

THE IMMEDIATE OBJECT OF VISUAL PERCEPTION

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The Immediate Object of Visual Perception

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to understand the nature of the visual perception by mainly focusing on the question, “What is the immediate object of visual experience?” To this aim, I will examine the theories of perception and give an account of myself with the help of some other theories. In the first chapter, I will reveal the two main approaches in explaining the nature of perception, namely the direct theory of perception and the indirect theory of perception, and state the objections that are raised against them. In the second chapter, I will briefly mention Searle’s, Dretske’s and Voss’s theories of perception that will help me with my own account of visual perception. In the last chapter, I will put forward my direct realist theory of perception depending on the theories of Searle, Dretske and Voss.

ÖZET

Görsel Algının Doğrudan Nesnesi

İl Uluç

Bu tezin amacı, “Görsel deneyimin doğrudan nesnesi nedir?” sorusu etrafında görsel algının doğasını incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda Direk Algı ve Dolaylı Algı teorileri incelenmiş ve diğer bazı teorilerden yararlanılarak yeni bir bakış açısı önerilmiştir. Birinci bölümde, Direk Algı ve Dolaylı Algı teorilerinin iddiaları ve onlara getirilen eleştiriler ortaya konulmuştur. İkinci bölümde ise ortaya konulacak yeni bakış açısına temel olacak algı teorileri kısaca özetlenmiştir. Son bölümde, yeni bir Direk Algı Teorisi önerilmiştir ve bu teori, ikinci bölümde ele alınan teorilerle desteklenmiştir.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Problem of Visual Experience

Most of our knowledge depends on our senses; and the sense of sight carries the heaviest burden of collecting knowledge for us from the external world. Hence the answers concerning the problem of visual perception affect many important philosophical questions; our answers concerning the problem of perception turns out to be solutions not just to the problem itself but some other problems of philosophy as well. Thus the problem of perception becomes one of the most debated and most crucial matters of philosophy. However, the question I want to deal with in my thesis concerns more than the problem of visual perception.

The main concern of my thesis is our visual experience.¹ I will talk in terms of visual experience instead of visual perception since in the case of visual perception, cases such as hallucinations are excluded. Therefore what I would like to examine, in my thesis, is the question ‘what is the object of direct visual experience?’ when Chisholm’s interpretation “it appears to *S* that something is [f]”² is taken into consideration while defining ‘visual experience’. The question would be stated better as ‘what is the immediate object of visual experience?’ since the first question implies that

¹ I want to exclude other cases of perception such as hearing, smelling, tasting etc. and narrow my investigation into visual experience in order to have a more detailed evaluation of the topic at hand.

² Roderick M. Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957), p.115.

there are two kinds of visual experience. Although there are two positions taken concerning the object of visual experience, indirectedness could be attributed to the object rather than visual experience. However, I will evaluate both forms of the question since some philosophers state the question in the former terms.

The question mentioned above has two different answers depending on the position you take on the matter of perception.³ The direct perception theorists' answer to this question would be that the immediate objects of our visual experiences are the external objects. Indirect theorists, on the other hand, would claim that immediate objects of our experiences are images in our minds or sense data. I will evaluate these two positions more thoroughly. However, I want to clarify some terms that I will use in this thesis beforehand.

1.2. What Does Visual Experience Mean?

I want to clarify what I mean by 'visual experience' first. Perception occurs when there is an actual object that corresponds to your experience, while the term 'visual experience' does not need to be bound to an "actualized" object. What I will consider when looking for some answers to the question that is asked will include experiences such as hallucinations and dreams where there is no external object corresponding to our experience therefore, I will prefer the term 'visual experience' instead of 'perception' throughout my thesis.

³ I will use the term 'perception' since these theories are called so by other philosophers although almost all of the theories concerning the object of perception take hallucinations into consideration as well.

Chisholm, in his book *Perceiving*, states that there are three possible usages in the language of perception. When one talks about someone having a visual experience of something one can mean,

1. There is something *S* perceives to be *f*
 2. It appears to *S* that something is [*f*]
- or
3. *S* sees something.⁴

When I talk about visual experience I will consider experiences described by the second usage, although it seems that the stress is on the property “*f*” when we state the description in this way. But I want to focus on the “something”, the object of visual experience. As a matter of fact, one can state this sentence in another way that would be less confusing. Hence the question stated in this thesis would be better stated as follows: When visual experience is understood as ‘it appears (visually) to *S* that something is there’ what is the immediate object of one’s visual experience, what is that something we are talking about?

1.3. What Does It Mean to Have a “Direct” Visual Experience?

The question I will discuss in my thesis can be asked in two ways: ‘What is the immediate object of visual experience?’ and ‘What is the object of direct visual experience?’ But before discussing this question, I want to explain what I mean by the term ‘the object of visual experience’. Valberg, in his book *The Puzzle of Experience*, gives a very good explanation for this term. “By an ‘object of experience’ we shall mean

⁴ Chisholm, *Perceiving: a Philosophical Study*, p.115.

something *present* in experience”, he says.⁵ Presence in experience indicates an immediate availability of the object.⁶ Hence what is discussed while arguing about ‘the object of experience’ is an immediate (or direct) relation between the object and the perceiver. It is because of this that the question asked in this thesis will be about the immediate (or direct) object of visual experience. While defining ‘the object of experience’, it is most important to distinguish ‘the object of experience’ from the external (or internal) object. The object of experience can be an internal or an external object depending on the theory of perception. However, what I mean when I utter the expression “the object of experience” is not same as the meaning of either expression (i.e. external object or internal object).⁷ “That is what we shall mean by ‘object of experience’... The explanation leaves open whether the object of experience is external or internal.”⁸

The first version of the question I mentioned at the beginning of this part (What is the immediate object of visual experience?) can be interpreted in two ways. An immediate object of perception can be causally closer to the subject or it can be inferentially closer to him. I talk about the causal relation between the subject and object when I talk about the immediate object of visual experience. When one has a visual experience, the last (closest) object of perception that causes the experience is called the immediate object of visual experience. Similarly, direct experience is the experience between the causally closest object of the visual experience and us. Austin objects to this definition by pointing out the vagueness of the term ‘direct’ visual experience. He asks if

⁵ J. J. Valberg, *The Puzzle of Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p.4.

⁶ Ibid, p.4.

⁷ Ibid, p.7.

⁸ Ibid, p.7.

our experience is indirect when one looks at a star by telescope or looks at the photograph of a lion or when one watches a movie in a theatre.⁹ However, what I have in mind when I talk about direct experience is not what Austin talks about while objecting to direct perception. The cases that I will take into consideration will be cases where the object is in front of you. When one looks at the photograph of a lion, the object of experience will be (the image of) the photograph of the lion (for indirect perception theorists). However, in order to avoid Austin's objection completely, I will prefer the first version of the question afterwards.

1.4. Direct vs. Indirect Perception Theories

As stated above, the direct-indirect distinction depends on our relation to the external world concerning visual experience.

If my question were whether my relation to the immediate object of our visual experience is direct or indirect, my question would be trivial, because the answer would always be that it is direct. My question is about the nature of the immediate object.

. However our relation to real world is considered, there seems to be a clear-cut distinction between direct and indirect perception theories about the immediate object of visual experience, since indirect perception theorists' main claim is that there is no direct relation between external objects of the world and us concerning visual experience. Indirect perception theorists say that the objects of our direct perception are sense data or representations of the world. Those sense data or representations can be caused by

⁹ John L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, Compiled by G. J. Warnock, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 16-17.

real objects or not. However, even if they are caused by the real things of the external world, what we directly perceive are not those things. What we perceive directly (or what we experience in case of hallucination) is the sense datum (or representation of the world) and our relation to reality is established by those sense data (or representations). But we have to realize that the indirect theory does not come to a conclusion that the object of experience is internal because I might be hallucinating, but comes to this conclusion despite the fact that I am not hallucinating.¹⁰ Thus their claim is about the object of visual *perception*, and they argue that it is sense data (or representations of the world).

