

Externalist Theories of Perception

WILLIAM P. ALSTON
Syracuse University

i. The Problem

What I term "externalist theories of perception" have been dominant throughout the modern period. Let me explain the term.

First, a "theory of perception," as I am using that term, attempts to answer the question, "What is it to perceive a certain physical object?" It seeks to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for this. Restricting ourselves to reasonably sensible theories, all the contenders hold that one necessary condition for my seeing a certain tree is that I have a visual experience of a certain sort. Must this be a conscious experience? And does the notion of an unconscious *experience* make sense? I myself want to recognize unconscious perception, but I have no time here for the question of how to construe the experiential component of unconscious perception. Therefore, I shall restrict the discussion to conscious perception.

What restrictions are to be put on the character of the visual experience involved? If there are to be such restrictions they will be formulated differently by different accounts of the nature of sensory experience. Thus the sense datum account will put the restrictions in terms of the character of the sense data of which one is aware, the adverbial theory in terms of the *way or mode* of sensing involved; and so on. However, there is a prior question as to whether any such restriction is called for. Since it is possible for me to be genuinely seeing that tree under conditions in which it looks radically different from the way it is, are there any limits to this? If not, then there are no limits to the kind of visual experience that could be involved.¹ Since this issue is peripheral to my central concerns in this paper, I shall pass it by. The question on which I will be focusing is: "What

¹ Michael Pendlebury argues for limits in "Perceptual Representation," *Proceed. Arist. Soc.*, 1986-87. My favored theory, the Theory of Appearing, as we shall see, does carry with it definite limits on the nature of the sensory experience involved, although these do not correspond with anything the other theories would regard as part of the "character" of the experience.

other conditions must be satisfied (and are sufficient together with the experiential condition) in order that I see that tree?"

It is at this point that the notion of "externalist theories" emerges. I use that term for any theory that holds that conditions "external" (to the subject) are required, conditions over and above the subject's having an appropriate sensory experience. I said in my opening sentence that externalist theories have been dominant. So marked is that dominance that many of my readers will, no doubt, take it as incredible that any reasonable person should deny that additional conditions are required. "Obviously," one might say, "it is not enough for my genuinely perceiving a tree that I merely have a certain kind of experience. How could that be sufficient?" Obviously, it could be sufficient only if a perceptual relation to the tree is built into the nature of the sensory experience itself. And the apparent obviousness of the need for extra conditions is just the apparent obviousness of the supposition that sensory experience cannot be so characterized, that it is "all in the head" or mind, something purely subjective and confined to the perceiving subject. Opposed to this supposition is the view that sensory experience is essentially a relational affair, a matter of something's "appearing" or being "presented" or "given" to the subject as such-and-such: as red, round, treelike, doglike, or whatever. Where the something in question is an external physical object, e.g., this tree, then this relational state of affairs that is constitutive of the sensory experience ensures that the subject perceives this tree. Indeed, the relational state of affairs is a case of seeing the tree. To be sure, if I am subject to an hallucination and fail to see any tree, I might still be having a visual experience introspectively indistinguishable from the one typically involved in seeing this tree. In that case what this view would take to be appearing to me is presumably something subjective like a mental image, rather than something objective. But where what appears is an external physical object, then what makes it true that I am having the sensory experience I am having, and what makes it true that I see this tree, are one and the same. The position I have been describing is the "Theory of Appearing" (sometimes known as the "Multiple Relation Theory of Appearing") a theory that dropped out of sight in the latter part of this century after severe attacks by the likes of Price and Chisholm.² It is a

² The theory is espoused in G. Dawes Hicks, *Critical Realism* (London: Macmillan, 1938), in H. A. Prichard's *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), chap., 3 and in W. F. H. Barnes, "The Myth of Sense-Data," *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, 45 (1944-45), among other places. A clear statement without a whole hearted endorsement is found in G. E. Moore, "Some Judgments of Perception," in *Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), pp. 244-47. It is criticized in C. D. Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, pp. 178 ff., H. H. Price, *Perception* (London: Methuen,

theory that I myself favor and aspire to revive. However I will not argue for it here. It will figure only as the contrast to “externalist theories.” This paper will be devoted to a general attack on the latter, thus clearing the way for the Theory of Appearing.

Externalist theories differ not only in the specification of external conditions, but also in the characterization of sensory experience. Let’s distinguish two purely “internal” ways of characterizing sensory experience, the Sense Datum Theory and the Adverbial Theory. The former agrees with the Theory of Appearing that sensory experience displays an act-object structure, is the awareness of something; but it restricts the “somethings” to “sense-data,” non-physical entities the sole function of which is to be bearers of sensory qualities. The Adverbial Theory, by contrast, construes sensory experience in itself as “objectless,” as a *way or mode* of being conscious or of sensing, rather than as a direct awareness of any object. In Chisholm’s lingo, we are to think of a certain sensory experience as sensing *treely* or *red-squarely* or *Victorian housely*. Since the adverbial theory is very much in fashion now, and the sense-datum theory largely discredited, I shall concentrate on the former.³

ii. Causal Theories

Clearly, one might conceivably be visually sensing daggerly without really seeing a dagger, as in the notorious case of Macbeth. What further condi-

1932), chap. 3, R. M. Chisholm, “The Theory of Appearing,” in *Philosophical Analysis*, ed., Max Black (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1950), and Frank Jackson, *Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

³ I must confess to doubts that the adverbial theory really provides a coherent alternative. When such leading proponents as Ducasse and Chisholm explain it, they tell us that what are otherwise taken as objects of awareness are to be understood as *ways* of being aware. Thus instead of speaking of being aware of something red and round, or of a tree, we are to speak of sensing *red-roundly* or *treely*. But it seems dubious to me that we can attach any independent sense to these adverbs. The only way I can make sense out of ‘sensing treely’ is to take it as a curious reformulation of being sensorily aware of a (putative) tree. I can’t see that we have any genuinely alternative concept of a tree-like *way* of sensing. (For an extended criticism along these lines, see Panayot Butchvarov, “Adverbial Theories of Consciouness,” *Mid. Stud. Philos.*, 5 (1980).) To be sure, many who call themselves “adverbial theorists” don’t take the term ‘adverbial’ as seriously as Ducasse or Chisholm. They simply hold that we should think of sensory experience as (in itself) lacking an act-object structure, and as characterizable in terms of normal full perception. Thus the sensory experience typically involved in seeing a tree is to be characterized just in that way; it is a *sensory experience of the sort one normally has when seeing a tree*. That approach certainly avoids the above objection to Ducasse and Chisholm. However it does so at the cost of total uninformative-ness. We are not told what sensory experience is like. We are merely told where to find paradigm cases, and told that the term applies to anything sufficiently like those cases in unspecified ways. This is a cop-out rather than an alternative view of the subject matter.

