

# Handout Causative Disjunctivism

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## 1 Outline

The disjunctive theory of perception says that there are two fundamentally different kinds of sense-experience. Perceptual experiences constitutively involve external things. Hallucinatory experiences, while being subjectively indistinguishable from perceptions, do not have this nature. Whatever else is true of such experiences, they don't have external objects as constituents.

Given their commitments, disjunctivists need to deny what we might call:

POSSIBILITY I: It is possible, even during mere hallucination, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in genuine perception.

Why do they need to reject this? For disjunctivists, experiences of the perceptual kind constitutively involve external objects; no such experience could occur in a case of total hallucination.

Notably, standard reasons given for rejecting this claim are insufficient; so more work needs to be done if we are to end up with a coherent disjunctivist view. That is one task of this paper. Another is to point out that disjunctivists both can and should reject the following:

POSSIBILITY II:

It is possible, even during genuine perception, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in mere (total) hallucination.

In fact, many disjunctivists accept POSSIBILITY II. Actually, many go further still, and accept:

COMMONALITY

In every actual case of genuine perception, the subject undergoes an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in hallucination.

As is well-known, COMMONALITY causes trouble for disjunctivists by generating "screening off" worries (Martin 2004, 2006; Moran 2019a). Yet, many disjunctivists accept this claim. Here, building on Moran (2019a), I argue that can and should be rejected. The argument, in turn, implies that just as POSSIBILITY I is false in a disjunctivist framework, so is POSSIBILITY II. What results is arguably a purer form of disjunctivism, closer to the disjunctivism of Hinton (1973), Snowdon (1981) and McDowell (1982), on which, just as the perceptual kind of experience never occurs in cases of hallucination, so the hallucinatory kind of experience never occurs in cases of perception. After all, these original disjunctivists seemingly insist that undergoing sensory experience is *either* a matter of having the perceptual kind of experience *or else* a matter of having the hallucinatory kind of experience. This claim, however, is most naturally read as entailing the negation of COMMONALITY. The present paper can thus be read as an attempt to rehabilitate a much more traditional form of disjunctivism, on which perception and hallucination involve two fundamentally distinct kinds of experience which are never co-instantiated.

## 2 The Standard Line and Veridical Hallucination

The argument for POSSIBILITY I turns on two ideas (Foster 1986, 2000; Robinson 1985, 1994):

PROXIMATE CAUSES

For every perceptual experience, *p*, there is a nomically possible hallucinatory experience, *h*, with the same proximate cause as *p*.

And

SAME CAUSE, SAME EFFECT

If an event of kind A is the proximate cause of an event of kind B, then it is nomically necessary that whenever an event of kind A occurs, it produces an event of kind B as its immediate effect.

Both premises are plausible. Jointly, however, they imply POSSIBILITY I. By PROXIMATE CAUSES, we can imagine a perceptual experience *p* and an hallucinatory experience *h* that have the same proximate cause. By SAME CAUSE, SAME EFFECT, it therefore follows that an experience of the same kind as *p* will be produced by the brain state that produces *h*. But this is just to suppose that an experience of the perceptual kind occurs in the case of hallucination, contrary to what disjunctivists must claim. I.e., we get POSSIBILITY I.

How to reject this? The radical way: Reject PROXIMATE CAUSES (Child 1992, 1994, 2011; Johnston 2004; Snowdon 1981, 1990). Think of perceptual experiences as temporally extended events beginning with light leaving the object seen. The proximate cause of an hallucination is a brain state, but the brain state in the perceptual case is a mere proper part of the constituting base of the experience. The experience itself has an event involving the object sensed as cause.

This won't do, since it generates absurd results about the temporal extent of experience (see Dretske 1999; Martin 1992; Moran 2019b). Note also a dialectical point: I want a way to reject COMMONALITY, and nothing about *this* move helps us with *that* task (cf. Martin 1992: 185-187)

The more common move: Reject SAME CAUSE, SAME EFFECT. (Campbell: 2010: §§3-4; Nudds 2013: 274-275; Langsam 1995: 42-46; Martin 2004: 56-58; 2006: 268-371; McDowell 2010; Travis 2011). According to disjunctivists, perceptual experiences essentially have external objects as constituents. Accordingly, a background condition on the occurrence of such an episode is that an appropriate external object exist and be available to be perceived. No mere brain state, however, could guarantee that this condition obtains. On a disjunctivist view, therefore, no mere brain state is sufficient for a perceptual experience to occur. Rather, in order for a given brain state to produce a perceptual experience, a substantive background condition must be met. In particular, an appropriate external object must exist and be available to be perceived.

In short, the idea is that that sameness of proximate cause is insufficient for sameness of effect, given that certain effects have background conditions on their instantiation. Consider, however, a weaker principle that takes this into account (cf. Martin 2004: 56-58; Nudds 2013: 275).