On the other hand, direct realists claim that there are no other intermediary objects as an object of perception between the real world and us. What we directly perceive is what there is. One can also name the distinction mentioned above direct realism vs. indirect realism since what is in question is our relation to reality. However, if I made the distinction in terms of realism, debates on reality would come to mind and they would lead me to a very different topic than the one of my thesis. Hence I will name those theories about the visual relationship between us and the external objects of the world direct perception theories and indirect perception theories; and what will determine under what category those theories fall is there being another object of perception between us and the real world or not.

¹⁰ Valberg, *The Puzzle of Experience*, p.23.

1.5. Indirect Perception Theory

Indirect perception theories argue that the immediate object of visual experience is not the external object itself but rather an internal image that is called a sense-datum. This theory is based on the argument from illusion that is given to show that what we directly experience is not the external object as the direct perception theorist claims. I will first state the claims of indirect theorists and I will present their differences and similarities; then I will present the argument from illusion and Ayer's supporting examples; last, I will state their weaknesses.

1.5.1. Phenomenalism vs. Representationalism

Indirect perception theories are of two sorts. One of the two types, Phenomenalism, claims that the object of perception is just sense data. Phenomenalism does not have a claim about sense data's relation to real world. Moreover, some Phenomenalist theories (such as Berkeley's) have an ontological claim that says that reality consists of the sum of the mental images of people.

On the other hand, representationalism argues that while the immediate object of perception is the internal sense data (or representations of the world as they call them) the indirect object is the material object of the external world since the external object causes the representation; hence it becomes the object of perception in an indirect way.

However, I will not distinguish Phenomenalist and Representationalist theories and will classify them under one title, indirect theories of perception, since what they disagree on is the immediate object's relation to the real world; but both theories claim

that the immediate object of visual experience is internal to the mind, it is sense data. In other words, they agree on the answer they give to the question that is considered in my thesis: “What is the immediate object of visual experience?” Hence they will not be addressed differently.

1.5.2. Argument From Illusion

The indirect theory of perception is grounded by an argument called ‘the argument from illusion’. This argument asserts that we have illusionary experiences while perceiving things of the world; we sometimes perceive things as having qualities that they do not really have. There must be something that has that quality since we perceive that quality and the real object does not have it. Therefore the immediate object of our perception in these cases is something internal (since there is nothing external that has the quality mentioned above); and since the object of our illusion is perceptually indistinguishable (solely in terms of perception) from the object of ‘real’ perception cases, those must be the same types of objects, hence internal objects of experience. The argument is clearly stated as follows in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

- i. When one is subject to an illusion, one is aware of something's having a quality, F , which the real ordinary object supposedly being perceived does not actually have.
- ii. When one is aware of something's having quality F , then there is something of which one is aware which does have this quality.
- iii. Since the real object in question is, by hypothesis, not- F , then it follows that in cases of illusion, either one is not aware of the real object after all, or if one is, one is aware of it only “indirectly” and not in the direct, unmediated way in which we normally take ourselves to be aware of objects.
- iv. There is no non-arbitrary way of distinguishing, from the point of view of the subject of an experience, between the phenomenology of perception and illusion.

- v. Therefore there is no reason to suppose that even in the case of genuine perception one is directly or immediately aware of ordinary objects.
- vi. Therefore our normal view about what perceiving is—sometimes called “naïve realism” or “direct realism”—is false. So perception cannot be what we normally think it is.¹¹

1.5.3. Argument From Hallucination

An argument similar to the argument from illusion can be formed based on hallucination cases. It is purported that in case of having a hallucination, there is an experience even though there is no “mind-independent” object corresponding to it. Thus there must be some kind of object internal to the mind in order for us to have a visual experience of something. Since perception and hallucination are “subjectively indistinguishable”, they must be the same kind of experiences. Hence immediate objects of both experiences must be of the same kind considering that the experiences are the same kind as well. Consequently, the immediate object of perception must be internal as well. This argument can be formulated as follows:

- i. It seems possible for someone to have an experience—a hallucination—which is subjectively indistinguishable from a genuine perception but where there is no mind-independent object being perceived.
- ii. The perception and the subjectively indistinguishable hallucination are experiences of essentially the same kind.
- iii. Therefore it cannot be that the essence of the perception depends on the objects being experienced, since essentially the same kind of experience can occur in the absence of the objects.
- iv. Therefore the ordinary conception of perceptual experience—which treats experience as dependent on the mind-independent objects around us—cannot be correct.¹²

¹¹ Tim Crane. 8 March 2005. “The Problem of Perception”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available [online]: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-problem/> [01 June 2006].

¹² Ibid.

1.5.4. Ayer's Supporting Examples

Ayer gives four different examples in order to support the argument from illusion given in favor of Phenomenalism. The first example shows the cases where an object is misidentified. Those are where we confuse an object with another; where we think that a painting of a car is a real one or where a toy gun is thought to be a real one.¹³ Thus, even though we do have something that we perceive, it is not the thing that we think we perceive at that moment.

The second bunch of cases that Ayer gives to support Phenomenalism are the cases of hallucination. The case in which a drug addict hallucinates spiders in the room s/he is in, or the case where a person hallucinates other people who do not exist fall under this category.¹⁴ Namely, they are those cases where we think that we perceive something while there is not a real external object that can be an object of perception.

The third type of case is the one where we see things from different perspectives. For instance when we look at an object from different distances, the same object looks different in size, or an object that is round looks elliptical, an object that is a square looks diagonal being looked at with a certain angle.¹⁵ There, he gives examples of different perceptions of the same external object.

Finally, Ayer mentions that a more general point can be made in favor of Phenomenalism and it can be said that we never see things as they really are. The environmental conditions always affect our visual experience. Therefore, what we see

¹³ Alfred J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (New York: W. Morrow, 1975), p.73.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.73.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.74.

can never be just the material object; and that serves for the argument for Phenomenalism.¹⁶

Ayer asserts that those four examples are classical examples given in favor of the argument from illusion, hence Phenomenalism.¹⁷ However, in my opinion, only the first two sets of cases can actually be considered as examples of illusion. The third case Ayer mentions is not a case of illusion even though it is an example against Phenomenalism. And the fourth “example” that he mentions is a brief summary of the argument against Direct Perception Theory.

1.5.5. Weak Points of Indirect Perception Theory

Indirect perception theory, despite its success at explaining the hallucination and perspective change in perception, has some difficulties that need to be solved. The first problem it faces is the problem of causation. Since this theory claims that we perceive sense data, which are not material objects, there arises a problem of causation. Those immaterial sense data cause us, material objects, to have experience. There is another big debate going on about the problem of causation between the immaterial and the material objects. The idea that objects of the same kind have causation between themselves is not a very objectionable view.¹⁸ However, even if we accept the view that there is such a thing as causation in the world, further explanation is needed whether causation between a material and an immaterial object is possible; and if it is, then one

¹⁶ Alfred J. Ayer, *The Central Questions of Philosophy* (New York: W. Morrow, 1975), p.74.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.74.

¹⁸ Although there is a debate whether there is causation or there is no such thing at all going on as well, the idea that causation is between two objects of the same sort (between two material objects, or two immaterial objects) is not debatable if we accept that there actually is such a relation.

should also explain the kind of causation between a material object and an immaterial one.

Even if the causation problem is somehow solved, there are some other objections that remain unaffected.¹⁹ One of these is that the sense data (or images or the intermediary objects of perception) cause a “veil of perception”²⁰ between the mind-independent external world and us. It is very hard to build a bridge (a bridge that provides an epistemic, cognitive or perceptual access) between the external world and our mind, in which all the perception occurs. Moreover, the immediate object of perception being a mind-dependent, hence subjective, sense datum causes us to face a problem of solipsism. Since what we perceive is our private sense data, what we have direct access to is private to our experience; then a person can only be aware of (hence can only know) his/her own private sense data as well.²¹ I stay neutral on problems such as solipsism and skepticism in this thesis and I will not take a side on these debates since I agree with Searle on this issue that Direct Realism does not solve the problem of skepticism, either.