tions then must be satisfied if one genuinely is to see a dagger? Perhaps the most obvious suggestion, at least most obvious to modern sensibilities, is a causal one. It is abundantly obvious that in visual and other sense perception the object figures importantly in the causal chain leading up to the sensory consciousness involved. This encourages us to suppose that it is by virtue of being causally related to a certain object that a sensory consciousness is (counts as, is involved in) a perception of that object. But, unfortunately for this approach, it is equally obvious that even if this is necessary for perceiving an object it is, without further qualification, not at all sufficient. By no means everything that figures in the causal chain leading to a certain visual experience is thereby seen. For example, the chain contains neurophysiological processes in the brain and elsewhere; but they are not seen. To get sufficient as well as necessary conditions for seeing an object, along causal lines, we need to bring out the distinctive causal contribution the object seen, as contrasted with other causal factors, is making. This might be done either by specifying that causal role or by giving some recipe for doing so. The first approach is illustrated by R. M. Chisholm's *Perceiving*.⁴ There Chisholm undertakes to specify the distinctive causal role of the perceived object for each of the sense modalities by defining a "proper stimulus" for each modality. For example.

We may say that *x* is a proper *visual* stimulus for *S* provided (i) that light transmitted from *x* stimulates a visual receptor of *S* and (ii) that this light, after being transmitted from *x* and before reaching the visual receptors of *S*, is not reflected. When we look at the moon at night, our eyes are stimulated by light from the sun; the proper stimulus, however, is the moon and neither the light nor the sun.

We may say that *x* is a proper *auditory* stimulus for *S* provided that soundwaves transmitted from *x* stimulate an auditory receptor of *S*. The proper auditory stimulus is thus neither the sound waves nor the medium through which they are transmitted, but the vibrating object that transmits them. (p. 144)

Chisholm then proposes that we understand 'S perceives *x*' as 'As a consequence of *x* being a proper stimulus of *S*, *S* senses. . .', where the blank is to be filled in with a specification of the way in which *S* is sensing.

Thus Chisholm seeks to exploit what we know about the way in which sense perception actually takes place in order to specify what distinguishes the object perceived from other causal contributors to the sensory experience. George Mavrodes objects to this account that it would prevent us from seeing the moon though a telescope or from seeing things in mirrors or on television; for in all these cases light from the putatively perceived object is reflected before it stimulates our visual receptors.⁵ How-

⁴ Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957.

⁵ *Belief in God* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1981), p. 56.

ever, this objection may be accommodated by distinguishing between direct and indirect perception and taking Chisholm to be offering an account of the former. A more stubborn objection is that "if we are attempting to characterize the ordinary notion of perceiving, we should not explicitly introduce material of which someone who is perfectly capable of employing the ordinary notion might be ignorant."⁶ The more we make use of what has been discovered by the science of perception the less we can lay claim to be reproducing the concept that is employed in the population at large. Even the dependence of visual experience on the reflection of light and the stimulation of the retina has been unknown to many persons who were quite capable of attributing the seeing of objects to themselves and others. Having leveled the above criticism, Grice takes a different approach to singling out the relevant causal contribution.

I suggest that the best procedure for the Causal Theorist is to indicate the mode of causal connexion by examples; to say that, for an object to be perceived by x, it is sufficient that it should be causally involved in the generation of some sense-impression of x in the kind of way in which, for example, when I look at my hand in a good light, my hand is causally responsible for its looking to me as if there were a hand before me, or in which . . . (and so on), *whatever that kind of way may be*, and to be enlightened on that question one must have recourse to the specialist. (pp. 144-45)

Even if this were a correct characterization of the ordinary concept of perception (and I shall shortly be arguing that it is not), it would not provide the illumination we seek. For Grice's formulation goes beyond the simplest causal thesis (that to perceive X is for X to be among the causes of a sensory experience) only by saying that what distinguishes the object perceived from the other causes is that it is causally involved in the way in which objects perceived are involved. True enough; it had better be involved in that way. But this tells us nothing as to what that way is; hence it does nothing to advance the inquiry. It is much as if one had begun an account of causality by pointing out that a cause precedes its effect (let's assume that this is universally true). And then, in answer to the question, "What distinguishes the cause of X from other events that preceded it?," one says, "It is related to X in the way a spark is related to an explosion when it causes it, in the way in which an impact is related to the shattering of a window when it causes that shattering; and so on." I doubt that this would be regarded as a signal contribution to our understanding of causality.

⁶ H. P. Grice, "The Causal Theory of Perception," *Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol.* 35 (1961), p. 143.

However, for present purposes I want to concentrate on deficiencies shared by Chisholm's and Grice's views, construed as general accounts of what it is for a cognitive subject (whether human, or indeed animal, or not) to perceive a physical object, i.e., as analyses of the concept of physical object perception, construed in the widest fashion. Here the basic point is a very simple and, one would think, an obvious one: they do not cover all the logical possibilities. Even if we restrict ourselves to human beings, functioning within the natural order as we have it, it is clearly logically possible that we should have senses other than those we in fact possess, i.e., that we should be sensitive to other sorts of physical stimuli and that this sensitivity should be connected with neural mechanisms in different ways. And if we move into possible worlds with other kinds of perceivers and other natural laws, a much wider field of possibilities is opened up. Thus the causal contributions mentioned by Chisholm and obliquely indicated by Grice will fail to cover the entire logical territory, being restricted to a tiny corner thereof. Indeed, these considerations show that the account of seeing *x* given by Chisholm fails to cover even all possible cases of *seeing*, all cases that we would judge to fall under our concept of seeing. For there will be possible worlds with denizens and laws of nature such that experiences phenomenologically indistinguishable from our visual experiences are produced by different forms of physical energy impinging on different sorts of receptors. I see no reason for refusing to call the mode of perception so engendered "seeing." Hence these accounts, even if they were quite unexceptionable as formulations of what it is for one of us to perceive a physical object as we normally do, fall far short of an adequate account of the *concept* of perceiving.

