part of some “distal” narrow physical objects? To begin with, consider the ordinary notion of *camouflage*. In a certain sense, to be camouflaged is a very particular way of being hidden. However, even if camouflage can be useful in order to make an object imperceptible, there are many cases in which camouflage is also very useful to improve the salience and perceptibility of an object. Moreover, to be camouflaged is not merely to be hidden but to use some features of the environment as a kind of “second skin,” so to speak. In camouflage, there is a crucial *participation* of the object in its appearance.

That notion of camouflage offers a very easy way to express the central thesis of direct realism. The main idea is that intentional objects of perception could be—I would say that typically they are—*camouflaged physical objects*. What kind of camouflage would be plausible to admit here? The answer to this question is crucial for our purposes. We are a special kind of physical objects placed in an environment of other physical objects. And when these other objects are perceived, sometimes they are able to adopt some of our subjective states, perhaps identical with some physical features of our brains, as part of a peculiar camouflage.

As we are suggesting, this would be plausible particularly when those subjective states are themselves physical states of our brain. The natural history of the relationships between subjects and certain other kinds of physical objects would have organized the peculiar ways adopted by those camouflages. Some kinds of physical objects would have been able to adopt the appearances they have when they become objects of perception for certain subjects as a “second skin”, so to speak.

There are many relevant counterfactuals about the connections between “distal” physical objects and the “proximal” intentional objects of perception. Mainly, we can distinguish *three kinds of counterfactuals*:

- 1) Counterfactuals about how the “distal” physical objects that are intended to be perceived could change, even leave to exist, without any change in the “proximal” intentional objects of perception.
- 2) Counterfactuals about how some changes in those “distal” physical objects could be associated with certain changes in the “proximal” intentional objects of perception.
- 3) Counterfactuals about how some changes in the “proximal” intentional objects of perception could be associated with certain changes in the “distal” physical objects that are intended to be perceived.

Proponents of the argument from illusion emphasize the first kind of counterfactuals. They are also employed by skepticism about our knowledge of the external world and by idealist perspectives. I am not going to discuss here these uses. In any case, counterfactuals of the second kind are usually employed against those positions. They are employed to argue for the contribution of the “distal” physical world to our perceptive experiences. Very often this is described in *causal terms*, saying that in veridical situations of perception the appearances are causal affects of certain “distal” physical objects. At this point, we can take a further step expressed in the *third kind of counterfactuals*. Changes in the so called “appearances” would entail changes in the “distal” physical objects themselves. The third kind of counterfactuals is rarely taken into account in the theories of perception, but they are crucial. Moreover, they are very common. For instance, these are the kinds of counterfactuals involved in saying that if the red apple mentioned in 1 would not have had that red colour, then I would not have eaten it. The important idea here is that the apple that I have eaten is not merely an *appearance of apple*, it is intended to be a *real “distal” physical object with a red appearance*.

Using causal terms again, we could say that “distal” physical objects are not only able to cause certain appearances in us. The truth of counterfactuals of the third kind suggests that in some situations these appearances can become a *constitutive* part of those “distal” physical objects themselves.

Counterfactuals of the second kind go against counterfactuals of the first kind. They are incompatible. In the limit case, if no “distal” physical object was ever “there”, any counterfactual of the second kind could be true. But counterfactuals of the second kind are compatible with counterfactuals of the third kind. If counterfactuals of the second kind are true without being true any relevant counterfactual of the third kind, then the “distal” physical objects simply become “hidden”-physical-objects-having-effects-on-us. What counterfactuals of the third kind entail is that the “distal” physical objects are not merely “hidden” behind the appearances. Those “distal” physical objects are able to adopt the appearances as sort of “second skin”. The counterfactuals of the third kind would not be true about “distal” physical objects merely “hidden” behind certain appearances. “Hidden” objects are *constitutively discon-*

nected from appearances, and this is true even when these appearances are a causal effect of them.

