

Pluralism introduced

You see a ripe mango, one that is ovoid and reddish-orange, under mundane circumstances. The central question of philosophy of perception is: what is it for you to enjoy a perception such as this?

There is enormous disagreement about how to answer this question, but underneath it all is an assumption that is almost universally shared. Let *direct awareness* be awareness of an entity that is not epistemically based on awareness of anything wholly distinct from that entity. The almost universally shared assumption, call it *monism*, is that seeing a mango essentially involves *at most one kind of direct awareness*. The disputes are then about the character and targets of this kind of direct awareness (or about whether seeing a mango essentially involves even one kind of direct awareness). For instance, *representationalists* say that what it is to see the mango is to deploy a special kind of representation of the mango. *Naïve realists* say that it is to stand in a particular non-representational relation of awareness to the mango. *Sense-datum theorists* agree with naïve realists that there is a non-representational relation of awareness, but they say that its target is not the mango but certain mental entities, *sense-data*. And there are other theories as well.

Monism is such a natural starting point that it hardly seems worth articulating – but I believe that it is false. The purpose of this book is to develop and defend an alternative, *pluralist* theory of perceptual experience. The core idea of pluralism is that what it is for you to see the mango is for you to deploy two radically different kinds of awareness in concert. In this very brief chapter, I prepare the reader with an overview of pluralism, albeit one that is dense and not intended to be fully digested now. My aim is just to leave you with a holistic impression of the

theory. That way you will know how its various pieces fit together as you make your way through the book.

1. An overview of pluralism

The pluralist theory has three main posits.

1. The pluralist begins by positing *sensory awareness*. This is a kind of awareness that reveals part (but not all!) of the essence of its targets. In addition, at least for beings like us, the targets of sensory awareness are always universals rather than particulars. In the case at hand, you are sensorily aware of the universals of ovoidness and reddish-orangeness. This positions you to know certain essential truths about these properties – e.g., that it lies in the nature of ovoidness to be more similar to sphericity than to cubicity, and that it lies in the nature of reddish-orange to be instantiated only in something that is spatiotemporally extended. Finally, sensory awareness is non-representational: there is no bad case of it. Imagine a subject who suffers a hallucination that perfectly matches your perception of the mango. According to the pluralist, even this subject is sensorily aware of ovoidness and reddish-orangeness.

The complete pluralist theory of sensory awareness is developed in chapter 3.

2. The pluralist goes on to posit a second, very different kind of awareness: *successful sensory representation*. It contrasts with sensory awareness in all three of the respects just discussed. We can successfully sensorily represent not just universals, but particulars – for instance, you represent the particular mango and its particular instances of ovoidness and reddish-orange. In addition, successful sensory representation does not reveal even part of the essence of its targets: seeing a mango does not position you to know that the mango is essentially a fruit, or even that it is essentially spatially extended. Finally, successful sensory representation is, as the name suggests, a form of representation. There is a bad case of it: the subject who suffers

from a matching hallucination deploys a failed sensory representation, one that merely purports to represent a particular mango and its particular instances of ovoidness and reddish-orange.

Despite the contrasts between sensory awareness and successful sensory representation, the pluralist does not think that these kinds of awareness are utterly disjointed. Rather, perception occurs when these kinds of awareness are exercised in concert. More precisely, the pluralist says that what it is to (consciously) perceive a mango is: (i) to successfully sensorily represent the mango and some of its property-instances, via a perceptual relation to them; (ii) to be sensorily aware of universals such as ovoidness and reddish-orangeness; and (iii) to take the property-instances that you sensorily represent *to be* instances of the universals that you are sensorily aware of. It is because perception involves the concerted exercise of these different kinds of awareness that the seams of your experience are not phenomenologically manifest.

Chapter 4 lays out the pluralist theory of sensory representation and integrates this with the previous chapter's theory of sensory awareness. That will yield the core of the pluralist theory of perception.

3. The pluralist's theory has one last major piece. She says that your perceptual system has access to your sensory representations, your sensory awareness, and various contextual clues. On this basis, and with your prior perceptual learning in the background, your perceptual system applies various *concepts*, both to the targets of your experience and to the experience itself. Call this process *categorization*. In our focal case, you categorize the mango as a mango, as ovoid, and as reddish-orange. More than this, you categorize the mango as a mind-independent object, and you categorize your experience as a perception rather than a sensory imagining or an episodic memory.

It is hardly an innovation to think that categorization might be involved in, without being essential to, perception. But the pluralist develops this idea in a distinctive way. Most

importantly, the pluralist draws on it in her theory of hallucination: she says that what it is to be a hallucination is to be an involuntary sensory representation that is not a perception but is subpersonally categorized as one.

These pluralist ideas about categorization, and the subsequent theory of hallucination, are developed in chapter 5.

However, before I develop these aspects of the pluralist theory, it will be helpful to carry out a preliminary investigation into *phenomenal character* – into “what it’s like” to have an experience. Here, too, I am a pluralist of sorts. I say that there is not just one kind of phenomenal character, but at least three radically different kinds. This is a central idea of the next chapter, and a launching point for the rest of the book.