

Debunking Perceptual Beliefs about Ordinary Objects

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Conceptions of Objects

Conservatism: there is something composed of the leaves and the trunk, but nothing composed of the dog and the trunk

Eliminativism: there is nothing composed of the trunk and the leaves

Permissivism: there is something composed of the dog and the trunk (a “trog”)

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Against Conservatism



Hawthorne (2006): Wouldn't it be remarkable if the lines of reality matched the lines that we have words for? The simplest exercises of sociological imagination ought to convince us that the assumption of such a harmony is altogether untoward, since such exercises convince us that it is something of a biological and/or cultural accident that we draw the lines that we do.

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Against Conservatism

If we are to be charitable towards ourselves without being unduly chauvinistic, it seems that we should posit ever so many more objects than we habitually talk about, in order not to credit ourselves with too much luck or sophistication in successfully hitting ontological targets most of the time.



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Against Conservatism

Sider (2001): On [conservative views], the entities that exist correspond exactly with the categories for continuants in *our* conceptual scheme: trees, aggregates, statues, lumps, persons, bodies, and so on. How convenient! It would be nothing short of a miracle if reality just happened to match our conceptual scheme in this way.



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Debunking Evaluative Beliefs

- (A1) There is no appropriate explanatory connection between our evaluative beliefs and evaluative facts.
- (A2) If so, then it would be a coincidence if our evaluative beliefs are correct.
- (A3) If so, then we should not believe that setting fire to cats is wrong.
- (A4) So, we should not believe that setting fire to cats is wrong.

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Debunking Disbelief in Trogs

- (B1) There is no appropriate explanatory connection between our beliefs about which objects there are and aren't and the facts about which objects there are and aren't.
- (B2) If so, then it would be a coincidence if our beliefs about which objects there are and aren't are correct.
- (B3) If so, then we should not believe that there is no trog in S.
- (B4) So, we should not believe that there is no trog in S.

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Debunking Belief in Ordinary Objects

- (C1) There is no appropriate explanatory connection between our beliefs about which objects there are and the facts about which objects there are.
- (C2) If so, then it would be a coincidence if our beliefs about which objects there are are correct.
- (C3) If so, then we should not believe that there is a tree in S.
- (C4) So, we should not believe that there is a tree in S.

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The Causal Response

The Causal Response

- Trees cause or tree experiences and beliefs
- So C1 is false: there is a *causal* explanatory connection between beliefs about objects and facts about objects

The Problem

- The mere fact that trees cause beliefs about trees cannot account for the accuracy of these beliefs.

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See 'n Say



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The Causal Response

- The fact that a duck caused the toy to make the sound of a duck does not explain why it made the sound of a duck (rather than a chicken or cow).
- Similarly, the fact that a tree caused me to have an experience as of a tree does not explain why I have an experience as of a tree rather than as of a trog or an uptree.

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The Permissivist Response

- Permissivists may deny A2
 - (C2) If there is no appropriate explanatory connection between our beliefs about which objects there are and the facts about which objects there are, then it would be a coincidence if our beliefs about which objects there are are correct.
- No matter which experiences and beliefs we had ended up with, we would have ended up with true beliefs. Having accurate perceptual beliefs is a trivial accomplishment; no luck is required.

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The Permissivist Response

- [1] Alice's testimony and my testimonial beliefs about the locations of the birds are accurate.
- [2] Yet it is a matter of chance that she said the things that she did.
- [3] Presumably, I am not just lucky to have ended up with accurate beliefs about where these birds can be found, as I would be each bird could be found in only one or two countries.
- [4] So the best explanation for how I ended up with true beliefs is that each of those birds can be found in every European country.

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The Permissivist Response

- [1'] My experiences are accurate: there are trees and other such objects.
- [2'] Yet it is a biological/cultural accident that I ended up the sorts of experiences I did.
- [3'] I presumably am not simply *lucky* to have accurate experiences, as I would be if there were only ordinary objects and no extraordinary objects.
- [4'] So the best explanation for how I ended up with accurate experiences is that there are both ordinary and extraordinary objects.

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The Permissivist Response



[2''] It is something of a biological and/or cultural accident that we draw the lines that we do. If [1''] we are to be charitable towards ourselves ... [4''] it seems that we should posit ever so many more objects than we habitually talk about, [3''] in order not to credit ourselves with too much luck ... in successfully hitting ontological targets most of the time.

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Rationalism

- *Rationalism*: We apprehend abstract facts, and our apprehension of these facts influences our beliefs, intuitions, and (perhaps) experiences
- *What I won't do*: Explain how this capacity works.
- *What I will do*: Explain how it can be rational to take oneself to have such a capacity nonetheless.

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Influencing Perceptual Experience

- *Cognitive penetration*: background cognitive states influence how information is presented in experience
- Why we experience a tree (and not a trog) in S
 - We are perceptual aware of a certain distribution of sensible qualities
 - We have substantial background knowledge about the likely distribution of occluded qualities
 - We apprehend that when qualities are so-distributed, there is a tree (and no trog)

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Motivating Rationalism

- [1] Our experiences do accurately represent which kinds of things there are.
- [2] We presumably are not just lucky to have accurate experiences.
- [3] If we suppose that our experiences are influenced by an apprehension of abstract facts, we can account for their accuracy.
- [4] Since no superior explanation appears to be forthcoming, we can accept this account by inference to the best explanation.

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Objection: No Independent Evidence

- The motivation for rationalism turned on the supposition that our experiences accurately represent which kinds of objects there are
- But we have no independent evidence for their accuracy!
- How to justify the belief that they are accurate?
 - (i) Coherentism
 - (ii) Default entitlement
 - (iii) Bootstrapping

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Objection: No Independent Evidence

The Problem of the Criterion

- (D1) Suppose for reductio that you are justified in believing that p.
- (D2) You are justified in believing that p only if you are justified in believing that you have a reliable source of information concerning whether p.
- (D3) So you are justified in believing an infinite sequence of propositions of the form: that your belief *that p* has a reliable source, that your belief *that your belief that p has a reliable source* has a reliable source,
- (D4) If so, then some sources of information are self-justifying.
- (D5) No sources of information are self-justifying.
- (D6) So you are not justified in believing that p.

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Objection: Mysterious

- Countervailing abductive case for intellectual apprehension: my experiences are accurate, and the best explanation for their accurate invokes a capacity for intellectual apprehension.
- Analogy: Platonic universals and propositions are similarly mysterious, but many posit them nonetheless on abductive grounds.

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Objection: No Ultimate Explanation

- Objection: There is no adaptive advantage to having such a capacity
- Response
 - Yes, there is no adaptive advantage to accurately representing the kinds to which objects belong
 - But there is an adaptive advantage to having a general capacity for apprehensions
 - Accurate beliefs about composition, coinstantiation, and kinds is a “spandrel”.

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[[Just in Case]]

The Argument from Vagueness

- (E1) Either every plurality of objects has a fusion or none do.
- (E2) Some pluralities of objects have a fusion.
- (E3) So, every plurality of objects has a fusion.
- (E4) If every plurality of objects has a fusion, then there are trees.
- (E5) So, there are trees.

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[[Just in Case]]

The Argument from Arbitrariness

- (F1) There is no ontologically significant difference between uptrees and islands.
- (F2) If so, then islands exist iff uptrees exist.
- (F3) Islands exist.
- (F4) So uptrees exist.
- (F5) By parity, all of the permissivist’s ordinary and extraordinary objects exist.

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