In theory of perception it is the rule to think about perception only under the model of “*things-having-effects-on-us*.” These effects have been called “sensations”, “ideas”, “sense data”, “perceptual representations”, etc. In any case, the causes of such effects, in the broad sense of “cause” we are using, are intended to be “distal” physical objects. The argument from illusion, sceptical arguments, idealist arguments and the classical distinction between primary and secondary properties rely on understanding that we cannot mistake a property of the effect for a property of its supposed cause. By assuming the “*things-having-effects-on-us*” model, idealist theories of perception refuse to look for such causes and indirect realist theories of perception try to offer plausible routes from the effects to the causes. I think that the only way a direct realist perspective can achieve an adequate formulation is by abandoning this model, and the notion of camouflage we have introduced would open the door for other interesting ways to understand perceptive experience.

In relation to the “*things-having-effects-on-us*” model, we are also inclined to think about intentionality as something going only one way: from our mind to the objects. “Distal” physical objects would be the causes of certain effects in our subjectivity, and intentionality can only go from inside to outside, from something internal to our subjectivity to the externality of the “distal” physical world. The approach I am suggesting would also make room for certain sorts of *constitutive* relationships between “distal” physical objects and their supposed causal effects in our subjectivity. If the appearances “distal” physical objects display in perception are understood as “the skin” those physical objects have when they are perceived, then those appearances become something more than mere “effects-on-us.” In situations of veridical perception, the effects in question can become part of the physical objects themselves. They can become part of the “distal” physical objects and, at the same time, part of our subjectivity. This would make possible to picture intentionality as something not only going from our subjectivity to the “distal” objects, but also as something going from these “distal” objects to our subjectivity. “Distal” physical objects become intentional objects thanks to their camouflage. Their peculiar camouflage makes them intentional objects by improving their salience and perceptibility.

3.2. *Physical intermediaries*

To illustrate the alternative way of understanding perception we are proposing, let us remember a notorious statement of Russell:

“what the physiologist sees when he looks at a brain is part of his own brain, not part of the brain he is examining.”²⁰

Russell was maintaining a certain *indirect*, representationalist theory of perception in which the immediate, or direct, “proximal” perceptual objects are certain physical objects—more concretely, the brain of the physiologist—and the mediate, or repre-

²⁰ Russell (1927: 383).

sented, objects of perception are other “distal” physical objects —the brain the physiologist is examining. According to the idea we have presented, we could rewrite the statement of Russell in the following way:

“what the physiologist sees when he looks at a brain is the very brain he is examining, because part of that brain —just when he looks at it— is his own brain.”

In this case, the immediate “proximal” perceptual objects are a *constitutive* part of the “distal” physical objects which are intended to be perceived. In situations of veridical perception, some “distal” physical objects adopt some of our subjective contents as a kind of camouflage. When they are perceived, those physical objects are able to adopt the appearances present in our subjective experiences as a “second skin.” They go, so to speak, inside our “skulls.” If we were to describe where that “second skin” is located in terms of the externality of the physical world, we could say that it is located in our brains.

3.3. *Some further remarks*

The new approach we have offered leads quite directly to some important remarks. The first one has to do with the bifurcated notion of experience. In some of the perspectives considered, we obtained an “ad hoc” bifurcated notion of experience, a certain kind of direct realism with respect to veridical perception and a treatment of illusory perception as mere projection, imagination or thought. Through the notion of camouflage we have also obtained a bifurcated notion of experience, but in this case we can offer plausible explanations for this. Only in situations of veridical perception, the “proximal” intentional objects of perception become a constitutive part of the “distal” objects perceived.