In addition to this objection, one can also attack the argument from illusion. One can argue that it does not have to be the case that there is something blue in order for a person to seem to see something blue. As Austin argued, there need not be something F when it appears that there is something F. If a stick looks bent, this does not mean that

¹⁹ For instance, Russell’s theory of perception, which is generally taken to be a materialist sense data theory, escapes such an objection.

²⁰ Crane, “The Problem of Perception”.

²¹ Even if they are not immaterial and they are our private brain states, all we have is our private brain state and this reduces us to solipsism as well, because we perceive nothing but our brain states that are subjective to us. Ibid.

there is something bent there, this means that there is a straight stick there that looks bent.²²

If an indirect theorist develops his/her theory such that there is a relationship between the immaterial object of visual experience and the external object of the world, there occurs another problem about the relation between the sense data and the external object as well. One should explain which kind of a relation there is between the external object and the sense datum. If this is causation, the same difficulty I mentioned earlier is also valid for this case. If it is a resemblance relation, then one should explain how such a relation occurs as well.

All in all, indirect perception theory should overcome such difficulties in order for us to consider it a competent account of perception.

1.6. Direct Perception Theory

Direct perception theory (or Naïve direct realism as Searle calls it) claims just what indirect theorists deny as a result of their argument from illusion; namely, the external object being the immediate object of perception. Direct perception theory's thesis is that there is no other object of perception causally closer to us than the external object. One of the proponents of the direct perception theory, Austin, builds a direct perception theory by rejecting indirect perception theory, especially Ayer's; and I will take him as my basis to explain the ground that direct perception theory stands on although there are some other direct realist theories that I find more attractive. Therefore, I will first explain direct perception theory by giving Austin's reply to Ayer;

²² Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p.30.

then I will state weak points of this theory; and I will end this chapter by briefly revealing Searle's and some other philosophers' direct realist arguments that I find plausible, which I will use as help for the remainder of my thesis.

1.6.1. Austin's Reply to Ayer

Austin gives a bunch of objections to Phenomenalists. He mainly takes Ayer's account of Phenomenalism into consideration while objecting to this position. He states that what we mean by direct perception is not so clear and since we cannot clearly state what a direct perception is, wherever the existence of the object can be inferred from something else, we must call it an indirect perception. For instance, when I see a movie in a theatre, or see a photo of my mother, I infer the object that I see from something else. Even when I use contact lenses or glasses, I use something in between the object and me. Hence there is no such thing as a direct perception in this sense; all of our perception is indirect. Hence what philosophers mean by 'direct perception' is something else and these philosophers need to explain what they mean.²³

Afterwards, he attacks the argument from illusion, claiming that the cases Phenomenalists consider illusions are not illusions but delusions and a deluded person is someone who has to be cured hence who can see something that is not there instead of having an experience of an internal sense data.²⁴

He goes on with his argument by stating that the familiarity of a case affects the illusion effect. For instance, he says, we do not consider cinema as a case of illusion.

²³ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, pp. 16-17.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 21-22.

Analogously, cases where we see a round object as elliptical or where we see a straight pen as bent are not cases of illusion either.²⁵

He also says that experiencing something as if it has a certain quality does not prove that there exists something that has that quality.²⁶

On the basis of the arguments he raised above against the argument from illusion, he concludes that this argument cannot serve as an argument against direct perception theory. And since indirect perception theory is grounded on this argument, given the fact that there are some serious problems that indirect theorists have to deal with concerning the explanation of the causation between material and non-material objects, the indirect theory of perception would lose its appeal as an alternative to the direct theory of perception.

Hence a direct perception theory can be proposed as a candidate for explaining the nature of visual experience. Each philosopher who holds the direct theory of perception states his version in a different way. I will offer a generic explanation of direct perception theory briefly since it will be explained in more detail in the latter parts of the thesis.

Direct perception theory maintains what we immediately perceive is the external object of the world. There is no intermediary object of perception between the perceiver and the external object in the case of perception, there is no causally closer object as an object of perception in between. Things such as sense data, images in the mind and so on

²⁵ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, pp. 26-27.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 30.

are not there as an object of perception.²⁷ Therefore, when we have visual experience, we experience the external object (and in the case of hallucination, we perceive nothing).

1.6.2. Weak Points of Direct Perception Theory

Direct perception theory's strongest side is indirect perception theory's weakest one. Direct theory has no problem in explaining the relation between us and the immediate objects of visual experience since they both are material objects and since there is no immaterial object in between. However, indirect theory's strongest point causes this theory a very big problem since one has to claim that there is no object of visual experience in hallucination while there seems to be one;²⁸ and one has a difficulty in explaining where the difference lies when one perceives an object from different perspectives since the external object stays the same. To say that the answer to these questions stated above is simply the external object would not be appealing since there is not one in the case of hallucination in the first place and it would fall short of giving an account of seeing an object as something else or seeing something from different perspectives. Hence, a proponent of the direct realist theory of perception would have to find some other explanation if s/he wants to convince his/her opponent that his theory is a plausible theory for perception, which can stand up to the objection that have been made against it. Therefore, a direct perception theorist's main problem would be to find an acceptable way to explain all those difficulties that are stated above.

²⁷ Whether they exist or not is another issue that I will not discuss for or against in this thesis.

²⁸ Since there is no external object and direct perception theory argues that the object of visual experience is nothing but the external object.

CHAPTER 2

DIRECT THEORIES OF PERCEPTION

2.1. Direct Perception Theories

Even though direct perception theory has some weak points I prefer the account those theorists give explaining the nature of visual experience. The Naïve Direct Realist theory of Searle seems to be the most attractive one to me despite its vagueness on some points addressing certain problems revealed by indirect theorists. Hence I will state his perception theory along with some others' to back those weak points of it up and I will try to get a plausible way to defend a direct theory of perception. I will state some parts of the theories of Searle, Dretske and Voss in order to have a basis for my account. But I will only mention the parts that will benefit me in building my account from those theories instead of stating the theories completely.

2.2. Searle's Naïve Direct Realist Theory

Apart from philosophers such as Austin who deny the existence of visual experience altogether, there are some philosophers who accept the existence of visual experience although they argue for Direct Realism. Searle is one of those philosophers. In this section of my thesis I will explain Searle's theory of perception, but this theory will not be a complete theory that deals with all the problems of perception since, as

Searle himself said in his book, his concern is not to discuss perception but to explain this topic briefly in order to strengthen his theory of Intentionality.²⁹

Searle calls his account of visual perception a naïve direct realism. He says that a visual perception consists of three elements; the perceiver, the visual experience, and the object of perception. The object of perception causes the visual experience. Visual experience is Intentional. It is directed to an object and the existence of that object is one of the conditions of satisfaction for visual perception. In hallucination cases, two of those elements are present; namely, the perceiver and the visual experience, while the third one, the object, is not there.³⁰

Even though he does not want to go into the direct-indirect perception debate, he criticizes indirect theories on some points and explains the difference between them and direct theories. He states that indirect realists (Phenomenalists and representationalists) make the vehicle of our visual perception the object of it. They treat the experience as the object of perception and thus reduce the intentionality in perception since what is seen is the experience itself instead of an object. He raises the question that is frequently asked to indirect realists and asks what the relationship between the sense data and material objects is. He declares that indirect realists' arguments supporting their treating visual experience as the object of perception (i.e. the argument from illusion and the argument from science) are successfully refuted by other philosophers. Therefore he does not explain and refute those arguments himself.³¹

²⁹ John R. Searle, *Intentionality, an Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.58.

³⁰ Ibid, pp.57-58.

³¹ Searle, *Intentionality*, pp. 58-59.