Nor is this failure to be put down to sloppiness or lack of ingenuity on the part of these thinkers. Let's use the term "pure causal theory" for any theory that appeals only to features of the causal contribution of an object to the sensory experience involved, in specifying what must be added to the experience in order that the subject perceive that object. It is clear from the above that any pure causal theory will come to grief in the same way as those of Chisholm and Grice. For whatever causal entanglements are mentioned, or indirectly indicated, there will be others that could underly object perception, and the ones they indicate could fail to be involved in perception, if perceivers and natural laws were sufficiently different. If one tries to circumvent this difficulty by constructing a disjunction of possible causal mechanisms, the enterprise would founder on the indefinite plurality of logical possibilities.

iii. Doxastic Theories

These difficulties have led some thinkers to concentrate rather on the beliefs about the external environment to which sensory experience gives rise, sometimes in conjunction with a causal condition.⁷ Perhaps what makes it that tree that I am seeing, rather than reflected light or goings on in my neurons, is that my visual experience directly gives rise to beliefs about the tree rather than to beliefs about those other matters. Note that the qualifier 'directly' in the above formulation is essential. A given sensory experience may, with various degrees of indirectness, give rise to beliefs about many things not perceived in that experience. Thus upon seeing the garage door open I may form the belief that my wife has just come home, though I do not at that moment see, or otherwise perceive, my wife. But here the visual experience directly produced a belief about the garage door, which then led by conscious or unconscious inference to a belief about my wife. Views of this sort have been propounded most notably by David Armstrong⁸ and George Pitcher.⁹ Both Armstrong and Pitcher also take a causal condition to be necessary for object perception, but they do not attempt to use it pick out the object perceived.

The main strength of these views lies in the fact that sense experience does typically yield beliefs about perceived objects; in fact that is its primary function in human life. Nevertheless, it cannot really be claimed that perception invariably yields beliefs about what is perceived. Just to take the most obvious case, I might be convinced that my experience is illusory or even hallucinatory when I seem to see a lake. If in such a case I really am seeing a lake, then this cannot consist in the fact that my sense experience gave rise to a belief about that lake, for no such belief was formed. Our doxastic theorists seek to handle this complexity by allowing the object to be picked out by (defeated) tendencies to believe, and by maintaining that even in cases like the one just described the subject at least has a *tendency* to form a belief about the lake.

There are a number of problems with this view,¹⁰ but here I shall mention only what I take to be the most obviously fatal one: the account is insufficiently wide. Although mature human percipients typically form

⁷ Thus Chisholm, *op. cit.*, p. 150, suggests that we might add to the conditions for S's seeing x the following: "S takes x to have some characteristic."

⁸ See *Perception and the Physical World* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), chaps. 9, 10; *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), chap. 10, esp. section v.

⁹ See *A Theory of Perception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), chap. 2.

¹⁰ In discussing Goldman's theory we shall note that it is possible for the object about which a belief is formed as a result of visual experience, e, not to be the object seen in undergoing e.

beliefs about perceived objects, this does not seem to be invariably true of object perception. In certain subnormal states adult percipients can and do perceive objects without thereby coming to believe anything about them, or even, it would seem, acquiring any tendencies to such beliefs. Nor does it seem that we have any tendency to form beliefs about *everything* we normally perceive, no matter how peripherally, dimly, or fleetingly. Finally it seems plausible to suppose that tiny infants see things before they have acquired any capacity for the formation of beliefs about these things and hence are not capable of generating even tendencies to such beliefs.¹¹ Thus I see no promise in this way of singling out the object perceived.¹²

In *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*,¹³ Fred Dretske puts forward an interesting view that is closely related to the doxastic account but also importantly different. His position on object perception may be summarized as follows. Of the items in the causal chain leading up to a sensory experience, some are so related to the experience that it “carries the information” that they occur. Roughly, one state of affairs, F, carries the information that another state of affairs, G, obtains *iff* F could not have been the case if G had not been the case, for some appropriate modality. Dretske then suggests that the object perceived is the *first* item back along the causal chain concerning which the sensory state carries information. His idea is that this will pick out the right object since earlier items in the regress can vary without change in the experience, whereas, under normal circumstances, the object perceived could not vary or be absent without a change in the experience. In normal visual perception an indistinguishable visual experience of the tree could be produced with various different specific patterns of light reflection and various different patterns of neural activity; but if the tree were absent or markedly different from what it is, the experience would be of a quite different sort. The experience will also typically carry information concerning items further back along the chain; Dretske’s example concerns hearing a door bell, where the experience also carries the information that the bell was pressed. But the object perceived is singled out as being the first item, tracing the chain back from the experience, concerning which information is carried by the experience.

¹¹ For a powerful presentation of the case for perception without belief see Fred Dretske, *Seeing and Knowing* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), chap. 2.

¹² It is worthy of note that both Armstrong and Pitcher take sensory experience to be nothing but a process of acquiring beliefs (or belief tendencies) about the physical environment. The above objections count even more strongly against that view.

¹³ Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1981.

This position escapes the most glaring defect of the causal theories examined above, viz., restricting the account to the causal relationships actually involved in normal human perception. If we, or other creatures, were sensitive to other forms of energy and modes of perception were developed on that basis, it still might be that the object perceived would be the first item back along the chain concerning which information is being carried by the experience. Moreover Dretske's account is presented as a unified account of object perception; it aspires to make explicit what is common to the perception of a physical object in any of the modalities, rather than, like Chisholm and Grice, giving a separate account for each modality. And the view is not saddled with the assumption that perception invariably gives rise to beliefs (or tendencies to beliefs) about the object(s) perceived. Nevertheless, in the end Dretske's ship is wrecked on the same shoals as the causal theories; it fails to cover all the logical possibilities. Even if the perceived object is the first item concerning which the experience carries information, both in all actual cases (and I have not even admitted this much) and in some possible cases, there are surely other possible worlds in which each visual experience, for example, is proximately caused by a unique and nomologically irreplaceable pattern of neural activity. If that were so, Dretske's account would imply that we would be perceiving that neural activity; but surely we might still be perceiving something external like a tree instead.

Another attempt to solve the problem, one that has affinities with the doxastic theory is the "intentional content" view, various versions of which have been put forward by Jaakko Hintikka¹⁴ and John Searle.¹⁵ I will focus here on Searle's account. Sensory experience intrinsically and essentially possesses a propositional content such that the experience is "satisfied" only if that proposition is true. Thus if I look out my study window at the house across the street, my visual experience essentially embodies the proposition *there being a house of such-and-such a description across the street from me*, and the experience (the conscious perceptual state) is "satisfied" (which in the perceptual case entails "veridical") only if this proposition is true. Searle also takes there to be other "conditions of satisfaction" that contribute to the intentionality of the experience, e.g. that *the above fact contributes to causing this experience*. Thus a causal condition is involved here also.

¹⁴ "On the Logic of Perception," in *Models for Modalities* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel and Co., 1969).

¹⁵ *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chap. 2.