There is also a second important point to be made concerning the classical distinction between *primary* and *secondary* properties. The new perspective offered by the notion of camouflage allows us to do away with this distinction. Only it is needed a distinction between dispositions to adopt a certain “second skin” and actualizing those dispositions. This second distinction would be very different from the first one, especially if we think of the actualization of those dispositions as a constitutive part of the physical objects when they are perceived.²¹

The third point is *historical*. It is time to say something about the direct realist theory of perception defended by Aristotle. Indeed, our approach is very close to the Aristotelian one. The “second skin” of the physical objects when they are perceived is simultaneously part of those physical objects and part of our subjectivity. In perception, we would not have any necessary intermediaries, something between the subjective, internal worlds and the external physical world. What we would have is some-

²¹ Smith (1990 and 2002) has argued that the distinction between primary and secondary properties is necessary for direct realism and not only for indirect realism. However, a direct realism assuming the distinction between primary and secondary properties is not the kind of direct realism connected to the common sense image of the world that many of us intend to have.

thing that can be simultaneously internal and external, subjective and physical. And this would constitute our public and empirical world.

In this sense, if we think of the “proximal” intentional objects of perception as full of qualitative features, we could say that these qualitative features would not be placed only in our minds. They would also be placed in the physical world, thereby making it an *enriched* physical world. They would be placed in the physical world because they are located in our minds, or in any kind of mind able to have those qualitative experiential states. So, it would become quite natural to say that minds similar to ours are able to share our public, empirical world.

Our fourth remark has to do with the very notion of *object*. Our approach explains in a simple way why it is so difficult —really, it is impossible— to find typical public and empirical objects in the narrow physical world when we do not perceive them. Our answer is simply that the narrow physical world intends to be a world of entities and properties constituted beyond all the features derived from the fact that they can be perceived. And when we do not perceive an object, that object loses its camouflage, it loses its “second skin.” Now, is it really so odd that physical objects are only able to show sensible features, even properties such as shape, when they are perceived? It would not be so odd if we take into account that by definition the narrow physical world intends not to contain any of the objects and features we can find in the public and empirical worlds opened to our perception.

The narrow physical sense of the notion of object is very different from our common notion of object. What could be called the “first skin” of the physical objects, their naked nature, is their physical reality in the narrow sense of “physical.” And this physical reality does not contain any of the features we can find in the four-dimensional space opened to us in our perceptive experience.

How can the thesis that the intentional objects of perception are *external*, that they are not determined by our subjectivity, be compatible with the thesis that those objects are intentional objects of our subjectivity, that they are *in* our mind? How can they be both *external* to the mind and, at the same time, *in* the mind? There would be no incompatibility here because there are *two senses of externality* involved. “External to the mind” is not necessarily the opposite of “being in the mind.” Intentional contents of perception are *external* to the mind because they are not determined by it, but at the same time they are *in* the mind because they are part of certain states of our subjectivity. Something similar happens, for instance, with our savings. When we put our money in a bank account, the money is *in* the bank, but it is *our* money. Our money is *internal* to the bank in the sense that it is in the bank, it is part of certain “states of the bank”, but our money does not “belong” to the bank and, in that sense, it is *external* to the bank.

4. *The Intentionality Perception, the Intentionality of Thought and the Intentionality of Language*

Our approach also has some important consequences concerning the relationships that the intentionality of perception can maintain with the intentionality of thought

and with the intentionality of language. In this final section we will briefly discuss this topic.

4.1. *Qualitative, non-conceptual contents*

Between thoughts and their intentional contents there is a peculiar kind of *intimacy* and *directness* that is very difficult to preserve for perception. Our thoughts never fall short of the facts that are intended to be thought. If I think about my brother in America, I am thinking about my real brother really being in America. I am not thinking on an imaginary or illusory brother apparently being in an imaginary or illusory America. However, things are different when we go from thought to perception. It seems as if our perceptions always fall short of the facts that are intended to be perceived, and as if the only way to assure that we reach these facts would entail a severe lack of intimacy and directness.