He goes on to explain how indirect realists answer the question about the relationship between sense data and the external world. For representationalists, the object of experience is the representations of the world, in some sense a copy of the external world; and for Phenomenalists the object is the collection of sense data. He then goes on to criticize these accounts of perception and reveals the problems for the theories that he thinks the most important. The most important problem with representationalism is the notion of resemblance since the external object is inaccessible by the senses and it is not plausible to claim that the shape and color of an external object that we have no access to by our senses and the shape and color that we see in a representation do resemble. Since one cannot give a plausible account of resemblance for representations, the Representationalist theory is not successful in explaining perception.³²

The objection Searle finds most influential against Phenomenalism is that it turns into solipsism. We gather our knowledge about the external world through perception. However, by making the object of direct perception a sense datum, an object that is only available to us, Phenomenalists allow us just to have access to our own sense data. And since we do not have a common ground for our knowledge, since my world is only accessible to me, the thought that we see the same objects as other people is “unintelligible”. As a result, the idea that we can have publicly shared knowledge is also hindered. We can know nothing but the world internal to our minds. And since we can only know other people through our own sense data, “the hypothesis that other people even exist and perceive sense data in the sense in which I exist and perceive sense data

³² Ibid, pp. 59-60.

becomes at best unknowable and at worst unintelligible.”³³ Hence Searle argues that a Phenomenalist turns into a solipsist.³⁴

He claims that once one takes the vehicle of perception (the content of it) as the object of perception, one is bound to argue for a theory of the same kind as the two above.³⁵ Contrary to this, he takes a different path and argues that the object of perception is the material object.

Searle categorizes his view as naïve direct realism but he criticizes some other direct realists (such as Austin) about their complete rejection of the existence of visual experiences.³⁶ Contrary to this, he thinks that the claim about the existence of visual experiences is “a genuine empirical ontological claim.”³⁷ Searle accepts that we have visual experiences but distinguishes perceiving an experience from having an experience and claims that even though we *have* visual experiences that does not mean that we *see* visual experiences.³⁸ He argues that we have visual experiences *of* material objects. Hence even though Searle accepts the existence of visual experiences ontologically, he does not put them in the same place as Phenomenalists, as objects of perception, but they are the process itself according to him. He supports his view with further evidence and says that it makes no sense to claim that the visual experience itself has the properties of the object of experience. For instance, even though a blue purse is blue, this does not mean that our experience itself is blue. “(...) [Though] my visual experience is a

³³ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.60.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 60.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 59.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 57, 60.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.46.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.38.

component of any visual perception, the visual experience is not itself a visual object, it is not itself seen.”³⁹

However, this claim (the claim that the object of visual perception is the external object) leaves some questions unanswered. One of those questions is “If that is the case, then what is the object of a hallucination?” Searle’s answer to that question is it is nothing. He argues that when I hallucinate, for instance, a car and there is no external object there to perceive, “then in the car line of business I see nothing.”⁴⁰ Neither do I see an external object, nor a sense datum, an impression or anything. But this does not mean that I do not *have* a visual experience. On the contrary, Searle thinks that we have a visual experience and it may well be indistinguishable from a real perceptual experience (where there actually is a car to perceive); but this does not mean that their objects are the same. The object of perception is the car in one of them (in case of real perception) while there is no object of perception (there actually is no perception but a visual experience) in the other. However we have a visual experience in both cases.⁴¹ He accepts the existence of visual experiences and argues that they are Intentional.⁴² He makes an analogy between visual experiences and beliefs; and says that the conditions of satisfaction of beliefs, desires and visual experiences are exactly the same. The “of” of the visual experience is the “of” of Intentionality as he says. Analogously, both beliefs and visual experiences can be wrong about the world; namely, the experience can be a hallucination while the belief can be a false belief.⁴³ And in addition to this, both beliefs

³⁹ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.38.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.38.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp.38-39.

⁴² *Ibid*, p.39.

⁴³ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.39.

and visual experiences are intrinsically Intentional. “Internal to each phenomenon is an Intentional content that determines its conditions of satisfaction.”⁴⁴

Searle maintains that we are more inclined to give the properties of the object of visual experience to the experience itself than the other mental events that have Intentional content because the Intentional content of visual experience has more immediacy than the other mental states to their own Intentional contents.⁴⁵

He then states two further reasons for other philosophers’ unwillingness to accept the existence of visual experiences. Some direct realists, he thinks, are afraid of accepting sense data into their ontology, because that would be admitting objects that come between the subject and the external world. However, as he argued earlier, by a correct account of Intentionality, one can avoid defining visual experiences as the object. “The visual experience is not the object of visual perception, and the features which specify the Intentional content are not in general literally the features of experience.”⁴⁶

Another reason for direct perception theorists to object to the existence of visual experiences is that when we focus our attention on our experience, this changes its character. In other words, we give our attention to the objects that we experience rather than the process itself. As a result, when we focus on the process itself (i.e. the visual experience), this makes us believe that we bring something that was not there before into existence. He claims that we actually change the character of visual experience when we focus on it, but we do not bring it from non-existence. It already existed.⁴⁷

He summarizes what he claimed so far in order to clarify his claims better:

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.40.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.43.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.44.

⁴⁷ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.44.

There are perceptual experiences; they have Intentionality; their intentional content is propositional in form; they have mind-to-world direction of fit; and the properties which are specified by their Intentional content are not in general literally properties of the perceptual experiences.⁴⁸

The experience is not a representation; it does not represent the world. It is of the external object. Visual experience is not a representation of states of affairs. It is rather a presentation of the world.⁴⁹ Hence his view is not a representational theory of perception.

As I said before, the claim that the object of visual perception is an external object causes some problems in explaining perspective changes as well as hallucinations. For hallucinations, Searle's argument was that there was no object of experience in the case of a hallucination while the visual experience exists. In the case of a hallucination, the conditions of satisfaction of visual experience are not satisfied. Therefore we have a hallucination instead of a perception.

But this solution does not apply to the problem of perspective changes in perception of the same object. Searle solves this issue by admitting aspects into his theory. He maintains that we can see things in two ways. One can see an external object under an aspect and one can see an aspect of something. Hence aspects of external objects can as well be the object of perception. But even though they are not themselves the object of perception (since they cannot be seen without the object), they are still essential to perception. In other words, aspects are essential to the Intentionality of perception even though they are not the Intentional objects themselves.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.45.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp.45-46.

⁵⁰ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.52.

To sum up what he wants to argue for perception, he maintains that indirect realists are right about us having visual experience while naïve direct realists are right about the nature of the immediate object of our experience according to him.⁵¹ Searle himself explains this in a perfect way, and I very much agree with him on this point of view. Hence I want to quote this directly from him;

I want to argue that the traditional sense data theorists were correct in recognizing that we have experiences, visual and otherwise, but they mislocated the Intentionality of perception in supposing that experiences were the objects of perception, and the naïve realists were correct in recognizing that material objects and events are characteristically the objects of perception, but many of them failed to realize that the material object can only be the object of visual perception because the perception has an Intentional content, and the vehicle of the Intentional content is a visual experience.⁵²

2.3. Dretske's Representationalist Direct Realist Theory

In addition to Searle's theory of perception, I will mention Dretske's Representationalist Direct Realist theory as another basis for the account I would like to give for perception. Dretske comes close to Searle's account of perception at some points. Hence my theory will be influenced by both philosophers' theories.

Dretske is also a direct realist. He says that in perception what we perceive is external objects or events. The immediate object of our perception is not sense data or images. We are directly related to the outside world in the case of perception. However, this point of view leaves direct realism with a big problem, as I stated earlier: the problem of hallucinations. What is it that we experience in the case of a hallucination? It

⁵¹ Ibid, p.61.

⁵² Ibid, p.61.

is not an external object. For direct realists it is nothing. For him, there are representations of which contents are not actualized.⁵³

Dretske thinks that we have representations as a vehicle to our perception. He distinguishes representational vehicles and representational content. Representational content is what is represented while the representational vehicle is the representation itself. While a representation (the vehicle- the experience) is in the head, the content is not. Dretske gives an analogy for us to understand this better; he says that we can say that a story is in the book but we cannot say that dragons or fairies (that the story mentions) are in the book; and this is the same for perceptual representations. When we see a red apple we have experience in our heads but this does not mean that there are red apples in our heads (or in our minds). Hence he declares that what he means by representations are representational vehicles.⁵⁴ As far as I understand, what he means when he talks about perceptual representations is pretty much similar to what he means by visual experience when he talks about visual perception.