For our present concerns the point to note about Searle's account is that it provides a way of picking out the object that is similar to the doxastic theory without requiring that every perception give rise to beliefs or belief tendencies. For here too the perceived object is identified as the one that is the subject of a certain proposition related in a certain way to the experience. For the doxastic theory the proposition is the one belief in which is directly generated. But for Searle's theory the proposition is part of the constitution of the experience, whether or not any belief eventuates. The way propositions are (partly) constitutive of the character of sensory experience is a distinctive way and not to be reduced to the way in which propositions form the content of perceptual beliefs.¹⁶

Our criticisms of externalist theories have been of two sorts. Causal theories and Dretske's informational theory were rejected on the grounds that even if they give a correct account of actual human perception they fail to cover all the logical possibilities. The doxastic theory, by contrast, was judged never to get out of the starting gate, since it fails to cover all actual human perception. The latter defect is the one I find in Searle and in other accounts that feature an "intentional content" of sensory experience. If that really were the way human perception is, I see no reason not to acknowledge that the same will be true of anything properly called "perception." However, I cannot see that this is the way (all) human perception is. I cannot agree that sensory experience does essentially embody propositional content. So far as I can see, what sensory experience essentially, and minimally, consists of is something of a cognitively simpler order, viz., the "presentation" of something to one's awareness as so-and-so, as being red, round, treelike, or whatever. I cannot see that this phenomenon of presentation, of something *looking* a certain way to the subject in the visual case, necessarily involves the subject's entertaining any proposition concerning the object, or, indeed, wielding any general concepts at all. It is undoubtedly true that normal mature human perception is shot through with conceptualisation and propositionalisation, but I do not take this to be minimally required, and I surmise that it is lacking in the simplest cases, in human infants and perhaps in lower animals. This is all highly controversial, and I cannot properly go into the issues here.¹⁷

¹⁶ Searle spells out this distinctive way in some detail. I will not be able to go into all that here.

¹⁷ For support for my position see the reference to Dretske in fn. 11. On the other side see, e.g., two articles by Joseph Runzo, "The Propositional Structure of Perception," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1977), and "The Radical Conceptualization of Perceptual Experience," *ibid.*, 19 (1982).

iv. Goldman's Complex Account

Now I turn to an account that is much more complex and subtle than any of those yet considered, Alvin I. Goldman's "Perceptual Objects."¹⁸ Goldman's theory contains elements of the causal and doxastic theories, as well as other components, but it combines them into a novel unity that avoids some of the difficulties that plague its predecessors. Here is a bare outline.

Goldman begins by recognizing a causal condition as necessary and takes his task to be that of bringing out how perceptual concepts embody resources for picking out the perceived object from among the causes of the relevant sensory experience. Another preliminary point is that, like Chisholm and Grice, he aims only at explicating concepts for each sensory modality rather than a more generalized concept of perceiving *x*. However, unlike Chisholm and Grice, he offers a generalized theory of modality concepts, in which variables will receive suitably different substitutions for different modalities. Hence what we are offered is a general account of perceptual modality concepts, and as such the account aspires to range over anything that would correctly be called a mode of perceiving.

Goldman criticizes a straight doxastic account much as I did above, but then he argues that perceptual beliefs still play a crucial, though more indirect, role in the concept of perception. Working with a particular modality like seeing, we consider many cases in which true beliefs about environmental objects are generated by visual experience. Then we try to find some, possibly complex, relation (or family of relations) that most, but not necessarily all, of those objects have to the subject. We can then take that relation(s), *R*, as one component of the concept of seeing *x*. Thus, for *S* to see *x* in having visual experience, *e*, is, in part, for *x* to be among the causes of *e* and for *x* to bear *R* to *S*. For vision, *R* will involve the following: "being in a conical region that extends indefinitely outward from the perceiver's (open) eyes, in the direction of ocular fixation," (261) being the first, or nearest, opaque object in a line of the cone traced outwards from his eyes, and being illuminated.¹⁹ Most of the objects about which true visual beliefs are formed satisfy this condition, though visual experience does also give rise to true beliefs about other matters, e.g., about light and its sources. However *R* (together with the unspecific

¹⁸ *Synthese*, 1977.

¹⁹ One might well wonder why nothing concerning the causal process running from *x* to *e* is included in the *R* family. Goldman doesn't provide any principled basis for excluding causal details from *R*, but, as we shall see, he provides for those details in a separate component of the analysis.

causal presupposition) cannot be the whole story. For one can see objects that do not satisfy R, as when we see things in a mirror or on television. Such cases indicate that there is another component to our concept of seeing, one that in these cases overrides the R component, viz., a “counterfactual dependence” component. We take ourselves to be seeing things reflected in a mirror because our visual experience varies in important ways with variations in the objects reflected in the mirror, just as it varies with variations in the objects we see directly. Goldman does not try to spell out in full detail the kinds of counterfactual dependence that are characteristic of human vision, but he notes that it involves ways in which apparent shape, size, and color vary with variations in the object seen. Pretending that all this is adequately spelled out, we can list as another component of our concept of seeing *x* in having experience *e*, that *e* bears counterfactual dependence relation *D* to *x*.

Finally, Goldman notes that as we learn about the causal mechanisms involved in vision, these tend to infiltrate our concept, so that another component will be that the causal chain from *x* to *e* has certain features. (Goldman doesn’t try to make a ruling as to exactly which features are embodied in “our” concept of seeing *x*; indeed he gives the impression that he thinks that there may be no exact answer to this question and/or that there is no unique such concept.) He also points out that sometimes this component can become dominant over the others, as when we apply the concept to sub-human creatures. In saying that frogs see we are largely relying on a similarity in causal mechanisms, rather than on the dependence of features of the frog’s experience on the features of the object seen. We don’t know much about the details of salientian experience, and in any event the particular mode of dependence would be quite different from the human case.

To summarize:

Each modality concept is constituted by a family of three relations. The first member of the family is an environmental relation (such as *R*), the second a counterfactual relation (such as *D*), and the third a causal-mechanism relation (e.g., light-transmission culminating in stimulation of photo-receptors). Paradigm, or primary, cases of perception in a modality are cases where all three members of the family are exemplified. When some members of the family are not exemplified, as in reflections, or infra-human perception, a decision of whether to attribute perception in the modality in question sometimes emphasizes certain family members and sometimes others.²⁰

²⁰ P. 267.

