

# An Aristotelian argument against perceptual disjunctivism<sup>1</sup>

It is orthodox to take an **experience-first** view of perception; to take perceptual experience to be metaphysically prior to genuine perception.<sup>2</sup> But the turn of the twenty-first century has seen a flowering of **perception-first** views which overturn this orthodoxy: a perception-first view takes genuine perception to be metaphysically prior to perceptual experience.<sup>3</sup>

Here I pick no quarrel with perception-first theories *per se*. But I do pick a quarrel with **kind disjunctivism** – the view that perceptual experiences do not form a kind – which often comes attached to perception-first theories. Typically, the kind disjunctivist allows that genuine perceptions form a kind, but she insists that perceptual experiences taken together are just a motley assortment (§1).<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> In developing the ideas for this paper, especially the ideas in §1, I owe a profound debt to Miracchi (ms). Her manuscript is wonderfully perspicuous in laying out the core commitments of the perception-first view. Indeed, the apt phrase “perception-first” is Miracchi’s.

<sup>2</sup> Representationalists usually subscribe to an experience-first view: see Tye (1995); Dretske (1995); Siegel (2010). However, as described in a later footnote, Schellenberg (forthcoming) offers a representationalist theory of perception that is neither experience-first nor perception-first.

<sup>3</sup> For recent perception-first views, see McDowell (1994); Campbell (2002); Martin (2006); Fish (2009); Kennedy (2011); Brewer (2011); Logue (2013); Genone (2014); Miracchi (ms). Of course, perception-first views have their roots in earlier work by Moore, Snowdon, and Hinton.

<sup>4</sup> It is not always easy to tell which perception-first theorists are kind disjunctivists (although Martin (2004, p. 37) is a rare clear case). Consider Fish (2009, p. 95) and Brewer (2011, p. 109), however. These perception-first theorists say that there is nothing more to hallucination, and perhaps also to illusion insofar as it is illusory, than being introspectively or otherwise cognitively indistinguishable from genuine perception. That is arguably not enough for genuine perceptions, hallucinations, and illusions to form a kind. Nor do they mention any other kind formed by perceptual experiences. Or take Campbell (2002), who suggests that a genuine perception and a matching hallucination have “nothing intrinsic in common” (p. 117). The commitment to kind disjunctivism is certainly not forced on Fish, Brewer, and Campbell – see Logue (2013, p. 12); Miracchi (ms) – but I find it very natural to read them as kind disjunctivists.

It can seem natural for the perception-first theorist to adopt kind disjunctivism, but I believe that this natural move is mistaken. That is the first central thesis of this paper. I argue against kind disjunctivism by appeal to a simple Aristotelian point about the relationship between functions and kinds. In essence, my idea is that perceptual experiences form a kind because all perceptual experiences share a common *perceptual function* (§2-§3).

I then pick a lesser quarrel with the **fundamental kind disjunctivist**, who holds the weaker view that perceptual experiences do not all belong to the same *fundamental* kind.<sup>5</sup> This view might be true. But, I suggest – and this is the second central thesis of this paper – fundamental kind disjunctivism, even if true, lacks the philosophical importance that its advocates typically attach to it: the view does not track a deep metaphysical divide between genuine perceptions and all other perceptual experiences (§4).

## 1. Some disjunctivist options for a perception-first theorist

As a prelude to more central matters, we will need to fix the reference of a term. Say that **perceptual experience** is the most natural category *E* such that a subject has an *E* just in case she has a genuine perception, hallucination, or illusion.<sup>6</sup> This reference-fixing definition is remarkably thin:

---

<sup>5</sup> Martin (2006, especially p. 361) offers an especially well-developed version of fundamental kind disjunctivism. Other fundamental kind disjunctivists include Crane (2006, p. 139); Neta (2008, pp. 311-312); Fish (2009, p. 17); Brewer (2011, p. 94 and p. 109); Kennedy (2011, p. 78); Miracchi (ms). My discussion of fundamental kind disjunctivism will also target the significance of Logue’s nearby claim that perceptual experiences do not “have any reasonably specific, *fundamental* experiential commonalities,” where “[a] reasonably specific experiential commonality is fundamental just in case ... each experience satisfies all other psychological characterizations ultimately in virtue of having the common property” (2013, p. 12, emphasis hers).

<sup>6</sup> “An *E*” is just an entity belonging to category *E*. I would understand naturalness along the lines of Lewis (1983).

1. It is silent on whether the category of perceptual experience is at all natural. Relatedly, it is silent on whether the category of perceptual experience corresponds to a kind. For the *most* natural category meeting the reference-fixing condition might yet be very unnatural, and so the category might not correspond to a kind.<sup>7</sup>
2. It is silent on whether a perceptual experience *just is* a genuine perception, illusion, or hallucination, or whether perceptual experience is instead a distinct mental phenomenon that necessarily co-occurs with these.
3. It is silent on whether genuine perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations are *metaphysically* prior to perceptual experiences. Our method of reference-fixing guarantees only that the notions of genuine perception, illusion, and hallucination will be *conceptually* prior to the notion of perceptual experience.
4. It is silent on the especially vexed question of how to understand illusion. Some treat illusion as a variety of genuine perception – perhaps an illusion is simply a genuine perception that disposes its subject to form a false perceptual belief. Others treat illusion as having elements of hallucination and elements of genuine perception. Still others say different things about different illusions.<sup>8</sup> But the reference-fixing definition finesses these complications: it says that something is a perceptual experience just in case it is a genuine perception, hallucination, or illusion, without taking a stand on whether the final disjunct (“illusion”) is redundant.