He argues that even if representations do not have an object, they have content. The content of the representations that have no object is “fixed by the *ways* they have [(mis)represented] the world to be.”⁵⁵ According to his view, experience remains even when there is no object of experience.⁵⁶

⁵³ Fred Dretske, “Experience as Representation”, *Philosophical Issues* 13 (2003), p. 76.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp.67-68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 69.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 69.

Moreover, when we talk about properties of an object that we have a visual experience of, we talk about the properties that the object has, not about the properties of the experience.⁵⁷

Another point Dretske mentions about visual experience is that it must not be understood in conceptual terms. When we talk about visual experience, we do not mean that we experience it in conceptual terms. Animals and infants that do not have concepts can have visual experiences, and we (the grown-up human beings who have concepts) do not have to have concepts in order to have an experience and we do not have to have a visual experience in order to have a concept, either.⁵⁸

For him, a representation does not mean an object of perception as I explained before. Representations (hence visual experiences) have intentionality.⁵⁹ Those representations are only representational vehicles instead of being the object itself. And that representational vehicle does not have the properties it represents. If we looked in the head of the person who has a visual experience, we would not see the properties of the object (we would not see a blue elephant for example). What we would see would be the vehicle, namely that person's brain while s/he is having an experience of a blue elephant.⁶⁰ If this is the case, how can we explain having an experience of a blue elephant? This question is answered as follows: it would be possible in the sense in which there are unicorns in a story. There need not be unicorns in the real world for a story in a book to mention them. Similarly, there need not be a blue elephant in the real world in order for us to experience such a thing. Our experience does not have to have

⁵⁷ Dretske, "Experience as Representation", p. 70.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 70.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 72.

an object. When we look into the head of a person, we see the representational vehicle (i.e. electro-chemical reactions in the brain), but we cannot see the content. The only person who can see the content is that person himself.⁶¹

If properties that an experience represents are not the properties of it, then how can we distinguish one experience from another? We individuate them by the properties of objects that they represent. “We distinguish experiences not in terms of their properties, but in terms of the properties that their objects (if there are any) have.”⁶²

He then proceeds to give some answers to the objections that direct realism faces. But I will mention the one that I find most interesting. It is the problem about differences in experiences of the same external object. In other words, it is the question when we have different experiences of the same external object, what is different in our experience, since it certainly is not the object itself. He gives an example of an object seeming blurry when one looks at the object without his/her glasses on. Since we do not follow an indirect theory, we “realize” that neither the object nor our experience must be blurry in order for us to see it blurrily.⁶³ “Blurry is the way experience represents objects, you don’t need a blurry representation to represent things as blurry.”⁶⁴

2.4. Voss’s Theory of Sense Impressions

The last philosopher that I want to mention in this chapter is Voss. I will also use his theory of perception as a basis for my own account. Even though the question he

⁶¹ Dretske, “Experience as Representation”, p. 73.

⁶² Ibid, p. 74.

⁶³ Ibid, p. 80.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 80.

focuses on is not the same as the question I discuss in my thesis, his account of what perception is will be a big help for my own story. I will make use of his account of perception in explaining the perspective changes of perception and so on.

He begins to discuss the theory by explaining what a 'locution' is, and then he analyzes 'perception locutions'. "A locution is a form of words."⁶⁵ A 'perception locution' is a form of words that contains words like 'perceive', 'see', 'smell', and so on.⁶⁶ Then he proceeds to state his theory and raises objections against the sense-data theories.

He makes objections to sense-data theories from two perspectives; one group of objections is logical objections while the other group is epistemological ones. Logical objections are labeled as "objections from failure of transitivity of identity"⁶⁷ and "objection[s] from indeterminacy".⁶⁸ Those objections reveal the fact that perception has to be intentional.⁶⁹

Epistemological objections are also gathered up into categories. One objection says that the sense-datum theory explains perception in non-intentional terms while perception is argued to be an intentional process. The second category of objections against sense-datum theory is actually a reason for us to believe that intentional theories are more favored since "they create no artificial logical gap between the notion of seeming to perceive and the notion of being in good position to have reason to believe

⁶⁵Stephen H. Voss, *What It Is to Have an Impression*, (California: Stanford University, 1968), p.1.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.2.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.70.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.71.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.84.

the relevant propositions about the physical world.”⁷⁰ Hence he goes on by proposing an intentional theory of perception locutions.

He begins his exploration of what perception is by trying to analyze the perception locution ‘x seems to perceive something ϕ ’. He makes use of Armstrong’s suggestions for an analysis of perception as he builds his own account. He first gives the following account of this locution:

- (1) X seems to perceive something ϕ if and only if X believes that something ϕ is there.⁷¹

He finds this account inadequate. He supports this view with an example. Think of a schizophrenic person who is aware of his/her mental illness. S/he has hallucinations of some things that are not there. Since s/he knows his/her condition, s/he does not have the belief that there are, say, blue elephants there and s/he perceives them. Hence this account of ‘seeming to see’ is too narrow since it does not contain those situations in which one is aware that s/he has a misperception.

This conclusion led him to replace the first account he gave with another one:

- (2) X seems to perceive something ϕ if and only if X is acquiring the potential belief that something ϕ is there.⁷²

But this account is too broad for the locution since one can believe that something is at a certain place without having a perception. For instance one can believe that a cat is there because his/her friend says so (and s/he thinks that his/her friend is

⁷⁰ Voss, *What It Is to Have an Impression*, p.116.

⁷¹ Ibid, p.118.

⁷² Ibid, p.119.

trustworthy). Hence this account is not a proper one for the perception locution mentioned above.

With the help of the objections stated above, he then proceeds to render the definition in a better form.

- (3) X seems to perceive something ϕ if and only if X is acquiring the potential belief that he perceives something ϕ .⁷³

Again this definition is not a good one since it is still too broad because it includes some cases that are not under the proper kind of perception. For instance, when we see boiling water, we do not have a belief that it is very hot with the belief that we have a visual perception of boiling water. But I cannot claim to have a perception of heat by just looking at the boiling water (especially not a visual perception of heat). Hence this analysis of ‘seems to perceive’ is not a good one.

He then proceeds to narrow the definition some more in order to exclude those beliefs that we mentioned earlier.

- (4) X seems to perceive something ϕ if and only if X is acquiring the potential belief that he immediately perceives something ϕ .⁷⁴

Afterwards, he argues that this analysis is not enough either. There is only one way to perceive an object, while there is more than one way to perceive that something is there. For instance, when we perceive snow at a distance, what we immediately perceive is that something white is there. Then we mediately perceive that something cold is there. However, if we perceive the object, then what we immediately perceive is

⁷³ Voss, *What It Is to Have an Impression*, p.121.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.123.

the snow, which is white and cold. But we cannot claim to immediately perceive cold when we perceive it from a distance.⁷⁵ Hence the analysis would be as follows:

- (5) X seems to perceive something \emptyset if and only if X is acquiring the potential belief that he immediately perceives that something \emptyset is there.⁷⁶

After giving a plausible analysis for the perception locution ‘X seems to perceive something \emptyset ’, he proceeds to explain what it is meant by the expression ‘immediately perceives’. The proper analysis that he comes up with for immediate perception concerns causal immediacy and is stated as follows:

- (12) X immediately perceives (sees, hears, etc.) that something \emptyset is there if and only if X (i) perceives (sees, hears, etc.) that something \emptyset is there and (ii) thereby acquires the belief that something \emptyset is there, in such a way that there is no proposition q such that X’s belief that q at that time is a necessary causal condition of X’s acquisition of the belief that something \emptyset is there.⁷⁷

At last he analyzes the term ‘acquiring a potential belief’ that he uses in his analysis of ‘seeming to perceive’. The first analysis he comes up with for the term ‘acquiring a potential belief’ is as follows:

- (13) X is acquiring the potential belief that p if and only if X is acquiring the belief or inclination to believe that p.⁷⁸

According to this analysis, we acquire the potential belief that we perceive that p if we acquire a belief that p or we are inclined to believe that we perceive p. However,

⁷⁵ Voss, *What It Is to Have an Impression*, pp.123-126.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.126.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.134.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.141.