Since Goldman proposes no straightforward necessary or sufficient conditions for, e.g., seeing, it is a correspondingly less straightforward matter to provide counterexamples to the view. It will not be sufficient to point out that R, e.g., is not necessary for seeing, for Goldman claims the necessity of each of the components only for paradigm (primary) cases.²¹ To be sure, it would be sufficient to show that the combination of the components is not sufficient for seeing, for then ipso facto the combination would not be sufficient for a paradigm case. But I won't attempt that. Indeed, it seems clear to me that the combination of Goldman's components is sufficient for seeing x, and indeed for doing so in a paradigmatic fashion. However, it will suffice to discredit Goldman's analysis if we show that none of his components are necessary for a paradigm case of seeing. For in that case, even if he has provided a sufficient condition, since seeing extends beyond the satisfaction of that condition he has not succeeded in telling us *what seeing is*.

This demonstration will follow the pattern exhibited, or rather alluded to, in the above criticism of Chisholm's and Grice's causal theories. I will exhibit logically possible cases of seeing an object in which the component in question does not obtain. The above discussion of Chisholm and Grice has already, in effect, accomplished this for Goldman's causal-mechanism component. In that discussion we saw that the sorts of causal contributions seen objects make to visual experience in human visual perception are not made by seen objects in all logically possible cases. To get the result we are aiming at here we need only add that there are possible worlds in which some other causal contribution of seen objects is not only occasionally realized but is the norm. Consider, e.g., a possible world in which visual receptors (those involved in the production of visual experience) are responsive not to light but to a quite different sort of radiation. In this world there are no photo-receptors. Hence in paradigm cases of seeing x in that world, x does not make the sort of causal contribution to the visual experience involved that we find in the actual world.

Next let's consider the first component, the "environmental" relation R. It is clear from the above that Goldman develops this relation so as to fit the actual pattern of human visual belief formation. Hence we need not range far over logical space to see that R is not necessary for paradigm cases of seeing. Suppose that experiences phenomenally like our visual experience were produced in the following way. The organism propagates waves of a certain sort from all parts of the head. These waves bounce off

²¹ In the above quote he implicitly claims this; for he says that the absence of one of the components calls for a decision as to whether to apply the perceptual term, thereby implying that this would not be a paradigm case.

objects in the environment and return to the head where they are picked up by sensors distributed all around the head. Here the conical region of R is replaced with a spherical region emanating from the head of the subject with up-down extension increasing with distance from the head. We may further suppose that in such a world intuitive judgments of what is seen typically place the seen object within that region rather than only within the region specified by Goldman's account. For that matter, we need not envisage anything so outré to secure this result. Just put photo-receptors all around the head of the subject, and the environmental relation of seen objects to the subject will differ in the way we have just specified. In a world in which this is the way in which people normally see objects, the exemplification of R will not be necessary for paradigm cases of seeing.

That leaves the relation of counterfactual dependence. Again, we must note that the relation, D, which is built into Goldman's account, reflects the way in which visual experience is dependent on characteristics of the object seen, as things actually are with human vision. And, again, we can easily envisage states of affairs in which quite different types of dependencies obtain. It might have been, e.g., that apparent colors depend on quite different physical properties of the surfaces of seen objects than those physical properties on which they are in fact dependent. Just to take one more example, the details of the D relation reflect, *inter alia*, the "perceptual constancies," the ways in which objects tend to, e.g., retain the same apparent size when they occupy varying proportions of the visual field, and tend to retain the same apparent shape when the shape of the retinal image varies. Obviously, it is logically possible for the perceptual constancy mechanisms to be different from what they actually are, in which case the D relation would be correspondingly different. And one or another possible world will be such that the dependence relations are typically, or invariably, different from D in these or other ways. In these worlds the D relation that actually obtains with human vision is not necessary for paradigmatic cases of seeing an object. And so D is not, in general, necessary for paradigmatic cases.

v. Some Modifications of Goldman's Theory

This is too easy. Complex theories by acute philosophers shouldn't be knocked down this readily. What has gone wrong? Well, incredible as it may seem, it appears that practically all the philosophers who say that they are attempting to analyse the concept of seeing, hearing, etc., concentrate in fact on finding conditions that fit seeing, etc., as the world actually is. They ignore variation across possible worlds, or at least they ignore the full range thereof. This is true not only of Chisholm, Grice, and Goldman, but of virtually every other analytic philosopher who has tackled this

problem. Without getting deeply into psychological diagnosis, I would suggest that the problem of finding conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for paradigm or primary cases of seeing by human beings as we and our environment are actually constituted, is itself so difficult that one's energies are absorbed by this task to such an extent that none are left for a voyage into logical space. Be that as it may, having seen that Goldman's theory as presented, with the components tailored to the actual situation, cannot be an adequate account of the general concept of seeing, the idea naturally suggests itself of transforming the theory into a world-relative version. Instead of, e.g., supposing that his relation R is partly constitutive of seeing, wherever and whenever it may occur, we can take his way of arriving at R for actual human seeing and generalize it into a recipe for producing an R_w for any world, w . And so for the other components. The theory in this form would be that R_w is necessary for paradigmatically seeing x in w ; and so for the other components. Let's see whether this world-relative version will work any better.

Before tackling this we had better consider whether all of Goldman's relations can be so generalized. This depends, in each case, on whether there is a general recipe for picking out the relation in question, one that makes the relation a function of facts that do not include an antecedent decision as to what objects are seen. If a given relation is simply stipulated (C is a neurological transmission from the stimulation of photo-receptors . . .), that does not enable us to pick out a corresponding relation in some other world. And if it is specified merely as the relation of that sort that one's visual experience has to the object seen (D is the sort of counterfactual dependence our visual experience typically has to what we see), then, apart from introducing circularity into the analysis, it is again of no use in deciding what sort of relation plays an analogous role in some non-actual world. Now, as we saw above, Goldman does give a general recipe of the right sort for picking out R , in terms of the way in which visual experience generates true beliefs. And the recipes for generating the others are dependent on R .

A rational reconstruction of the development of a modality concept might go as follows. Initially, a modality concept is tied to an environmental relation and a counterfactual relation. It is natural, however, to inquire into the causal mechanisms that underlie the counterfactual dependence.²²

Thus we have a general recipe for picking out the causal mechanism relation, C , if and only if we have a recipe for picking out D . There is such a recipe, but it is in turn tied to R .

²² P. 265.

Associated with relation R is a certain counterfactual dependence, a dependence of one's visual percept on the aggregate of objects in R. . . . Give the label "D" to the counterfactual dependence relation associated with R.²³

Thus R is the hook on which the entire chain depends.²⁴ And since, as we have seen, Goldman does have an independent (of other parts of the analysis) recipe for picking out R, the whole account can be given a world-relative form.

