

Subjectivity and the Agential Perspective

I. The Passive Subject

Imagine that you and a friend have planned a trip whose success depends on an early start. You are dismayed to discover, then, when you arrive at the appointed time, that he is still in bed. You remind him that your plan requires leaving right away, and you point out that if he moves quickly there will still be time to do so. Your friend readily agrees, but makes no move to get out of bed. Your patience nearly exhausted, you suggest in no uncertain terms that he get up. To your amazement, he calmly responds that he understands perfectly well that the trip depends on his being up soon and expresses the sincere hope that he will be. Suppose that in response to your evident consternation he hastens to explain. While he understands the necessity of his being up and mobile, he finds incomprehensible your suggestion that he bring this about. It is not, he says, that there is any disagreement between you where the language of happenings is concerned. But he goes on to explain that although he went to bed a normal subject, he discovered on awakening that the language of action had become unintelligible. By way of support for his new perspective, he points out that whereas you both agree in viewing the past as fixed, he is consistent in seeing the future (quantum indeterminacies aside) in the same light. As he warms to the topic of the incoherence of the conceptual scheme that includes doings as well as happenings, you remind him that speaking is an action--on hearing which, and after some signs of struggle, he lapses into silence.

As the remarks of the passive subject suggest, this story can be told in such a way that there are no factual disagreements between the passive subject and us.¹ If so, then what distinguishes the passive subject from the normal subject? Is the passive subject missing something that we get? And if so, what? Or, if there is nothing that we get and he doesn't, is he responding irrationally or unreasonably to the facts upon which we all agree? Or are we in some way out of touch or irrational?

Suppose we ask whether this example raises a problem for a scientific realism or scientific naturalism. Many, no doubt, would claim that it doesn't. The thought would be that there is a

straightforwardly naturalistic explanation of the difference between the passive subject and us. There are two obvious forms this response might take. It might be suggested that what the passive subject lacks is simply a causal connection (or the right kind of causal connection) between his desires (for example, the desire to be out of bed) and bodily movements. The suggestion then would be that his beliefs and desires, construed as physical states of the brain, lack the causal efficacy of ours. Alternatively, it might be suggested that there are many compatibilist accounts of action, agency, free will, and freedom available and that whichever one is correct will tell us what the crucial difference between us and the passive subject consists in.

In the remainder of this section, I shall argue that neither of these responses is adequate. I shall begin by addressing the two responses directly and then, go on to characterize the kind of problem I am raising in more general terms. The problem to which I am pointing, however, is not one that has been generally recognized in this context. Thus the characterization of the problem in its full generality will be postponed until section II. There I shall point to its analogies to a problem in another philosophical domain whose depth and significance has been far more widely appreciated.

_____ The claim that the passive subject differs from us in that our beliefs and desires lead to bodily movements whereas his do not is clearly true. But, equally clearly, this is not the only difference. Nor is it the most important one. Simply adding a causal connection between the passive subject's desires and his motor systems so the desires produce bodily movements will not make the passive subject an agent. Such an addition would, in an obvious sense, leave the connection between the desires and the movements opaque. For consider an analogy. In certain works of art a mysterious stranger acts so as to satisfy a character's desires that that character would never act to satisfy or to satisfy in that way. (Examples include the recent film With a Friend Like Harry, the Patricia Highsmith novel and Hitchcock film, Strangers on a Train, and the Curtis Hanson film, Bad Influence.) In the case under consideration, the passive subject's relation to his own bodily movements would be no closer than such a character's relation to the actions of the Mephistophelian stranger. Nor would it suffice to give the passive subject reliable advance knowledge of the movements in question. For even clairvoyance about how one's body will move as a causal result of one's desires is not the same as one's actually moving it. Indeed, that his body should move in ways that satisfy his desires, and that he should have advance knowledge of what

the movement will be, is something the passive subject can fully understand. What he lacks is the concept of a doing as opposed to a happening. And nothing we have provided so far takes him out of his passive condition.