---

<sup>7</sup> On some views, a category corresponds to a kind just in case the category is reasonably natural.

<sup>8</sup> For sophisticated perception-first treatments of illusion, see Fish (2009); Brewer (2011); Genone (2014).

With this reference-fixing definition now in hand, we are poised to consider a central question: what is the metaphysical relationship between perceptual experience and genuine perception?<sup>9</sup>

Here are two possible answers:

**Experience-first view:** Perceptual experience is metaphysically prior to genuine perception.<sup>10</sup>

**Perception-first view:** Genuine perception is metaphysically prior to perceptual experience.<sup>11,12</sup>

The experience-first theorist might metaphysically analyze any genuine perception as a perceptual experience that meets certain further conditions: e.g., accurately representing the environment because the experience is properly causally related to what it represents. By contrast, the perception-first theorist might metaphysically analyze perceptual experience as *that which is introspectively indistinguishable from a genuine perception*.<sup>13</sup>

In deciding between experience-first and perception-first views, we decide whether to take perceptual experience or genuine perception as metaphysically prior to the other. But

---

<sup>9</sup> Miracchi (ms) sharply brings out the importance of this question. Some will be concerned with the question only as it pertains to *conscious* perceptual experiences and *conscious* genuine perceptions. I am happy to allow for that restriction, if it is wanted.

<sup>10</sup> For proponents of an experience-first view, see fn. 2.

<sup>11</sup> For proponents of a perception-first view, see fn. 3.

<sup>12</sup> There is a third possible answer: that neither perceptual experience nor genuine perception is metaphysically prior to the other. E.g., Schellenberg (forthcoming) analyzes both genuine perception and perceptual experience in terms of a common metaphysical factor, namely, *perceptual capacities*. In this paper I ignore this third possible answer.

<sup>13</sup> These are merely sample accounts for the experience-first and perception-first theorists. We should not get hung up on the details, which might need refinement.

whichever we choose, we may still say that something else – perhaps even something *within the domain of personal-level psychology* – is metaphysically prior to it. An experience-first theorist may, if she wishes, say that certain personal-level representations are metaphysically prior to perceptual experiences. And a perception-first theorist may, if she wishes, say that certain personal-level relations of acquaintance between the subject and what she perceives are metaphysically prior to genuine perceptions. In this way the perception-first view is weaker than a typical knowledge-first view: the latter holds that *nothing* is metaphysically prior to knowledge within the domain of personal-level psychology.

In this paper, I am *not* arguing against the perception-first view itself. But I *am* arguing against a claim that perception-first theorists often endorse:

**Kind disjunctivism:** Perceptual experiences do not form a kind.<sup>14</sup>

To say that perceptual experiences do not *form* a kind is to say that there is no kind that includes *all and only* perceptual experiences. The kind disjunctivist usually concedes that genuine perceptions form a kind, but she regards the mental phenomena underlying genuine perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations as just a grab-bag. Perhaps she will compare this collection of perceptual experiences to the collection of things that look like lemons – including not just actual lemons, but also lemon-looking soaps, holograms, and so on – which do not form a metaphysical unity.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> For proponents of kind disjunctivism, see fn. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Since I have defined kind disjunctivism as a view about whether or not perceptual experiences *form* a kind, there is no need to add that the kind must be “reasonably specific.” If there exists a kind that includes *all and only* perceptual experiences, then such a kind will automatically qualify as reasonably specific. On this point, contrast Byrne and Logue (2008, p. 68) and Logue (2013, p. 112).

A perception-first theorist is not forced to adopt kind disjunctivism, but we can see why she might find kind disjunctivism very natural. For she needs to account for genuine perception, and she can – perhaps by appealing to acquaintance, or perhaps just by taking genuine perception as relatively metaphysically primitive within the domain of personal-level psychology. She also needs to account for illusions and hallucinations, but she might hope to do so by appealing to genuine perception. Perhaps she will say that an illusion is a genuine perception that disposes the subject to form a false perceptual belief, and that a hallucination is that which is not a genuine perception but is introspectively indistinguishable from one. *And then her explanatory work is arguably done.*

Since genuine perceptions do a great deal of explanatory work in this account, it will be natural for the perception-first theorist to treat these as forming a kind. But she has not appealed to perceptual experiences in her explanations, so she need not think that they form a kind. Insofar as she wishes to talk about perceptual experiences at all, she can simply understand them as the disjunction of genuine perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations, each of which she has already accounted for. Thus, for someone who accepts a perception-first theory, the idea that perceptual experiences form a kind might seem an idle hypothesis.