Let's turn, then, to R_w , for if it doesn't work the other components will go down with it. Are there worlds in which seen objects do not typically bear R_w to S? It seems clear that there are. All we need to exemplify this is a world in which more true beliefs about the unseen than about the seen are typically generated by visual experience. And surely there are such worlds. After all, as Goldman notes, we regularly form true visual beliefs about objects we are not related to by R, e.g., light and its sources. There are many examples of this. I see a vapor trail in the sky and form the belief that a jet plane has passed by. The larger category to which this case belongs is that of forming beliefs about presumed causes of visually detected effects. If one had *inferred* the jet plane from the vapor trail, Goldman might rightly deny that the belief about the plane satisfied his criteria for being a visual belief. But if no such inference took place and one, on seeing the vapor trail, straightaway said to oneself "Lo! A jet plane," the credentials of the belief could hardly be questioned. Another familiar example is "looking through" a printed text to the content or message expressed. (Heard speech presents the same phenomenon.) When we are reading something with our mind on what the author is saying we form relatively few beliefs about the visual properties of the printed text but many beliefs about what is being said. It may be argued that in all such cases there are many unconscious beliefs about the visual properties of the text and unconscious inferences from those beliefs to "interpretations." But even if this is so, we can easily envisage a different setup, in which the visual detection of, e.g., shapes of the letters and their spatial distribution, is utilised in arriving at the interpretation in a "sub-doxastic" way, without anything properly called beliefs about the printed text ever being formed.²⁵

²³ P. 263.

²⁴ Don't suppose that this makes it impossible for one of these relations to be exemplified without one or both of the others. That remains possible just because C is specified as what typically, but not necessarily invariably, underlies D, but not necessarily only D; and similarly for the relation between D and R.

²⁵ See Stephen P. Stich, "Beliefs and Sub-Doxastic States," *Phil. Sci.*, 45 (1978).

So far I have merely pointed out that in the actual world, and in nearby worlds, visual beliefs are formed about things other than what is seen, a point Goldman recognizes. And, no doubt, Goldman is right in suggesting that such cases are definitely in the minority. But surely it is logically possible that the balance should be shifted. Suppose that we are so programmed, by heredity and/or socialization, that we regularly and predominantly “look through” most of the things we see to their “meaning,” as we do with texts in the literal sense, or to their causes, as we sometimes do with vapor trails. To construct the world I am after we don’t have to deny that *any* true visual beliefs are formed about objects seen; we need only deny that, overall, most true beliefs that are directly engendered by visual experience are about what is seen. In that case, Goldman’s formula for picking out R , applied to that world, would give the wrong results for what is seen in that world. In the world(s) I have just adumbrated the R relation would be enormously complex and disjunctive. It would have to include our situation vis-a-vis, e.g., authors’ thoughts, God’s designs in creation, and causes of many visually detected phenomena. To simplify matters, let’s suppose that in w most visual beliefs are about fairly proximate causes of what stands in the actual world R to the subject. Thus R_w will just be R_a (the R for the actual world) plus the appropriate causal relation of x to what stands in R_a to S . But in w subjects typically see what they are related to by R_a ; or, if you prefer, we can make the environmental relation to what is typically seen different from both R_w and R_a . In any event, what is typically seen is not that to which one bears R_w . Thus bearing R_w to an object is not necessary for seeing that object in a primary way in w . The objects one is related to by R_w are not seen, while one is not so related to those one does see.

Since R_w fails to give the right result, so will D_w and C_w . D_w will comprise the sorts of counterfactual dependence, if any, that one’s visual experience has on the objects to which one bears R_w , and this relation will be quite different from the counterfactual dependence one’s visual experience has on objects that are seen. Hence bearing D_w to an object will by no means be necessary for seeing it in a primary way. A similar point holds for C_w . The causal relations of the proximate causes of what S sees to S ’s visual experience will be significantly different from the causal relations of what S sees to S ’s visual experience. Hence standing in the first sort of causal relation, C_w , to an object is by no means necessary for seeing it in a primary way. Thus there are worlds in which none of the world-relative relations are necessary for primary seeing; and so the world-relative version fares no better than the original.

At this point one might wonder just what I am supposing to be the case when I suppose that in w S sees a tree even though S is not related to the tree by R_w , D_w , or C_w . If I have cut myself loose from all the ways in which seeing an object manifests itself, how can I coherently be supposing that S does see the object? A quick answer would be that I have not cut myself loose from all such ways, only from those involved in Goldman's account. In the above examples I have not denied that S 's visual experience exhibits any counterfactual dependence on the tree, only that it exhibits the sort yielded by Goldman's recipe for that world. However a deeper response, and one more indicative of my position, would be this. In supposing that S sees a tree in w though she is related to the tree by none of Goldman's relations, relativized to that world, I am not supposing that any particular public manifestation of seeing the tree obtains. I am simply utilising our common ordinary concept of seeing x , and supposing that it applies here. If one says that I can't be supposing that the concept applies without supposing that some publicly available manifestation of the seeing is present, then I reply that I do not accept that verificationist principle; and in any event we cannot just suppose that it is valid without begging the question in favor of my opponent who is seeking to analyse object seeing in terms of publicly ascertainable manifestations. My own view is that in supposing that S sees a tree I am supposing that a tree visually appears in some way to S and that this is a relationship that is not equivalent to any entanglements of the sort we have been considering. But I could not defend my alleged logical possibilities in this way without begging the question. I am simply appealing to the reader to use her grasp of our common ordinary concept of seeing x , and of other forms of object perception, to determine that it is logically possible that S sees x in w even though S is not related to x by the w -forms of any of Goldman's relations.

But even if the above considerations do definitively dispose of the letter of Goldman, one may feel that it is too quick a way with the spirit. In particular, one may feel that counterfactual dependence has not been given its innings as a world-neutral necessary condition of seeing x . The version just considered didn't work just because D_w was tied to R_w , and the latter can vary across possible worlds without what is seen correspondingly varying. But perhaps one could work out a world-relative counterfactual dependence condition that is not tied to a condition based on the preponderance of visually generated beliefs, as Goldman's R is.²⁶ That might be

²⁶ I have been helped in thinking about the possibility that counterfactual dependence is the heart of the matter by David Lewis' "Veridical Hallucination and Prosthetic Vision," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1980, even though in this article Lewis aims merely at an account of what it is to see (rather than to hallucinate) and not at specifying what it is to see x . Frank Jackson, in *Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977),

constructed as follows. We start with the idea that some sort of causal dependence of the visual experience, *e*, on *x* is a necessary condition of *S*'s seeing *x*. What I see in having visual experience, *e*, is to be found among the important causal contributors to *e*. Within that class it is picked out by the extent to which the features of *e* are counterfactually dependent on its features. The object seen is that cause of *e* on which *e* is most richly counterfactually dependent.²⁷ This is a general recipe that can be used to pick out a *D* for any world, at least any world in which there is a unique winner of the competition, any world in which one among the causal contributors to a visual experience is most fully determinative of the character of that experience. This way of picking out a *D_w* is independent of Goldman's way of picking out an *R_w*; and hence the vicissitudes of the latter do not drag the former down with it.