A similar point applies to the suggestion that we can address the problem raised by the passive subject by an appeal to one of the contemporary and naturalistic accounts of the compatibility of free will and determinism. Certainly it seems that such accounts would have to address this problem squarely, since they purport to say how action is possible in the face of a future that is fixed. In fact, however, this is not the case. In part this is because such accounts focus on determinism, whereas the real problem is objectivism. It is just as difficult to reconcile genuine agency with indeterminism or randomness as with its opposite. Indeed, any objective metaphysics--that is, one expressible without psychological, agential, or normative concepts--raises the same problem.²

Of course this point has not gone completely unnoticed. Galen Strawson has appealed to points of this kind to ground an essentially skeptical treatment of freedom and free will.³ But even Strawson's skepticism fails to address the real problem raised by the passive subject. Strawson suggests that freedom is really a kind of necessary illusion but fails to ask the genuinely deep question--namely, what the illusion is an illusion of. If freedom and agency are incoherent on the assumption of determinism and, equally, are incoherent on the assumption of randomness and on any other assumption about the objective metaphysical facts, then from an objectivist metaphysical perspective the notion is incoherent. It is then a mystery what people think they have when they think they have free will. If so, then far from providing an answer to the passive subject, accounts like Strawson's, when their implications are spelled out, simply raise the same problem in an equally acute form.

Strawson's is, of course, a skeptical account of freedom and agency. It says, in effect, that determinism rules out freedom and agency and that every other objectivist account does so as well. But the problem for Strawson is not by itself a problem for (naturalistic) compatibilist accounts that say that determinism is not a problem for freedom and agency and that there could well be nondeterminist accounts that would be equally unproblematic. But having seen the problem for Strawson's skepticism, we can easily see where such accounts will fail. The problem is one of meaning: The passive subject purports not to understand 'action'. Strawson provides no account of the content of the illusion of

freedom, and prima facie both the idea that the future is completely fixed and the idea that there are random events make the idea of action incoherent. We can, then, for any alleged compatibilist analysis of freedom and agency consider an analogue of Moore's open question argument: It seems that for any such analysis of his performing an action, the passive subject can say that he hopes that the conditions specified in the analysis comes to pass or obtain soon. Since this is an inappropriate attitude to take to a possible action of one's own, it points up the inadequacy of the analysis, at least if it is understood as a priori or conceptual in character.⁴

II. Meaning and Agency

It will help to clarify what I am calling the problem of the meaningfulness of such terms as 'action' if we compare it to an analogous problem in another domain--one which has been generally recognized and is, by comparison, relatively well understood. In a highly influential account of our evaluative discourse and practices, J. L. Mackie has argued that our ordinary evaluative claims are false.⁵ Mackie's position can be summarized in three points.

- (1) Our ordinary moral discourse commits us to the existence of objective values or objective goods⁶--things that are objectively and intrinsically prescriptive in the sense that they are "action-directing absolutely, not contingently . . . upon the agent's desires and inclinations"⁷ "An objective good would be sought by anyone who was acquainted with it, not because of any contingent fact that this person, or every person, is so constituted that he desires this end, but just because the end has to-be-pursuedness somehow built into it."⁸
- (2) There are no such objective values or goods.⁹
- (3) The denial of the existence of objective values or goods is not a conceptual or analytic or a priori truth, but an a posteriori and empirical one.¹⁰

These three theses, however, are difficult to reconcile. It is not easy to see, for example, how values could be both "a very central structural element in the fabric of the world" and such that "just knowing them or 'seeing' them will not merely tell men what to do but will ensure that they do it, overruling any contrary inclinations."¹¹ The reason that this is difficult to imagine is that it is not enough that

objective values should have their prescriptive and motivating force independently of agents' contingent desires. They must also have their force independently of agents' contingent vulnerabilities to persuasion. (An automobile would not become objectively valuable, for example, merely because it had a mechanism for projecting subliminal images on the windshield that were extremely effective in getting people to buy it regardless of their contingent motivational makeups prior to the experience.) Thus objective values would have to have their prescriptive and motivational force for all rational subjects merely in virtue of that rationality. But it seems that for anything that was genuinely a part of the fabric of the universe, we could imagine a rational creature capable of apprehending it while remaining indifferent to it.¹² And if in fact this is always possible to imagine, then the objection to objective values is not contingent, a posteriori, and empirical but a priori and conceptual.

It seems, then, that Mackie's endorsement of (3) was ill-considered. Was this, then, just a lapse on Mackie's part? The answer, of course, is no. For, as Mackie was perfectly well aware, there must be an explanation of our evaluative discourse. That is, even if we are error theorists--even if, like Mackie, we hold that ordinary evaluative beliefs are false--there must be an account of what the world would be like if such beliefs were true. And Mackie's own view, implausible as it seems, at least provides an answer. Since on his view there are possible worlds at which objective values exist, for our evaluative beliefs to be true would be for us to inhabit such a world.