SAME CAUSE, SAME EFFECT\*

If an event of kind A is the proximate cause of an event of kind B, then it is nomically necessary that if an event of kind A occurs in some context C, such that in C, all of the background conditions {X} on a kind-B effect occurring are satisfied, then the event of kind A will produce an event of kind B as its immediate effect.

This weaker principle is harder to reject. If an event of kind A produces an event of kind B, it seems to follow that events of kind A have the *power* to produce type-B events as their immediate effects. Now this might be a conditional power, which can be exercised only when the background conditions on a type-B event occurring are satisfied. However, in cases where those conditions are satisfied, it is hard to see how the type-A event should fail to exercise its power to produce a type-B event. It appears, therefore, that disjunctivists must accept the weaker principle

But now we get another version of the causal argument relying on veridical hallucination...

NO FURTHER CONDITIONS (PERCEPTION)

All that it takes, to have an experience of the perceptual kind, is the existence of the right sort of object, plus a subject in the right sort of antecedent brain state. Nothing else.

Add this to PROXIMATE CAUSES and SAME CAUSE, SAME EFFECT\*, and you get a close cousin of POSSIBILITY I:

POSSIBILITY I\*

It is possible, even during mere veridical hallucination, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in genuine perception.

Yet this is just as bad. Neither veridical nor non-veridical hallucinations could involve the sort of experience constitutive of perception if these have the nature disjunctivists think they do.

4 The reverse causal argument

Consider also:

NO FURTHER CONDITIONS (HALLUCINATORY)

All that it takes, to have an experience of the hallucinatory kind is for the subject to be in the right sort of antecedent brain state. Nothing else is required; no further conditions.

(Why accept NO FURTHER CONDITIONS (HALLUCINATORY) Because we intuitively think of hallucinatory experiences as ‘inner events’, and therefore such that no further condition, beyond the subject being in the right kind of antecedent brain state, must be met for such events to be produced (Martin 2004: 58; Snowdon 2005: 288). This is meant to show that the instantiation-conditions for hallucinatory experience are undemanding; in contrast to the perceptual case, no background conditions must be met for an hallucinatory experience to occur.)

Add this to PROXIMATE CAUSES and SAME CAUSE, SAME EFFECT\*, and you get COMMONALITY, which then gives you POSSIBILITY II. COMMONALITY then generates screening off. (Why, if in the good case, we have the hallucinatory kind of experience, do we need to posit the perceptual kind of experience as well? Can’t the hallucinatory kind do all the explanatory work we need?)

5 Causal Conditions and a Unified Response

Thus, I propose a view on which:

ANTI-POSSIBILITY I: It is not possible, during a case of mere hallucination, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in genuine perception.

ANTI-POSSIBILITY II:

It is not possible, during a case of genuine perception, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in mere (total) hallucination.

Then  $\neg$  POSSIBILITY II entails:

ANTI-COMMONALITY

In no case of genuine perception does the subject undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in hallucination.

If we can make out such a view, the causal argument is rebuffed (even the revised version involving veridical hallucination), and, moreover, screening off worries are not going to arise.

How to do it? I argue that there are background conditions on perceptual experience that cannot be met in perceptual cases, and background conditions on hallucinatory experience that cannot be met in hallucinatory cases. In particular, the right sort of causal chain has to be involved in each case. This causalist view straightforwardly entails both  $\neg$  POSSIBILITY I &  $\neg$  POSSIBILITY II.

CAUSAL CONSTRAINT ON PERCEPTION (CP):

It lies in the nature of experiences of the perceptual kind to be caused in the standard or appropriate way by an external thing.

CAUSAL CONSTRAINT ON HALLUCINATION (CH):

It lies in the nature of experiences of the hallucinatory kind to be caused in the deviant or non-standard way (i.e. not to be caused in the standard way by a suitable external thing).

Given that no causal chain can be both standard and deviant, it follows that (i) an essential background condition on undergoing perceptual experience cannot be met in hallucination and that (ii) an essential background condition on undergoing hallucinatory experience cannot be met in perception. Therefore we can derive easily ANTI-POSSIBILITY I & ANTI-POSSIBILITY II.

There are many ways to motivate CAUSAL CONSTRAINT ON PERCEPTION (CP). One could appeal to the idea that the acquaintance relation must obtain in virtue of physical facts which must involve causal facts. Or one could appeal to the idea that successful perception requires the appropriate kind of contact with an external item, and that successful perceptions are essentially so. Here I wish to exploit this latter line of thought, and then use a similar one to motivate (CH)

DEF: An event  $x$  is an event of kind  $K_p$  =def  $x$  is the sort of event involved in perception.