However the variety of possible worlds is, in the end, no better handled by this view than by Goldman's. There are two main points here. First, there is the trouble hinted at in the last paragraph, that there may be no one item in the causal chain leading up to *e* on which *e* is most richly counterfactually dependent. There may be a tie. To appreciate this possibility let's once more start from some familiar features of the actual world. It is well known that visual experience varies not only with variations in the object seen but also with variations in many other factors: illumination, relative position of *S* and *x*, and, most intimately, neurological processes, especially processes in the brain. Let's further note that the dependence of *e* on *x*, and on the other factors as well, is never complete. *x* can change in various ways, most obviously in its innards and backsides but in other ways as well, e.g., its legal status, without any change in *e*. And likewise, *e* can change without any change in *x*, as when the change in *e* is due to changes in the illumination or in *S*'s position or movement. Now it seems quite possible that the degree of *e*'s (partial) dependence on *x* could be matched as precisely as you please by *e*'s (partial) dependence on something else, e.g., certain neurological processes in the brain, even though the detailed content of the dependence would be different in the two cases.²⁸ In worlds in which this is the case there is no unique *D*, i.e., no

chap. 7, also emphasizes counterfactual dependence or, in his terms, "functional interdependence."

²⁷ This idea has obvious affinities with Dretske's notion that the perceived object is distinguished by the way in which the sensory experience carries information about it.

²⁸ Our notion of degree of counterfactual dependence is by no means precise, and we are far from being able to quantify it, or even to unilinearly order it. Apart from general difficulties about counterfactuals, there are different relevant dimensions here, e.g., the number of respects of dependence and the invariability of the dependence. (Not to mention the problem of how to count respects.) But it is my opponent who introduced the notion of degrees of dependence. I would only say that insofar as we have enough of a

relation of dependence on that cause on which it is most fully dependent; and so there is no D that could be used in an analysis of what it is to see *x* in that world. An advocate of the D-theory might reply that this just shows that in those worlds there is nothing seen, and that the D theory will still work for all worlds in which seeing takes place. However it seems quite clear to me that I might see a tree, even though my visual experience is precisely as dependent on the character of some brain process as it is on the character of the tree. And since the D theory doesn't fit seeing in such a world it can't be a unqualifiedly general account of what it is to see an object.

The second difficulty is this. Just as when I see a tree my visual experience might be as dependent on brain processes as on the tree, so it might be more fully dependent on the former. Even if in the actual world the counterfactual dependence on brain processes is significantly less (and it is not at all clear to me that this is the case),²⁹ it clearly logically possible that this should be otherwise. Surely there are possible worlds in which phenomenal visual experience features and brain process features are even linked by a nomological if and only if. But that means that there are worlds in which what one sees diverges from what one is related to by the D relation.

The D-theorist may try to regroup by placing further restrictions on the dependence relation that is constitutive of seeing. One thing that distinguishes *e*'s relation to the tree and to the underlying brain processes is that there seems to be an overlap of properties, and a structural isomorphism, in the former case and not in the latter. The visual appearance of the tree mirrors the spatial distribution of parts of the tree, its shape, and its position vis-a-vis things in its vicinity, in a way that it doesn't mirror the underlying brain processes. This suggests that D_w is a function not so much of what *e* is most dependent on, but of what *e* is dependent on in a specially pellucid way, where the structure of *e* is isomorphic with that of the other term of the relation. One difficulty with this view is that there are reasons for denying any overlap between physical and phenomenal properties. The sense-datum theory and its predecessor, the Cartesian-Lockean theory of ideas, encourage us to think in terms of an overlap of properties, for these theories regard phenomenal properties as borne by special non-physical entities; it is not wholly absurd to regard these perceptual

grip on this to make his theory intelligible, to that extent we can see that it is possible that *e* might be dependent to an equal degree on two or more members of the causal chain.

²⁹ Remember that the counterfactual dependence of *e* on *x* is spotty and partial. The tree can change in various ways without my visual experience changing. Hence the commonly cited fact that an identical experience can be produced by different patterns of brain processes does not in itself show that the counterfactual dependence of the experience on the perceived object is greater.

representatives of physical objects as having shape, size, and relative position in just the same way as physical substances themselves.³⁰ But when we think of experience on either the adverbial theory or the theory of appearing, there is nothing in the experience that could share properties, spatial or otherwise, with physical substances.³¹ But waive this point. Suppose that there normally is an important isomorphism between visual experience and visually perceived objects. The fact still remains that even if there is not also a like isomorphism between visual experience and underlying brain processes, it is logically possible that there is. Some of the gestalt psychologists, notoriously, proposed such an hypothesis; and although this might have been an empirically ungrounded speculation, one could hardly rule it out on purely logical grounds. Thus once again there are possible worlds in which visual experience is dependent in the specified way on brain processes, as much or more than on perceived objects. And hence again, this cannot be what, in general, it is for a visual experience to constitute seeing *x*.

An alternative suggestion — that we focus on dependence relations that we are able to work with, that we naturally tend to recognize, that we need to take account of in dealing with our environment — will meet the same fate. There is no doubt that the characterization just given distinguishes the *e-x* dependence relation (where *x* ranges over external physical objects we ordinarily take ourselves to be seeing) from the *e*-underlying brain process dependence relation. We are innately programmed to exploit the former relation to form true beliefs about external objects, but not to exploit the latter relation to form true beliefs about what is going on in the brain. The former beliefs are common to all societies, however primitive, whereas the latter has had to await sophisticated scientific developments, and even now is conspicuously meager. Moreover, it is obviously of enormous adaptive importance for us that we should use sense experience as a source of information about the current state of the environment, whereas in most cases it is much less adaptively important for one to know what is currently going on in one's brain. But once again, although this is true of the actual world (and of many others as well), it does not hold true of all possible worlds. There could be perceiving organisms so constructed and so situated that it is much more important for them to know what is going on in their brains than it is to know how it is with the immediate environment. Such organisms might well develop

³⁰ I am by no means committing myself to the coherence of this; I am only not ruling it out of court *ab initio*.