The situation is quite different for the experience-first theorist. The experience-first theorist holds that perceptual experience is metaphysically prior to genuine perception, and she might reasonably think that perceptual experience is metaphysically prior to illusion and hallucination, too. She might say: a genuine perception of an object is a perceptual experience that is properly causally related to an object and accurately represents it because of this causal relation; an illusion of an object is a perceptual experience that is properly causally related to an object but does not accurately represent it because of this causal relation; and a hallucination of an object is a perceptual experience that is not properly causally related to an object. Since any

experience-first theory in this vein uses perceptual experience to do important explanatory work, it is natural for the experience-first theorist to hold that perceptual experiences form a kind. For this reason, kind disjunctivism is almost invariably paired with a perception-first theory, though perhaps there is some strange way to pair kind disjunctivism with an experience-first view.<sup>16</sup>

My first thesis in this paper will be that no one, not even the perception-first theorist, should accept kind disjunctivism.

Kind disjunctivism must be distinguished from another view:

**Fundamental kind disjunctivism:** Perceptual experiences do not form a *fundamental* kind.<sup>17</sup>

The idea is usually that genuine perceptions form one fundamental kind; hallucinations, as well as any illusions that are not genuine perceptions, belong to one or more distinct fundamental kinds, if they belong to any fundamental kind at all.

Fundamental kind disjunctivism is weaker than kind disjunctivism, since perceptual experiences might form a kind that is not fundamental. So my argument against kind disjunctivism will not target fundamental kind disjunctivism. Nevertheless, my second thesis in this paper will be that even if fundamental kind disjunctivism is true, its truth does not have the philosophical significance usually ascribed to it.

There is, however, one important form of disjunctivism that I do not address in this paper. I do not address **phenomenal disjunctivism**, the view that there is a kind of phenomenal

---

<sup>16</sup> Per fn. 12, I continue to ignore views that are neither experience-first nor perception-first.

<sup>17</sup> For proponents of fundamental kind disjunctivism, see fn. 5.

character that all and only genuine perceptions have. (The idea is usually that the phenomenal character of any genuine perception comprises the worldly particulars that the subject perceives.) When it comes to perceptual experiences that are not genuine perceptions, the phenomenal disjunctivist may hold that they have some other type of phenomenal character or that they have no phenomenal character whatsoever.<sup>18</sup>

The truth or falsity of phenomenal disjunctivism will not matter for our purposes.<sup>19</sup> If phenomenal disjunctivism is true, then presumably genuine perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations do not form a *phenomenal* kind, given the radical phenomenal differences between genuine perceptions and hallucinations. But I will argue against the truth of kind disjunctivism, and against the significance of fundamental kind disjunctivism, on grounds that have nothing to do with phenomenal character.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Assumptions

My arguments will center on the **function** of perceptual experience. What I am calling a function is what contemporary philosophers might refer to as a proper function or a constitutive aim, and what Aristotle would have referred to as a *telos*. My arguments will require two assumptions about functions which strike me as commonplaces. These assumptions

---

<sup>18</sup> Phenomenal disjunctivists include Campbell (2002, pp. 114–115); Martin (2006, p. 369); Crane (2006, p. 139); Sturgeon (2008); Fish (2009, pp. 14–15). Interestingly, Logue (2013) is a perception-first theorist who rejects phenomenal disjunctivism.

<sup>19</sup> But cf. [Author's Work A], where I argue against the standard version of phenomenal disjunctivism.

<sup>20</sup> There are other disjunctivist theses that I find intriguing and will not attack here. I have in mind especially Miracchi's thesis that perceptual experiences form a "disjunctive kind" (ms).



certainly do not require any particular theory of function, but can instead be taken as data that any theory of function should accommodate.<sup>21</sup>

My first assumption is:

The **functional kind claim**: For any function, the entities with that function form a kind.

On this pivotal point, I take loose inspiration from Aristotle's remark that "[e]verything is defined by its function and capacity."<sup>22</sup>

In particular, what I take to speak in favor of the functional kind claim is the explanatory power of functions. Consider a well-functioning stapler and a broken stapler. Both are *staplers*. Why? They differ in their relevant causal powers: the well-functioning stapler actually staples things, and the broken stapler does not. And they might well differ in their material constitution, shape, size, mass, and so on; perhaps one is a tiny plastic four-way stapler and the other is a gigantic metal flat-cinch stapler. The obvious explanation for why both of these things are staplers is that both of these things have the *function* of stapling. The point is perfectly general: think of well- and ill-functioning hearts, ladders, cars, and so on. And even if there are distinct kinds of functions, such as artifactual and biological functions, the point applies equally to functions of each of these kinds.<sup>23,24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> To mention just a few standard approaches, functions have been explained in terms of etiological facts, modal facts, or value facts. See respectively Millikan (1993); Nanay (2010); Bedau (1992).

<sup>22</sup> See Aristotle's *Politics* (2013, 1.2.13).