As stated in other sections, in perception we are always in a highly *unstable* position. The intentional objects of perception are always in danger of being placed either in the externality of the narrow physical world or among things that are internally determined by our subjectivity. In the former case, we reach externality but we lose intimacy and directness. In the second case, we preserve intimacy and directness but we lose that externality. The model of perception based on the notion of camouflage we have suggested offers a very simple way to avoid such instability. Our position is not placed between the externality of the narrow physical world and the internality of our subjectivity. In veridical perception we perceive something that is *external* in the sense that it is a certain “distal” physical object not determined by our subjectivity and, at the same time, is *internal* in the sense of being an intentional object, a content of our subjectivity. In this way the intentionality of perception can reach the facts that are intended to be perceived, remaining as intimate and direct as the intentionality of thought.

The camouflage model allows us to distinguish between perception and projection, imagination or mere thought. There would be a natural history concerning the structure, kinds and evolution of those camouflages. As has been argued, the truth of the *third kind of counterfactuals* would play a crucial role in this natural history. Now, a very important question arises: is there any reason for or against considering that those contents, the “proximal” intentional objects of perception, have a *qualitative* character that cannot be reduced to conceptual contents? In our paper we have tried to be *neutral* about this problem. We have tried to avoid any terminology associated with the acceptance of the irreducible qualitative character of perceptual experience. But it is time to say something about that. The crucial point is that if the camouflage model is correct, then we could formulate an argument *for* the existence of qualitative, non-conceptual contents in perception. The argument would be based on the assumption that the relation of camouflage only can be clearly maintained between narrowly physical objects, which are the intended “distal” intentional objects of perception, and “proximal” intentional objects of a qualitative, non-conceptual sort. There would be such a relation of camouflage for perceptual contents in virtue of certain natural his-

tory involving the truth of counterfactuals of the third kind. However, it is plausible to reject that there could be any such natural history concerning the conceptual contents of our beliefs, desires, and so on. And the reason for such rejection would be that those conceptual contents are full of the *conventional* recourses of our languages.

In contrast with our perceptual experiences, the rest of our intentional life could *not* be a constitutive part of the camouflage that narrow physical objects are able to adopt in situations of veridical perception. In other words, the “second skin” narrow physical objects are able to adopt in situations of veridical perception only have qualitative features. It is not made of concepts or propositions, and it is not made of words.

4.2. *Indexical, demonstrative reference vs. conceptual, descriptive reference*

The model of perception we have suggested allows us to distinguish perception from thought and from language. However, there would be an important interface between, on the one hand, what we can perceive and, on the other hand, the things about which we can think and speak: indexical or demonstrative reference.

How can we understand demonstrative reference? When we refer demonstratively in a situation of perception, we are pointing to a certain point or region in a qualitative four-dimensional space. Because the objects that we point at, even the qualitative four-dimensional space itself, could be something merely internal, something determined by our subjectivity, we have the following problem: how can we demonstratively refer to something in a truly external, public and empirical world?

Now, we can try to answer that problem. According to the approach we are suggesting, our qualitative states could become a constitutive part of some narrow physical objects. In other words, these objects could become physical in an enriched sense. In situations of veridical perception, some “distal” narrow physical objects could be able to adopt those qualitative states as certain sort of “second skin”. Assuming this, when we refer to a certain point or region in our qualitative four-dimensional space, we can be *directly* referring to a certain physical object. That physical object would be in a truly external, public and empirical world and, at the same time, it would be within the scope of our perceptual intentionality. We would be able to find it *in* our perceptive experience. We would be demonstratively referring to that physical object because it is camouflaged under the relevant qualitative features!

Even the act of pointing itself could be considered part of their camouflage, like a “cry” associated to certain sensations. However, when we go from indexical, demonstrative reference to conceptual, descriptive reference, things are quite different. As a matter of fact, for subjects like us, there is no such natural history able to associate concepts with “distal” physical objects, particularly when concepts are linguistically articulated in a *conventional* way. When concepts are linked to the expressive resources of our conventional languages, their relationships with perceptive experience and with the externality of “distal” physical objects are very different. In general, counterfactuals of the third kind are not true about conceptual contents, even counterfactuals of the second kind are not true.

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