³¹ Thomas Reid makes much of this point in his criticism of the theory of ideas. Among many other references, see *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind*, chap. 5, sections i, vii.

innate tendencies to form beliefs on the basis of the e-brain process dependence relation rather than on the basis of the e-x dependence relation. And yet these organisms might be seeing things in the external environment just as we do. (I will leave the details to those more gifted in science fiction than myself.) Again, it is not necessary to deny that they form any visual beliefs about external objects, only that these beliefs don't occupy the place in their lives that such beliefs do in ours. And so, once again, the suggestion sins through failing to take account of the full range of possibilities. In a world of the sort just sketched, e's being dependent in the way specified on x is neither necessary nor sufficient for one's seeing x in having e.

Note that nothing I have said cuts against the very unspecific claim that some sort of counterfactual dependence of e on x is logically necessary for e to count as a case of seeing x, anymore than the fact that no purely causal theory of seeing works cuts against the claim that one logically necessary condition of S's seeing x in having e is that x figure prominently among the causes of e.

Let's take stock. Causal and doxastic analyses are singularly unsuccessful in bringing out what is common to object seeing over all possible worlds. Goldman's attempts to construct conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for primary cases of seeing do not pan out, even when world-relativized. An analysis constructed from the most promising single component in Goldman's account, the counterfactual dependence of visual experience on the object seen, doesn't work either, in any of its most plausible forms. Obviously, I have not scrutinized all conceivable externalist theories. But I take myself to have examined all the most plausible attempts and to have found them wanting.

vi. The Greatest Deficiency of Externalist Theories

Thus far I have been criticizing "externalist" theories of perception on "extensional" grounds, albeit extension across all possible worlds. That is, I have been following the classic pattern of criticism of necessary and sufficient condition accounts: exhibiting (possible) cases in which we have analysans without analysandum (so that the analysans does not provide sufficient conditions), and cases in which we have analysandum without analysans (so that the analysans does not provide necessary conditions). However, even if all these difficulties could be surmounted, there remains what I take to be a much more fundamental objection to any externalist theory. Even if some such theory were to fit object perception exactly across all possible worlds, it still would not be an acceptable account of object perception. Suppose, for example, that we could specify a certain causal role in the production of sense experience such that in any world

one sees *x*, in having a certain visual experience, if and only if *x* plays that role in producing that experience. Would having an experience (construed in a sense-datum or adverbial way) causally related in that way to *x* constitute seeing *x*? NO. No matter how *x* causally contributes to the production of an experience, I do not see, or otherwise perceive, *x* in having that experience unless *x* presents itself to my experience as an object. How could the fact that *x* plays a role in *bringing about* that experience make it true that I *see* *x*? The experience itself is, by hypothesis, either an awareness of some sense-datum distinct from *x*, or it is simply a way of being conscious. *x* is not presented or given to my awareness in the experience. That being the case, no causal relation of *x* to the experience could make it true that I *see* *x* or, indeed, that I am *aware* of *x* in any way at all. Causality is no substitute for awareness; there is no magic by which an item becomes an object of awareness just by virtue of standing in a causal relation to experience. One way of seeing this is to ask why, given that the experience itself is either an awareness of a sense-datum or just a way of being conscious, we should suppose that *this* causal contributor to the experience thereby acquires the status of a perceived object, while others do not. What possible explanation could there be for this astounding fact? There are innumerable causal influences on a given sensory experience that no one supposes to be perceived objects; why make an exception for one such influence? Another way of seeing the point is to consider experiences that are quite properly construed in an adverbial way, like feeling depressed, relieved, or exhilarated, experiences that virtually no one supposes to involve the awareness of some object. Yet these experiences too have their causes, and the experiences carry information about those causes. Why not pick out one of those as what one is aware of in having the experience? And if we do not, what rationale is there for treating these experiences differently from sensory experience? Why is it that causal relationships endow some experiences and not others with the status of being a perception of something? How can this double standard be justified? I am at a loss to see what plausible answer causal theorists can give to this question.

These points apply equally to other externalist accounts. Consider, for another example, the view that what it is for one to perceive *x* is that one's sensory experience immediately gives rise to a belief about *x*. The fact that a belief about a certain tree arises from an experience of something else, or of nothing, cannot constitute *seeing* that tree. Seeing a tree is something different from forming or having a belief about it (or forming a tendency to a belief about it . . .), even if seeing a tree typically gives rise to beliefs about it. Again, seeing *x* is an *intuitive* awareness of *x*, and thereby differs from any belief about *x*, or anything else that essentially involves proposi-

tional structure. Whatever sort of extensional equivalence there might be between seeing *x* and something having to do with beliefs about *x*, the latter could not be what seeing *X* is.

The fact is that externalist theories, by keeping physical objects out of their account of sensory experience, have thrown away any chance of explaining physical object perception. The most fundamental component in our concept of perception is that it is an *intuitive*, rather than a discursive, cognition of objects; it is a matter of having objects *presented* to one's consciousness, rather than a matter of thinking about them, or bringing them under general concepts, or making judgments about them. Much less is it just a matter of a causal relation between the object and one's experience of something else or of nothing. That's not what perception is. At most, we might agree to say that we perceive a tree under those conditions. But all the saying in the world won't make it so. If the tree is not present to my visual awareness I don't perceive it, whatever people say.³²

Why is this point not more generally appreciated? I suspect that the reason is this. Philosophers of perception have typically begun by becoming convinced of a sense-datum or an adverbial account of sensory consciousness. They then look around for the closest approximation one can make, on that view, to perception of external objects. In doing so they make use of our commonsense judgments as to when a subject perceives a certain external object, judgments that are made on the basis of a quite different way of looking at the matter. They then do the best they can to find relations of external objects to sense experience that will hold when and only when the subject really is perceiving the object in question. They fail to note that even if they did succeed in securing extensional equivalence they would only have succeeded in *mapping* real perception onto the scheme. They would not have succeeded in bringing out what *constitutes* perceiving an object. They fail to realize that they have been relying all along on an alien conception of perception (an intuitive awareness of objects) to determine the cases to which their account is to be responsible.

vii. Conclusion

For the reasons presented in this paper I take externalist theories of object perception to be unacceptable. Then what is left? Obviously, an account according to which the perceptual relation to the perceived object is *internal* to the sensory experience involved. That condition is satisfied by the

³² The last three paragraphs constitute a generalization of the traditional complaint against sense-datum theories that on those views we do not really perceive external physical objects.

Theory of Appearing, according to which a sensory experience essentially consists in something's (usually an external object) appearing to the subject as such-and-such. In this paper I have been concerned to dispose of externalist theories so as to clear the ground for the Theory of Appearing. The elaboration and further defence of that theory is a task for another occasion.