<sup>23</sup> Millikan (1993) especially underscores the explanatory importance of functions, but the point is widely appreciated.

<sup>24</sup> For an example of a pluralist approach to functions, see Preston (1998).

One might retort that we do not need to appeal to functions to explain why both of these things are staplers, as there are other obvious explanations. Perhaps both of these things were *intended by their designers* to be used as staplers. Wouldn't that fact suffice to explain why both of these things are staplers?

Perhaps – but only if that fact suffices to explain why both of these things have the *function* of stapling. To appreciate this point, suppose that in fact the function of a thing is determined in some way that has nothing whatsoever to do with the intentions of its designer; perhaps the function of a thing is determined solely by how consumers use it. Then the fact that both of these things were intended by their designers to be used as staplers can no longer explain why they are both staplers. More generally, while there are various further explanations for why these things are both staplers – explanations in terms of the designer's intentions, social conventions, the consumer's usage, etc. – these are just explanations for why the items both have the function of stapling. Far from being competitors to a functional explanation, then, these further explanations should be *incorporated into* a functional explanation.

At least, that is so unless it is best to eliminate functions from our explanations in general. A general defense of functional explanations is beyond the scope of this paper. Here I simply take the functional kind claim, and hence the existence of functions, for granted.

My second assumption is:

The **functional inheritance claim**: If an entity is produced by a system exercising a function of producing only entities that meet condition *C*, then that entity has the function of meeting condition *C*.<sup>25</sup>

An example might help to reveal why I find this claim plausible. Consider a hammer-making machine in a factory. The function of the machine is to produce only hammers. Or, to use the language of the functional inheritance claim, the function of the machine is to produce only entities that meet the condition of being hammers. Now imagine that the hammer-making machine is reliable, though not perfectly so: it typically does produce hammers, but sometimes produces misshapen lumps of metal and wood. The machine itself is **exercising** its function, i.e., it is operating in a way that is assessable with respect to its function.<sup>26</sup> Thus, when it produces hammers, the machine is successful with respect to its hammer-making function, and when it produces misshapen lumps, the machine is unsuccessful with respect to its hammer-making function. *But the products are also functionally assessable, for they “inherit” a function from the machine.* Each hammer is itself successful, because it is supposed to be a hammer and it is. And each misshapen lump is itself unsuccessful, because it is supposed to be a hammer and it is not.<sup>27</sup>

I believe that each of these assumptions is amenable to, and indeed has received, rigorous defense.<sup>28</sup> But that is not what I offer here. I will simply use the assumptions to argue against the truth of kind disjunctivism and against the significance of fundamental kind

---

<sup>25</sup> Compare Millikan (1993) on “derived proper functions.”

<sup>26</sup> As opposed to when the machine is turned off, say.

<sup>27</sup> Or, if you prefer, the machine is exercising the function of producing only *good* hammers. Then each good hammer is successful because it is supposed to be a good hammer and it is; each misshapen lump is unsuccessful because it is supposed to be a good hammer and it is not.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Millikan (1993).

disjunctivism. Since the appeal of these assumptions is quite independent of any debates about perceptual kinds, I expect that such arguments might move my disjunctivist opponents.

### 3. Against kind disjunctivism

At the heart of my argument against kind disjunctivism is one simple idea: the idea that all perceptual experiences share a certain *perceptual function*. Some perceptual experiences – including all genuine perceptions, perhaps – fulfill this function; they are perceptual successes. Other perceptual experiences – including all hallucinations, perhaps – fail to fulfill this function; they are perceptual failures. But all perceptual experiences have this function, because all perceptual experiences inherit the function from the perceptual systems that produce them. Thus, perceptual experiences form a kind.

I would regiment these ideas into:

The **Aristotelian argument** against kind disjunctivism:

- (A1) For any function, the entities with that function form a kind.
- (A2) If an entity is produced by a system exercising a function of producing only entities that meet condition *C*, then that entity has the function of meeting condition *C*.
- (A3) Every perceptual experience is produced by a system exercising a function of producing only successful perceptual experiences.
- (A4) No entities other than perceptual experiences have the function of being successful perceptual experiences.

Therefore, perceptual experiences form a kind.

The argument is valid. For (A2) and (A3) entail that every perceptual experience has the function of being a successful perceptual experience, while (A4) adds that nothing else has this function. It follows that perceptual experiences are exactly those entities that share the function of being successful perceptual experiences. (A1) then tells us that the entities that share any given function form a kind. This entails that perceptual experiences form a kind. So kind disjunctivism is false.

Premises (A1) and (A2) are simply the two assumptions of the previous section. So, to establish our conclusion, we need only secure premises (A3) and (A4).

According to premise (A3), any perceptual experience – whether it is successful or unsuccessful – is produced by a system exercising a function of producing only successful perceptual experiences. This premise follows from some ordinary observations. Start with the uncontroversial observation that we have *perceptual systems* – the visual system, the auditory system, etc. We must have perceptual systems, for we have genuine perceptions, and these must be the product of some perceptual system. A genuine perception cannot be, as it were, a one-off accident.