this analysis seems too strong since we can perceive in some cases such that we neither have the belief that we perceive p nor have we an inclination to believe that we perceive that p. For example, when we look at the mirror we do not have the belief nor the inclination to believe that there is someone who looks exactly like us there on the other side of the mirror. But we perceive such a thing. Hence we have to reformulate the analysis and give a weaker one.⁷⁹ He gives a weaker analysis as a candidate for the definition of the term ‘acquiring a potential belief’:

- (14) X is acquiring the potential belief that p if and only if either X is acquiring the belief that p or there are propositions which X believes which contradict p, and which are such that if X did not believe them then he would be acquiring the belief that p.⁸⁰

He then reformulates this analysis as follows in order to examine it better:

- (15) X is acquiring the potential belief that p if and only if either X is acquiring the belief that p or there are propositions which X believes such that (i) X believes that they contradict p and (ii) if X did not believe them then he would be acquiring the belief that p.⁸¹

But this account does not give a proper analysis since it is too strong. For one can have a reason to believe something even though s/he does not believe that or s/he does not believe the contrary. For example, a person who took a drug that causes people to see red objects as a side effect and was aware of this side effect neither believes that he

⁷⁹ Voss, *What It Is to Have an Impression*, pp.141-145.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.146.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.146.

immediately sees something red is there nor believes the contrary. However, he has a perception and acquires a potential belief.⁸² Hence we change the analysis as follows:

- (16) X is acquiring the potential belief that p if and only if either X is acquiring the belief that p or there are propositions which X believes such that (i) X believes that they constitute sufficient grounds for not acquiring the belief that p and (ii) if X did not believe them then he would be acquiring the belief that p.⁸³

This analysis is also strong since one can have some beliefs that prevent him/her from believing p that s/he is not aware of. One can even be surprised to have those beliefs and may change them once s/he is aware of having those.⁸⁴ Hence Voss once again changes the analysis into another form:

- (17) X is acquiring the potential belief that p if and only if either X is acquiring the belief that p or there are propositions which X believes such that the fact that X believes them is a necessary causal condition of X's not acquiring the belief that p.⁸⁵

However, this analysis also has some deficiency and it is that when I look at something blue continuously I do not acquire a potential belief that something blue is there since I already have that belief.⁸⁶ Hence he makes another change in analysis and comes with a final definition as follows:

- (18) X is acquiring the potential belief that p if and only if either X is acquiring the belief that p or the fact that X is antecedently inclined not to believe that p is a necessary causal condition of X's not acquiring the belief that p.⁸⁷

⁸² Voss, *What It Is to Have an Impression*, p.146.

⁸³ Ibid, p.147.

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp.146-148.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.148.

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp.148-150.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.150.

To sum up, Voss argues that to have a sense impression is to have a potential belief that a person immediately perceives something is there. To immediately perceive that something is there means to perceive that thing and to get the belief that that thing is there in such a way that there is no other belief that is causally closer than the belief that something is there while having that perception. In short, to acquire a potential belief that p is to acquire a tendency to believe that p . Therefore, we seem to perceive something when we immediately have a tendency to believe (or we have the belief) that we perceive that something is there.

CHAPTER 3

MY ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTION

3.1. A Direct Theory of Perception

The last chapter of my thesis includes my account of perception.⁸⁸ In this chapter what I will do is to reveal my thoughts on what a perception is, mainly focusing on the question, “what is the immediate object of visual perception?” with the help of the philosophers I mentioned in the earlier chapter. The theory I will suggest will be a direct realist theory.

In my opinion, perception is a purely material process. When we perceive something, it is an external object of the world. Our perception, as Searle said before, consists of three elements; the perceiver, the object of perception, and the visual experience.⁸⁹ And all those three elements are material. The perceiver (i.e. the living thing⁹⁰) and the object of perception (i.e. the external object, since this is a direct theory of perception) are of the external world. But what can we say for the visual experience?

⁸⁸ Since I use Searle’s theory of perception as the main basis of my account, I will use his terminology from now on. Hence I will ask my question as “What is the immediate object of perception?” since he uses the term ‘visual experience’ in a slightly different way from the way we used earlier. And I will stick to his terminology in order for us not to get confused about the meanings of terms. If I use a term in a different sense, then I will say so. I also want to point out that Searle’s term ‘visual experience’ is pretty much equal to Voss’ term ‘sense impression’; as I stated above’ I will use Searle’s terminology at this point as well for two reasons. First, to be consistent and not to get confused; and secondly, using ‘sense impression’ instead of visual experience would lead to more confusion since I will use the term ‘sensation’ in a much different meaning.

⁸⁹ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.57.

⁹⁰ I do not want to exclude the possibility that animals (and even plants) can perceive, although I will not discuss in favor of or against the view that they have so. This is not my concern in this thesis, but I want to point out that I do believe that animals perceive (but I will not claim that they do since, as I said before, I will not give an argument for this point of view.

The visual experience, for me, is a relation between the perceiver and the external world. It is the vehicle that makes us perceive something, not an immaterial sense datum or an image in our minds. And since we, the perceivers, are of the external world and the perceived thing is also of the external world, it would be the most plausible thing to argue that the process is also of the external world since it is, in some way, a relation between two material things.

Since perception consists of a perceiver and an object of perception (and since they have a relationship under the name of visual experience), visual perception is Intentional. The visual experience is of an object. Our perception is directed towards an object. And when we talk about a visual experience “of” something, this “of” is “of” of intentionality.⁹¹

So far, I said that perception is a material process and it is intentional. Now, the main claim considered in this thesis is that perception is direct. The immediate object of perception is the external object of the world. We do not have an intermediary sense data (or an image) as an object of perception. What there is in a perception is mainly the perceiver, the external object and the process that goes on in us, if we accept a direct theory of perception.

3.2. Reasons for Choosing a Direct Theory over an Indirect One

So far, I have stated what I will argue for in this chapter of the thesis. And it is that the perception process is material, intentional and direct. In this part, I will show the reasons why I chose this theory as a plausible candidate for explaining the nature of

⁹¹ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.39.

visual perception. As I said before, the direct theory's claim is that the immediate object of perception is the external object itself.

On the other hand, an indirect theory of perception suggests that the thing a subject perceives immediately is a mind-dependent sense datum instead of an external thing. Hence, the problem of causality between the material and immaterial things emerges here. As argued before in the first chapter of this thesis, it is a very problematic issue to claim that an immaterial object (namely the sense datum) causes a material object (namely us) to perceive something. And as a result, indirect perception theory has some problems with giving a satisfactory account of the relation between the perceiver (which is a material object) and the sense datum (which is immaterial).

Moreover, as I mentioned earlier in chapter one, there are other reasons that weaken the indirect realist theory. One of them is the attack on their main objection to direct realism, namely the argument from illusion. As Austin argues, it appears to me that a stick, which is originally straight, is bent; this does not mean that there is something there that is bent. He argues that when a church is camouflaged as a barn, this does not mean that there is an immaterial (or at least mind-dependent) barn somewhere. There is just a church that looks like a barn but nothing else.⁹² And since the argument from illusion that is the main objection raised against the direct realism is left ungrounded, there is no need to deny that the direct realism is false.

In addition to this, Searle suggests that the Intentionality of perception is hindered in indirect theories of perception since there is no object that perception is directed at, there is just the visual experience instead; and since our visual perception is

⁹² Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p.30.

not directed towards something, the Intentionality of perception perishes.⁹³ Voss also agrees that a successful account of perception must be Intentional and sense data theories cannot give an Intentional account of perception. But he gives a different reasoning to get to the point. He argues that although sense data theories direct perception at internal objects, this is not an intentional relation. It is a non-intentional relation like 'x is taller than y.'⁹⁴ Hence sense data theories strip perception of its intentionality in both Searle's and Voss's views.

Another reason for us to choose a direct realist theory over an indirect one is that in a direct realist theory there is no problem about explaining the sort of relationship between the object of experience and the outside world since the object of experience *is* the external object. However, this is not the case for indirect perception theories. They have to give a satisfactory account of the relation between the immediate object of perception and the external objects.