Of course, this is merely the semblance of an answer, since Mackie provides no substantive account of what such a world would be like--nothing beyond what follows trivially from his definition of objective value (together with the assumptions that values are extra-mental and that evaluative statements are genuinely true and false). Mackie may seem to gesture in this direction when he discusses Hume's conception of the mind's "propensity to spread itself on external objects," and his own conception of "the projection or objectification of moral attitudes and its relation to the "pathetic fallacy.""¹³ But these are suggestions about the subpersonal mechanisms whereby the illusion of objective value is produced, not about its content--that is, not about what the illusion is an illusion of.

It might be suggested at this point that the demand for an answer to this latter question is misguided. It might be held, that is, that the illusion of objective value is a shallow illusion--one that we can see through with minimal effort. This suggestion is desperate but, in the realm of values, one that

cannot be dismissed out of hand. But this is what makes the comparison between the problem of meaning for our evaluative notions and the problem of meaning for our agential notions useful. On the one hand, the problem itself is better understood in the evaluative domain. Michael Smith's well-known analysis of what he calls "the moral problem" essentially follows Mackie's, without Mackie's commitment to the contingency of the nonexistence of objective values. Smith identifies the following three theses as forming an apparently inconsistent triad.

- (1) Cognitivism for evaluative claims. (They express beliefs, not attitudes.)
- (2) Intrinsic objective prescriptivity and motivational force for such claims.
- (3) Humean moral psychology according to which beliefs and desires are separate and independent existences.¹⁴

Thus for Smith there is an apparent inconsistency between the idea of objective values and a Humean moral psychology, and he regards the latter as justified on conceptual grounds or a priori.) On the other hand, confidence that we have something more than a shallow illusion of a coherent discourse and practice (and hence that there is something to be explained) is far more likely in the agential domain. No one is likely to maintain seriously that our agential discourse and practice is based on a shallow illusion, if for no other reason than that the difference between us and the passive subject is not a shallow difference.¹⁵ Both Mackie and Strawson, as error theorists in their own domains, are vulnerable to the same objection: that they have failed to tell us what the content of the error is or what the illusion is an illusion of. In the next section I shall sketch the outlines of a positive account.

Since the problem raised by the passive subject is one of meaning, we can distinguish two subproblems. We need, first, an account of the inferential or conceptual role of the terms in our agential vocabulary. Second we need an account of the way in which those terms are grounded in our perceptual experience. In other words, we need an account of their meaning in terms both of their word-to-word and their word-to-world connections.

Since it figures prominently in Mackie's skepticism about value, I shall begin with the second aspect. Mackie's claim that there are no objective values hinges on two related arguments, which make up the metaphysical and the epistemological parts of what he calls the "argument from queerness." According to the epistemological argument "if we were aware of [objective values] it would have to be by

some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.”¹⁶ And he goes on to add that

when we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of . . . authoritative prescriptivity . . . None of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these, will provide a satisfactory answer; ‘a special sort of intuition’ is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clear-headed objectivist is compelled to resort.¹⁷

He specifically rejects the idea of “a power of immediately perceiving right and wrong, which yet are real characters of actions”.¹⁸

Mackie makes it clear that his rejection of moral intuition or moral perception is based on a Humean conception of perceptual experience. And although Mackie’s rejection purports to be grounded empirically, the point is far more plausibly construed as a priori--given a Humean conception of experience, particularly visual experience, how could “to-be-pursuedness” possibly get into what is given to visual perception? As we shall see, a similar point applies to whatever we take as paradigmatically agential properties.

The conception of perceptual experience, particularly visual experience, according to which this objection to moral perception seems irrefutable is based on an analogy between the character of the given in visual experience and the image produced by a camera, or in a so-called realistic painting, or by light on the retina. But this analogy, natural as it seems, is a false one. I shall argue that what we are given is in some ways much richer and in other ways much more impoverished than the analogy implies. I shall refer to the phenomenology of visual experience that will emerge as an inflationary and deflationary phenomenology.