It is equally plain that perceptual systems have *functions*. (At least, that is clear given that we are bracketing eliminativism about functions in general.) For in the same sense that it is the function of the heart to pump blood, it is also the function of these systems to produce mental entities that meet some distinctively perceptual condition.

What is not so clear is how to characterize this condition. Perhaps perceptual systems have the function of producing entities that represent the world accurately; perhaps perceptual systems have the function of producing entities that put the subject in a primitive acquaintance relation with her environment; perhaps perceptual systems have the function of producing

entities that presently situate objects with features.<sup>29</sup> But let us not allow disagreement about the precise content of this function to obscure the agreement that there is *some* distinctively perceptual function. To express this agreement neutrally, we can just say that any perceptual system has the function of producing an entity that is (perceptually) **successful** – that fulfills some distinctively perceptual condition – without worrying about precisely how to characterize perceptual success.<sup>30</sup>

Once we recognize that perceptual systems have this function, we should also acknowledge that perceptual systems can be exercised successfully or unsuccessfully with respect to this function. *And perceptual experiences look to be precisely the products of those exercises.* Genuine perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations are precisely those entities that are produced by the perceptual system when it exercises its function of producing only entities that are successful. In other words, every perceptual experience is produced by a system exercising a function of producing only successful perceptual experiences – just as (A3) says.<sup>31</sup>

Now, I find it most natural to think that genuine perceptions are always successful, that hallucinations are always unsuccessful, and that an illusion is successful just in case it is a genuine perception. But in no way does (A3) hinge on this view. For example, one might hold that a hallucinatory experience can be perfectly successful as long as it is a perceptual

---

<sup>29</sup> The first view I might recommend to representationalists; the second view I might recommend to relationalists; the third view, which is compatible with the first two, I endorse in [Author's Work B].

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, we might think that any perceptual system has *many* distinctively perceptual functions, like the function of directing perceptual attention in certain ways and the function of producing entities that interact with beliefs and desires in certain ways. However, I take it to be clear which of the many perceptual functions is under discussion here, and it is that function to which the Aristotelian argument appeals.

<sup>31</sup> For some possible theories of the function(s) of perceptual experience, see Burge (2010), Graham (2014), and [Author's Work B].

representation that strikes the best balance between constraints of accuracy and constraints of time, energy, etc.<sup>32</sup> (A3) allows for this possibility.

There is a potential worry for our defense of (A3), however. The worry is that sometimes a mental phenomenon might count as a perceptual experience not because of which system *produces* it, but because of which system *consumes* it. For example, according to one perception-first account, a hallucination is just an imagining that the subject mistakenly treats as a genuine perception.<sup>33</sup>

This suggestion might cast doubt on (A3). But it should not cast doubt on the conclusion of the Aristotelian argument. For we should understand this suggestion as encoding a new idea about how perceptual experiences might acquire their functions: perceptual experiences might acquire their functions not only from the systems that produce them, but also from the systems that consume them. And with this idea in hand, it is easy to adjust each premise of the Aristotelian argument accordingly. For example, we would simply replace (A3) with:

(A3\*) Every perceptual experience is either produced *or consumed* by a system exercising a function of producing *or consuming* only genuine perceptions.

And we would make similar adjustments to the other premises.

So much for premise (A3). Premise (A4) is smooth sailing. It claims that no entities other than perceptual experiences have the function of being genuine perceptions. I take the truth of this premise to be obvious, as we can reveal by contrasting the case of belief. While it is

---

<sup>32</sup> For hints of this view, see Ganson (2016).

<sup>33</sup> See Allen (2014).

perfectly reasonable to suggest that some of my beliefs are unsuccessful because they fail to fulfill some distinctive epistemic function, it is bizarre to suggest that any of my beliefs are unsuccessful *because they are not genuine perceptions*. Or at least, it is bizarre to make this suggestion *unless* one holds that the beliefs in question *are themselves* perceptual experiences – but if one adds this further claim, then the belief in question conforms to (A4).<sup>34</sup>

There ends my defense of the Aristotelian argument against kind disjunctivism. Again, the basic idea is that all perceptual experiences form a *functional* kind. For any perceptual experience has the function of being a *successful* perceptual experience, whether or not it fulfills that function.

But wait. The Aristotelian argument, which was supposed to topple kind disjunctivism alone, may also seem to topple the perception-first view itself – again, the view that genuine perception is metaphysically prior to perceptual experience. For (A2), (A3), and (A4) together entail:

(BC1) Something is a perceptual experience iff it has a certain distinctively perceptual function.

And it is then so very natural to endorse:

(BC2) Something is a genuine perception iff it is a perceptual experience that fulfills this distinctively perceptual function.

---

<sup>34</sup> The idea that at least some perceptual experiences are also beliefs is suggested by Lyons (2005) and Byrne (2009).



These claims are mere biconditionals – hence “BC.” But (BC1) can easily be converted into a *metaphysical analysis* of perceptual experience in terms of perceptual function, while (BC2) can easily be converted into a *metaphysical analysis* of genuine perception in terms of perceptual experience. These conversions would together yield an *experience*-first view, not a *perception*-first view.