In addition to these, if they claim that there is a relationship between the external world and sense data (or images, impressions etc.), then they should explain what it is. Representationalists claim that there are representations of the world in our minds and those representations are the objects of our perception. There are some accounts given for the relationship between those representations we perceive and the external objects of which they are representations.

One common account given of the relationship between the external world and those representations is that it is resemblance. However, Searle argues against this view by saying that the external object that is inaccessible to our senses and hence cannot be

⁹³ Searle, *Intentionality*, p.58.

⁹⁴ Voss, *What Is It to Have an Impression*, pp.76-84.

attached to qualities such as color, shape, weight and so on (qualities that are determined with the help of our senses) and the object of our perception that has all those qualities cannot resemble each other. It would be implausible to claim that two objects that do not share the same qualities resemble one another. Therefore, this relationship cannot be one of resemblance.⁹⁵

The direct perception theory's weaknesses are more repairable since they do not deal with two worlds, one material and one immaterial. But they only deal with a material world and all the objects and processes are in this world for us to deal with. What I will do in the remainder of the chapter is to give some responses to the objections raised against the direct realist theory and try to rebuild it in such a way that it can escape from the objections that indirect perception theorists direct to it.

3.3. The Immediate Object of Perception

Since what I defend is a direct perception theory, the answer to the question that is the focus of my thesis (What is the immediate object of visual experience?) is, it is the external object. There are no intermediary objects of perception between us and the external world. What immediately causes us to have a visual experience is nothing other than the external object itself. As Voss argues, what perception immediately causes in us is the belief that we perceive the object. However, I will focus on this point later. Nevertheless, in order for us to understand what is meant by immediate perception, it would be beneficial to understand the analysis Voss gives:

⁹⁵ Searle, *Intentionality*, pp. 59-60.

- X immediately perceives (sees, hears, etc.) that something ϕ is there if and only if X (i) perceives (sees, hears, etc.) that something ϕ is there and (ii) thereby acquires the belief that something ϕ is there, in such a way that there is no proposition q such that X's belief that q at that time is a necessary causal condition of X's acquisition of the belief that something ϕ is there.⁹⁶

In order for us to understand this definition better, what I mean by belief must be explained in a more detailed way. But this notion will be explained later in the chapter. Hence, for now, we should be content with a summary of this analysis such as: the immediate object of perception is such that when a subject perceives something, there is no object of perception causally closer to the subject than the external object. In other words, the object we immediately perceive (the object that causes our beliefs that we perceive that object) is the external object itself.

Therefore, as a direct realist what I claim is that there is no object of perception causally closer to the subject than the external object in a visual perception.

3.4. The Third Component of Perception: The Visual Experience

The claim that we do not perceive our visual experience does not mean that there are not visual experiences at all. As Searle said in *Intentionality*, we have visual experiences but we do not see visual experiences. There are three components of perception. The first two (the perceiver and the object of perception) are material objects that exist in external world. The third component, the visual experience, is the process that goes on during our perception. It is the vehicle that relates the perceiver to the

⁹⁶ Voss, *What Is It to Have an Impression*, p153.

perceived. In hallucination, since the process occurs even though the object is not present, we still have visual experience.

I also want to point out that the term ‘sense impression’ Voss uses in his thesis is nearly equivalent to the term ‘visual experience’ in *Intentionality*. I will use the term ‘visual experience’ for practical purposes. Hence when I use the term ‘visual experience’, this will mean both Searle’s ‘visual experience’ and Voss’s ‘sense impression’.

I want to analyze what this visual experience is since this is the vaguest concept among the components of visual perception. Visual experience is not a simple immaterial thing as indirect realists claim. It is a process as I said before. This process has some parts in itself. In other words, in order for us to have a visual experience, some sub-processes must occur. The first part of visual experience is the purely physical part, namely the sensation. The other part is the mental state we are in for us to have a perception instead of a sensation. I will explore what this part is later in this chapter. However, I will analyze the physical part of the visual experience first.

3.4.1. Sensation

I will use ‘sensation’ to mean the kind of physical process that goes on in our body as a sub-part of a ‘visual experience’. A sensation necessarily exists when a visual experience exists but not necessarily the other way around. I will use the expression ‘to sense an external object’ to mean having a ‘sensation’ (the physical process) caused by that object. I am well aware that there are other usages of the term ‘sensation’ as a part of perception which include some mental processes. However, I will not mean this while

talking about sensation. For me, sensation is the physical process that goes on in our sense organs and brains. Light rays are reflected from the object and those light rays reach our eyes in a certain angle and strength and in a certain wave length.⁹⁷ When those rays come into our eyes, they stimulate the nerve endings on our retina. As a result, some electro-chemical reactions occur between our nerves and this causes us to ‘sense’ the object. In a hallucination, there is not an object but again there are the electro-chemical activities in our brain that are caused by some other thing (a medicine, a light trick, a malfunction of the brain etc.). Hence we have a sensation (albeit a different kind) in a hallucination as well. Sensation is nothing but this physical chain of events. However, we attribute some immaterial events and objects to this purely physical event because we do not *see* those events. As Dretske said, vehicle and content are not the same; and since we do not know the code from the vehicle to the content, all we see is one’s brain when we look at the vehicle.⁹⁸ And since we do not see the content, we think that there are two distinct processes there, one being material and the other being immaterial. However, this is not the case; all there is is our lack of ability to interpret the vehicle correctly.

3.4.2. Awareness

However, sensation is not the only component of visual experience. If it were, then there would be no difference between sensation and experience. What makes the

⁹⁷ The angle and strength of light rays are the components that mainly determine -and consequently explain- the perspective changes in the perception of the same object.

⁹⁸ Dretske, *Experience as Representation*, p.73.

difference is the mental state accompanying that sensation. Hence the second part of visual experience is the mental state that is immediately caused by the sensation. This mental state may be awareness as Dretske claimed it to be. Hence when we have a visual experience what happens is that we sense an object and we are aware of that object, which we sensed.⁹⁹

But there is an objection that can be raised against this analysis. Suppose that I sense the red pencil my friend bought me as a present but I do not perceive that pencil. It is in my peripheral vision. There are light rays that reflect from it and come to my eye. But it is not the thing that I perceive.

However, at the same moment that I sense that pencil, I think of that pencil. Actually this is exactly the case now, the pencil is now a part of my peripheral vision.¹⁰⁰ And I think of it to use it as an example here. But since I think of that pencil, I am aware of that pencil. But this would lead me to a contradiction if awareness and sensation were enough for a visual experience, since I do not have the visual experience of that pencil and at the same time (since I have a sensation of it and I am aware of it as a result of my thinking of it) I, as the result of the analysis, would have a visual experience of it.

We can argue against this objection as follows. Despite the case I mentioned in my example, this is not a proper objection since although the case seems to satisfy the necessary conditions we set for visual experience, this is not true. Because the cause of our mental state, of our awareness of the pencil, is not the sensation of the external object. I mean this in the sense that we are not aware of it as a result of our sensation.

⁹⁹ Dretske, *Experience as Representation*, p.76.

¹⁰⁰ I know this not because I “see” the pencil but I know its location beforehand and I can “see” it when I actually look at the pencil. What I perceive now is the screen of the laptop and these words that I am writing. But, this does not prevent me from sensing a bunch of other things.

Therefore, we can amend this theory such that it is perception if the cause of our awareness is the external object through sensation.

This example shows us that all states of awareness we are in concerning an object are not parts of a visual experience. Hence we should find out what that mental state that specifically causes us to have a visual experience is. I will suggest that it is a potential belief.

3.4.3 Potential Belief

I am aware that the mental position I will suggest in this part will be quite debatable, and I do not claim to give a full account of my position or to claim that what I suggest is absolutely right. However, this is how I believe it to be, my candidate for the mental state that is in perception, so I will state my claim and give some reasons for it in this part.