- 1 It lies in the nature of experiences of kind  $K_p$  to be genuine perceptions.
  - 2 Part of what it is to be a genuine perception is to be appropriately caused.
  - 3 If it lies in the nature of events of kind  $X$  to be  $F$ , and part of what it is for  $y$  to be  $F$  is for it to be  $G$ , then it lies in the nature of events of kind  $X$  to be  $G$ .
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- $\therefore$  It lies in the nature of experiences of kind  $K_p$  to be appropriately caused.

The argument is valid, and establishes (CP). Premise 1 flows from the disjunctivist conception of what perceptual experiences are. Premise 2 we can motivate in various ways; but think in particular of the Gricean cases and the conditions of success. Premise 3 just looks like an obvious principle about essence – so the argument is convincing all in all. Here is a parallel argument:

DEF: An event  $x$  is an event of kind  $K_h$  =def  $x$  is the sort of event involved in hallucination.

- 1' It lies in the nature of experiences of kind  $K_h$  to be mere hallucinations.
  - 2 Part of what it is to be an hallucination is to be non-standardly/deviantly caused.
  - 3 If it lies in the nature of events of kind  $X$  to be  $F$ , and part of what it is for  $y$  to be  $F$  is for it to be  $G$ , then it lies in the nature of events of kind  $X$  to be  $G$ .
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- $\therefore$  It lies in the nature of  $K_h$ -experiences to be non-standardly/deviantly caused.

Martin (2004) and other fans of COMMONALITY will deny 1. But I think it follows from a plausible conception of hallucinatory experiences as failure states. It is often observed that hallucinations are in a certain sense ‘failed experiences’ (Tye 2014: 303), i.e., events that are, in their natures, ‘failures to [perceive]’ (Thau 2004: 250; cf. Johnston 2004: 135). The claim is that we can capture this via the premise that experiences involved in hallucination are essentially hallucinatory – one could not have an experience of that very kind that wasn’t an hallucination.

Premise 2 flows again from Gricean considerations, as well as a plausible causalist conception of what it takes to fail to perceive (and thus hallucinate). And premise 3 remains unchanged.

## 6 Where do we get?

The revised original causal argument fails because by (CP) this principle is false:

NO FURTHER CONDITIONS (PERCEPTION)

All that it takes, to have an experience of the perceptual kind, is the existence of the right sort of object, plus a subject in the right sort of antecedent brain state.

Actually, it is false in such a way that we get:

ANTI-POSSIBILITY I: It is not possible, during a case of mere hallucination, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in genuine perception.

After all, (CP) tells us that there are causal conditions on undergoing an experience of the perceptual kind that could not be met in cases of mere hallucination.

The reverse causal argument goes wrong because by (CH) this principle is false:

NO FURTHER CONDITIONS (HALLUCINATORY)

All that it takes, to have an experience of the hallucinatory kind is for the subject to be in the right sort of antecedent brain state. Nothing else is required; no further conditions.

Actually, it is false in such a way that we get:

ANTI-POSSIBILITY II:

It is not possible, during a case of genuine perception, for a subject to undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in mere (total) hallucination.

Then ANTI-POSSIBILITY II: entails:

ANTI-COMMONALITY

In no case of genuine perception, does the subject undergo an experience of the (fundamental mental) kind involved in hallucination.

After all, (CP) tells us that there are causal conditions on undergoing an experience of the perceptual kind that could not be met in cases of mere hallucination.

## 7 Some worries

We haven't time to go into them, but here are some concerns:

- Hume worlds: can't we draw the perception/hallucination distinction in worlds that lack any kind of causation? If so, how could (CP) and (CH) be true? (Johnston 2004)
- Causative disjunctivism implies that the kind of experience a brain state will produce depends on its causal antecedents. Is this a plausible idea? In the literature on the causal argument, it is often said that it is difficult to see how the causal powers of a given brain state could be dependent on its causal embedding in this way. As Snowdon (2005: 292) puts it, echoing a widely endorsed line of thought, the idea is that it would be 'beyond

explanation' how a given brain state could be sensitive to its broader causal context in this manner. The same basic objection can also be found in Johnston (2004: 116), Foster (2000: 28), Robinson (1994: 157), Sethi (2020: fn. 46), and van Cleve (2015: 287).

- What of the idea that hallucinations are 'inner experiences'? How can they have causal conditions on their instantiation if they are mere 'inner events' (Martin; Pautz)?
- Argument: (1) If there are background conditions on the occurrence of hallucinatory experience, this must be implied by an account of the mental nature of such events. (2) But no plausible account of the nature of such events implies this. Hence, there are no background conditions (causal or otherwise) on hallucination and (CH) must be false.

I have replies to these worries and hopefully we can get to them in the Q & A.

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