Can the collapse of the perception-first view be resisted?

Of course. The perception-first theorist need only say that the distinctively perceptual function is nothing other than the function of *being a genuine perception*. She can then resist the conversion of (BC2) into a metaphysical analysis of genuine perception, since the candidate *analysans* would itself be metaphysically analyzed in terms of genuine perception. Better yet – she can go ahead with the conversion of (BC1) into a metaphysical analysis of perceptual experience. She can say that *what it is* for something to be a perceptual experience is just for it to have the function of being a genuine perception.<sup>35</sup> She would thereby re-assert the metaphysical priority of genuine perception over perceptual experience.

Thus, a broadly Aristotelian view of perception need not be a rival to a perception-first view. On the contrary, these views make natural allies.

#### 4. The limited significance of fundamental kind disjunctivism

So far, I have argued that kind disjunctivism is false; I have argued that perceptual experiences, whether successful or unsuccessful, all have the function of being successful and therefore form a functional kind. Let us consider how these consequences bear on **fundamental kind disjunctivism** – again, the view that perceptual experiences do not form a fundamental kind.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> So says Miracchi (ms).

<sup>36</sup> For proponents of fundamental kind disjunctivism, see fn. 5.

The fundamental kind disjunctivist presupposes that for any perceptual experience, there is such a thing as “the” **fundamental kind** to which that experience belongs.<sup>37</sup> One fundamental kind disjunctivist has suggested that any entity’s fundamental kind is the *most specific kind* to which the entity belongs; citing this kind tells us the very *nature* of the entity.<sup>38</sup> Many other fundamental kind disjunctivists have not bothered to characterize the notion of a fundamental kind.<sup>39</sup> Now, one might be skeptical of the presupposition that every perceptual experience belongs to a single fundamental kind.<sup>40</sup> But because I wish to explore how the Aristotelian argument might bear on the fundamental kind disjunctivist’s view, let us grant her this presupposition.

Fundamental kind disjunctivism may be true even if kind disjunctivism is false. For even if a genuine perception and a hallucination both belong to the same functional kind, they need not belong to the same *fundamental* kind – e.g., it may be that for any genuine perception, its functional kind is not its fundamental kind. So the Aristotelian argument does not by itself force the fundamental kind disjunctivist to abandon her position.

The truth of fundamental kind disjunctivism would moreover seem to be important. For fundamental kind disjunctivists are usually perception-first theorists who think that genuine perceptions belong to one fundamental kind, while no other perceptual experience belongs to this fundamental kind. If this way of thinking is right, then fundamental kind disjunctivism would apparently track a deep metaphysical divide between genuine perceptions and all other

---

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the weaker presupposition that every *genuine perception* belongs to a single fundamental kind might do.

<sup>38</sup> See Martin (2006, p. 361).

<sup>39</sup> See Crane (2006, p. 139); Neta (2008, pp. 311-312); Allen (2015, p. 288). Others use related notions, such as the notion of a “most fundamental characterization” (Brewer (2011, p. 94); Miracchi (ms)). However, Logue’s formulation of a view similar in spirit to fundamental kind disjunctivism is admirably clear – see fn. 5.

<sup>40</sup> I certainly am. See [Author’s Work A, pp. xx-xx]. I find an ally in Pautz (2007, p. 528).

perceptual experiences. (Picture a continent populated by the genuine perceptions, with all other perceptual experiences inhabiting one or more surrounding islands.)

But I challenge the idea that fundamental kind disjunctivism is both true and significant in this sense. I do so by entertaining an argument whose soundness I will not judge. I say only that if we accept the argument's premises, then we must reject fundamental kind disjunctivism; but if we reject any of the argument's premises in the most natural ways, then we deprive fundamental kind disjunctivism of the significance just described.

Consider:

**The fundamental function argument:**

(F1) For any fundamental function, the entities with that function form a fundamental kind.

(F2) Every perceptual experience has the fundamental function of being a successful perceptual experience.

(F3) No other entity other than a perceptual experience has the function of being a successful perceptual experience.

Perceptual experiences form a fundamental kind.

The argument is valid. Is it sound?

I believe that each premise has at least some plausibility. Premise (F1) uses the notion of a fundamental function, which is to be understood by analogy with the notion of a fundamental kind. If an entity's fundamental kind is to be understood as its most specific kind, then let an entity's fundamental function be understood as its most specific function; if an entity's

fundamental kind is to be understood as its most explanatorily basic kind, then let its fundamental function be understood as its most explanatorily basic function; and so on.<sup>41</sup>

Think of a heart, which has many functions: to take blood in from the major veins through the right atrium, to take oxygenated blood in from the pulmonary veins through the left atrium, to pump blood out through the ventricles, etc. Despite this abundance of functions, however, arguably the heart has a single fundamental function which has to do with circulating blood. This function might just be the conjunction of the functions of the sort that we were listing earlier, or it might be some more general function that can be fulfilled even if those more specific functions are not fulfilled. Regardless, premise (F1) is plausible. After all, this fundamental function, whatever it is, is arguably the function that we should cite when characterizing the very nature of the heart.