Voss suggests that the visual experience is the potential belief (along with the physical part of the perception, namely sensation). A potential belief is a tendency to believe something. Voss gives an analysis of visual experience (sense impression in his terms) as follows:

- X seems to perceive something ϕ if and only if X is acquiring the potential belief that he immediately perceives something ϕ is there.¹⁰¹

Hence when one has a visual experience, this means that s/he has a sensation (in one way or another) and s/he has a tendency to believe that s/he immediately perceives something.

¹⁰¹ Voss, *What Is It to Have an Impression*, p.126.

However, what I mean by a (potential) belief is something different from what Voss means by a (potential) belief. When Voss talks about belief, he seems to have a linguistic belief in mind such as “x is there”; and this leads me to think that this is a linguistic belief, in such a way that one cannot have a belief without mastering language. However, what I consider to be a part of visual experience is not that kind of belief. When I talk about a belief, what I mean is a pre-linguistic, less developed conceptual belief. This is because I want to be careful and claim that in order for us to have perception, we do not have to have a language. For me, perception and some other mental states such as awareness and some primitive beliefs come before language.¹⁰² I would argue for this view with the help of new-born babies. They learn language from the external world; and in order for them to learn language (even gestures), they have to perceive the environment. They have to *perceive* their surroundings in order to imitate the people they *see*.¹⁰³ Therefore, the visual experience (getting a potential belief weaker than the one Voss suggests), hence perception, comes before language.

But this does not mean that we do not have conceptually saturated linguistic beliefs. We acquire those kinds of beliefs when we learn language; and since we begin to think in terms of concepts once we learn the language, our beliefs in case of visual experience become linguistic. Therefore while the account Voss gives is true for people that have mastered language, it is too narrow to be a necessary condition for visual experience.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² There are some other mental states that do not require language but I will not enumerate all those mental states here.

¹⁰³ I will not go into a detailed discussion on this issue and I will take it granted that perception, awareness and beliefs of some sort (primitive beliefs) are pre-linguistic. For detailed discussion, see Özge Koçak’s thesis on this issue. I want to thank her for her valuable discussion and ideas.

¹⁰⁴ When I talked to Voss on this issue, he stated that even though he stated the belief in a propositional form, this does not mean that one has to master language in order to have beliefs. A baby can have a belief

3.5. Perspective Changes

This account of the visual experience I gave above helps us to explain the problematic cases, such as perspective changes and hallucination, that the direct theory of perception faces. In this section, I will give an account that I think is plausible for perspective changes.

One of the objections indirect theorists raised against the direct theory was what the difference is in perception of the same object from different perspectives if there is nothing between us and the external object in perception (the perceiver is fixed in this case). The answer to this question is that the visual experience is different. It is different in such a sense that:

- (i) Our sensation is different since the angle and/or strength of the light rays that go into our eyes is different. As a result, the electro-chemical reactions they stimulate in our nerves are different. Therefore, our sensations are different when we look at an object from different perspectives.
- (ii) We have different potential beliefs that accompany the purely physical part of perception, the sensation. In one case belief is “I see x as p” while in the other case it is “I see x as q”.

The thing that is similar in both cases of perception is that it is the visual experience of the same object. In addition to this, our potential beliefs are in such a form

that it perceives ‘x is there’. The analysis’ being done in a propositional way does not mean that only people who have language can have those kinds of beliefs hence perception.

that “I see x and I see it as p” and “I see x and I see it as q”. In other words, our potential beliefs are adjunctive beliefs (not necessarily that complex in form, though); and since they are of the same object, one of their adjuncts is the same while since they are from different perspectives one of their adjuncts is different.

Hence what distinguish two perceptions from each other are the sensation as well as one (or some) adjunct(s) of the potential belief while what makes them similar is the external object as well as an (or some) adjunct(s) of our potential beliefs.

3.6. The Case of Hallucination

Even when we admit visual experience into our ontology as a part of perception, there still remains a big problem; namely, the problem of hallucination. Since the immediate object of perception is the external object and in the case of hallucination, there is no external object present, then what is it we see there? In other words, if this is the case, what is the object of hallucination since we have a similar (one that we cannot distinguish by ourselves) experience? In a hallucination, I would, again, follow Searle’s footsteps and claim that there is no object of perception in hallucination. Actually, there is no perception there. Even though we seem to have an experience similar to the experience we have in perception in the case of hallucination, those two experiences are not of the same kind. This is because the cause of each experience is different. One is caused by the light rays that are reflected from the external object while the other is caused by some other external and internal-to-brain factors. One occurs when there is an object present in front of the subject while the other occurs when there is not. Hence, since the causes of the two experiences are different, it is conceivable to claim that their

natures also differ. However, this does not mean that they are completely different. They have many aspects that are similar to each other. For instance, we have a visual experience in both of the cases although in one of them there is no actual object of perception. Visual experience remains even though the object at which our perception is directed is not present.

We took the first step to solve the problem by stating the obvious (that perception and hallucination are two different kinds of visual experience). But then, what is the object of hallucination? I already answered this question above. There is no object of hallucination. There is no immediate object of our visual perception that causes us to have a visual experience. The cause of our visual experience is some other external (light rays etc.) and internal-to-brain (malfunction of the brain, nerves sending wrong messages to each other etc.) factors, not an external (or internal) object. Then again, what is there if there is no object of visual experience, how can a visual experience exist without an object? The answer to this question is easy to answer since we do not necessarily use external object in the analysis of visual experience. My story is as follows:

Sensation occurs when we have electro-chemical activities in the related parts of our brains. This can be caused by an external object or some other factors (external or internal to our brain) than the external object. They both are sensations even if they are different in kind. In addition to this, in both cases we have potential beliefs, hence we have visual experiences (meaning that we seem to see) of an object (whether the object is present or not), caused by those sensations. Hence we have visual experience although there is no object of it and this causes us to hallucinate. In the case of hallucination, there

are the perceiver and the visual experience present but there is no object of perception. Hence there is no perception but a hallucination.¹⁰⁵

3.7. Searle's Claim on Aspects

The last point I want to pay attention to is Searle's claim that we see things under aspects. He claims that we see things in two different ways. We perceive things under aspects or we perceive aspects of the things. It is true that when we look at a table we see it as brown and I see the brown of the external object.

As he also said, to claim that I can perceive the aspect by itself is unbelievable. Even if I focus on the aspect of an object, what I perceive is *the aspect of the object*, not just the aspect itself. Suppose that I focus on the brown of the table I perceive, what I see is still the external object. Yes, my attention is on the color of the table, but this does not mean that I can perceive brown independently of the external object all together. It is impossible to perceive the aspect independently of the external object, as it is impossible to perceive the object independently of the aspect. Therefore, I completely agree with Searle about his views on aspects.

3.8. Conclusion

What I did in this thesis was to defend the Direct Theory of Perception and try to find some solutions to the problems direct theorists face by mainly focusing on the

¹⁰⁵ The experience is a "wrong" one; it is mistakenly directed at the world that does not contain the object of perception in it.

question “What is the immediate object of visual experience?” In order to do this, I explained what I meant by perception, visual experience, immediate perception and related terms that I made use of. Then, I stated indirect and direct theories of perception and their strong and weak points. Afterwards, I examined the theories of philosophers from whom I will get help with my own account and stated the parts of those theories which I use. In the end, I came up with my own account of perception with the help of the philosophers I mentioned above.

In my opinion, perception is direct. We immediately perceive the external object of the world. Perception consists of three elements; the perceiver, the object of perception, and the visual experience. The visual experience has also sub-parts and it consists of two elements; the sensation and the potential belief. Sensation is the physical part of the visual experience. It is the chain of events that occurs in the related parts of our body. The potential belief is the mental part and it is the tendency to believe that we immediately perceive such and such. Different perceptions of the same object (perspective changes) occur as a result of the changes in visual experience (the change in the sensation and the change in the potential beliefs). Hallucinations can also be explained with the help of visual experiences. In the case of a hallucination, no object of perception is present but there is visual experience (there is sensation and the potential belief). Hence there occurs the hallucination. Finally, we see objects under aspects but this does not mean that what we perceive is just the aspects (or it is not the case that we can perceive aspects without perceiving external objects). This is my version of Naïve Direct Realist Theory of Perception as Searle calls it.

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