Premise (F2) is plausible because, as we have already seen, all perceptual experiences have one function in common: the function of being a successful perceptual experience. Plausibly, this is the fundamental function of any perceptual experience. For we arguably characterize the very nature of any perceptual experience by saying that it is the kind of thing that is supposed to be a successful perceptual experience. Now, to make the discussion concrete, while keeping things as friendly as possible to a perception-first theorist, let us assume that the function of any perceptual experience is to be a genuine perception, so that a successful perceptual experience will just be a genuine perception.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> One might worry that the notion of a fundamental function is incoherent. For perhaps some entities do not have a unique fundamental function: perhaps some entities have no fundamental functions, or many. – I reply that the worry generalizes. Perhaps some entities do not belong to a unique fundamental kind: perhaps some entities belong to no fundamental kinds, or to many. (Again, see [Author's Work A, pp. xx-xx].) So the notion of a fundamental function is in no worse shape than the notion of a fundamental kind, though the two notions might break down in different cases.

<sup>42</sup> The assumption is concessive and inessential to my argument.

Premise (F3) strikes me as beyond dispute; see the earlier defense of (A4).

These premises together entail the falsity of fundamental kind disjunctivism, so the fundamental kind disjunctivist must reject at least one of these premises. Can she reasonably do so? Given that (F3) is beyond dispute, I see three notable paths of resistance that she might travel.

*First notable path of resistance.* She can grant (F2) but resist (F1). (F1) says that whenever an entity has a fundamental function, the corresponding functional kind is that entity's fundamental kind. For think about the idea that an entity's fundamental kind is the most specific kind to which it belongs. The property of *having and fulfilling function F* is more specific than the property of *having function F*. And, arguably, the property of *having and fulfilling function F* at least sometimes demarcates a genuine kind, since the difference between successfully and unsuccessfully functioning entities can have explanatory value: we might explain why a certain athlete collapsed in a race by saying that her heart was not functioning properly. Perhaps, then, the fundamental kind to which a genuine perception belongs is the kind formed by the entities that have *and fulfill* the function of being a genuine perception, while the fundamental kind to which a hallucination belongs is the kind formed by the entities that have *but do not fulfill* the function of being a genuine perception.

This view preserves fundamental kind disjunctivism. But it is worth appreciating how modest the view is, and how little it supports the kind of rhetoric that fundamental kind disjunctivists often use. It is common for fundamental kind disjunctivists to suggest that genuine perceptions and hallucinations are as different in nature as lemons and bars of soap that look like lemons; there is a deep metaphysical divide in each case.<sup>43</sup> But the version of fundamental kind disjunctivism now on offer, though it treats genuine perceptions and

---

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Martin (2006, p. 384) and Neta (2008, p. 312).

hallucinations as not belonging to the same fundamental kind, certainly does not license any claim of a deep divide. On the contrary, genuine perceptions and other perceptual experiences end up being *species of a common genus*: the common genus is characterized by having the function of being a genuine perception, and the species are differentiated by whether or not the function is fulfilled. The divide between different species of a common genus is a good deal shallower than the divide between lemons and lemon-shaped soaps!<sup>44</sup>

*Second notable path of resistance.* Perhaps the fundamental kind disjunctivist instead wishes to grant (F1) and to resist (F2). (F2) says that all perceptual experiences share the same fundamental function. But the fundamental kind disjunctivist might protest that the fundamental functions in question are too fine-grained to be shared by all perceptual experiences. For example, she might say that my genuine perception of a particular cup has the fundamental function of being a genuine perception *of that particular cup*, while my “matching” hallucination of a cup – which we may stipulate is not a hallucination of any cup in particular – just has the fundamental function of being a genuine perception *of some particular cup or other*. Given (F1), it will follow that these perceptual experiences will belong to different fundamental kinds. That will be so *even though* my hallucinatory experience will be introspectively indistinguishable from my genuine perceptual experience.

This view is reasonable. But it has a surprising consequence: the consequence that genuine perceptions do not themselves all belong to the same fundamental kind. For a genuine perception of a particular cup and a genuine perception of a particular pen will also have different fundamental functions: one will have the fundamental function of being a genuine perception of that particular cup, while the other will have the fundamental function of being a

---

<sup>44</sup> For just this reason, some fundamental kind disjunctivists build into their view the proviso that genuine perceptions and hallucinations are not species of a common genus. See Neta (2008, p. 312).

genuine perception of that particular pen. Indeed, even two genuine perceptions of distinct but qualitatively identical cups, seen by the same subject under the same environmental conditions, will have different fundamental functions and will therefore belong to different fundamental kinds.

If we accept this consequence, then we again preserve fundamental kind disjunctivism only by sacrificing the significance of the view. For if just about any pair of *genuine perceptions* belong to different fundamental kinds, then it no longer seems to be of particular philosophical interest that any genuine perception and any hallucination *also* belong to different fundamental kinds. We no longer find a continent populated by the genuine perceptions, with all other perceptual experiences inhabiting the surrounding islands; we find that even the genuine perceptions are sprinkled among countless small islands.

*Third notable path of resistance.* It might now occur to the fundamental kind disjunctivist to reject *both* (F1) and (F2), for the reasons just given. The idea would be that a genuine perception of a cup and a “matching” hallucination of a cup do not belong to the same fundamental kind for two independent reasons. First, it is essential to the genuine perception that it fulfills its fundamental function, while it is essential to the hallucination that it fails to fulfill its fundamental function. And second, the genuine perception and the hallucination have different fundamental functions: the genuine perception has (e.g.) the function of being a genuine perception of that particular cup, while the hallucination has only the function of being a genuine perception of some cup or other.

What I wish to say about this path of resistance is more or less what I said about the second path of resistance: once more it turns out that even pairs of genuine perceptions will almost never end up belonging to the same fundamental kind. And if fundamental kind disjunctivism does not carve an important divide between genuine perceptions and

hallucinations – if it divides even genuine perceptions among many small islands – then it is not clear why the truth of the view matters.

The fundamental kind disjunctivist therefore faces a dilemma: if she accepts all premises of the argument, then she must abandon her view, but if she travels any notable path of resistance, then her view ends up being much more modest than the usual advertisements would have us believe.

I do not want to overstate the point. For the fundamental kind disjunctivist may yet be able to retain one important distinction between genuine perceptions and other perceptual experiences: perhaps every genuine perception involves a perceptual relation to one or more perceptibles, while no other perceptual experience – at least insofar as it is not a genuine perception – involves a perceptual relation to any perceptible. Perhaps that is disjunctivism enough. But, I repeat, it is not the bold disjunctivism on which genuine perceptions and other perceptual experiences are like lemons and lemon-shaped soaps. It is the modest disjunctivism on which genuine perceptions and other perceptual experiences are like well- and ill-functioning hearts.



## REFERENCES

[Author's Work A]

[Author's Work B]

- Allen, K. (2014). "Hallucination and imagination." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93 (2): 287-302.
- Aristotle. (2013). *Politics, Second Edition*. Trans. C. Lord. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bedau, M. (1992). "Where's the good in teleology?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (4): 781-806.
- Brewer, B. (2011). *Perception and Its Objects*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burge, T. (2010). *Origins of Objectivity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Byrne, A. (2009). "Experience and content." *Philosophical Quarterly* 59 (236): 429-451.
- Byrne, A. and Logue, H. (2008). "Either/or." In *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge*, eds. Adrian Haddock and Fiona Macpherson (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 57-94.
- Campbell, J. (2002). *Reference and Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crane, T. (2006). "Is there a perceptual relation?" In *Perceptual Experience*, eds. T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (Oxford University Press), pp. 126-146.
- Dretske, F. (1995). *Naturalizing the Mind*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Fish, W. (2009). *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ganson, T. (2016). "Sensory malfunctions, limitations, and trade-offs." *Synthese* (online first).
- Genone, J. (2014). "Appearance and illusion." *Mind* 123 (490): 339-376.
- Graham, P. (2014). "The function of perception." In *Virtue Scientia: Bridges between Virtue Epistemology and Philosophy of Science*, ed. A. Fairweather (Synthese Library), pp. 13-31.
- Kennedy, M. (2011). "Naïve realism, privileged access, and epistemic safety." *Noûs* 45 (1): 77-102.
- Lewis, D. (1983). "New work for a theory of universals." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61 (4): 343-377.
- Logue, H. (2013). "Good news for the disjunctivist about the bad cases." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86 (1): 105-133.
- Lyons, J. (2005). "Perceptual belief and nonexperiential looks." *Philosophical Perspectives* 19: 237-56.
- Martin, M. (2004). "The limits of self-awareness." *Philosophical Studies* 120: 37-89.
- Martin, M. (2006). "On being alienated." In *Perceptual Experience*, eds. T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (Oxford University Press), pp. 354-410.
- McDowell, J. (1994). *Mind and World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Millikan, R. (1993). *White Queen Psychology and Other Essays for Alice*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Miracchi, L. (ms). "Perception first."
- Nanay, B. (2010). "A modal theory of function." *Journal of Philosophy* 107 (8): 412-431.
- Neta, R. (2008). "In defence of disjunctivism." In *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge*, eds. A. Haddock and F. Macpherson (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 311-329.
- Pautz, A. (2007). "Intentionalism and perceptual presence." *Philosophical Perspectives* 21 (1): 495-541.
- Preston, B. (1998). "Why is a wing like a spoon? A pluralist theory of function." *Journal of Philosophy* 95 (5): 215-254.
- Schellenberg, S. (forthcoming). *The Unity of Perception*.
- Siegel, S. (2010). *The Contents of Visual Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Sturgeon, S. (2008). "Disjunctivism about visual experience." In *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge*, eds. A. Haddock and F. Macpherson (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 112-143.
- Tye, M. (1995). *Ten Problems of Consciousness: A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Williamson, T. (2000). *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.