III. Deflationary Phenomenology of Experience

It will help to reposition some of our intuitions, some of which are deeply entrenched, if we start with the deflationary side of the argument. Begin by distinguishing two theses:

- (1) Our perceptual experience of the world is like a photograph or a “realistic” painting.
- (2) Our perceptual experience of the world is like our perceptual experience of a photograph or a realistic painting.

Thesis (2) is plausible in at least those cases in which we mistake our experience of a photograph or painting for an experience of the world itself (e.g., in the case of a trompe l’oeil painting). And it is thesis (2) that Gombrich expresses when he characterizes our response to realistic pictures as “something akin to visual hallucination.”¹⁹ On this account, the similarity of a picture to the thing it represents is not an intrinsic similarity, such as the similarity of an original to a copy, but “it is the similarity between the mental activities that both can arouse . . .”²⁰ (One might think in this context of painted stage scenery which can look extremely realistic from one’s location in the audience and virtually unrecognizable from the stage.) It is thesis (1), however, with which we are concerned.

Thesis (1) derives much of its plausibility from the analogy between the camera and the human eye. But the thesis is not that the retinal image is like a photograph or painting. It is that conscious visual experience--experience as it is given to the subject from the first person perspective--is, in relevant respects, like a photograph. What does this mean?

The essential idea is that a subject’s visual field, construed as something consciously and fully available to the subject, has properties analogous to those of a photograph--or analogous to those of the image that the scene before the subject projects on the retina. This second thesis is expressed in Leon Battista Alberti’s De Pictura.

For Alberti, a painter is able to represent what he sees because the elements of vision and the rules for their comparison are themselves pictorial. Once this principle is established, Alberti identifies what he sees as a constructed picture, analyzes it, and uses the product of the analysis for the artificial and correct representation of the perceived image.²¹

Such a conception runs through the empiricism and rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the phenomenalist and sense-data theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An even more recent version has been defended by Christopher Peacocke.

Suppose you are standing on a road which stretches from you in a straight line to the horizon. There are two trees at the roadside, one a hundred yards from you, the other two hundred. Your experience presents these objects as being of the same physical height and other dimensions Yet there is also some sense in which the nearest tree occupies more of your visual field than the more distant tree It is a feature which makes Rock say that the greater size of the retinal image of the nearer tree is not without some reflection in consciousness.²²

According to Peacocke, the properties of our conscious visual perceptual experience are not exhausted by its representational properties, such as the property in virtue of which the two trees are represented as being the same size. In addition, there are nonrepresentational or “sensational” properties, such as the property in virtue of which the closer of the two trees is represented in a larger area of the visual field--a property analogous to that in virtue of which it would be represented in a larger portion of the surface of a photograph of the same scene from the same point of view. Such a model of visual perception, I shall say, is based on the camera analogy. Such models have strong similarities to so-called sense-data theories. According to such theories, what is most directly given in visual perception are colored areas of various shapes in a visual field, in virtue of which the visual experience has the representational properties that it does.²³ According to these theories, the actual shapes, sizes, and colors of the areas of the visual field are the apparent shapes, sizes, and colors of the external objects of our visual perception. On such theories, the portion of the visual field that represents a plate viewed at an angle, for example, will be elliptical, and theorists of this persuasion speak in such cases of an elliptical sense-datum.

I shall argue that the camera analogy is badly flawed as a way of thinking about our visual perception. And I shall claim that the flaws undermine arguments like Mackie’s against the possibility of objective value, as well as the possibility of such agential properties as being an action or being an agent. (We can now see that the terms ‘inflationary’ and ‘deflationary’ are used relative to phenomenologies that

exploit the camera analogy--specifically as explicated by thesis (1) and by such expository remarks as Ayer's and Peacocke's.) Consider first the deflationary claim. There are good reasons to think that although we have access to some of the apparent shapes, sizes, and colors that the theory requires, such access, except in very easy and obvious cases (e.g., to the fact that the apparent shape of a rectangle viewed at an angle is a trapezoid or trapezium), is extremely limited.

It is not difficult to construct thought experiments that support this suggestion, and such experiments play an important role in loosening the grip in which the camera analogy continues to hold our thinking. Here is one such experiment. Try to approximate the apparent shape of your car windshield from the driver's seat using four straight lines. (It is worth actually trying this exercise before going on.) The naive response is a trapezoid with its base wider than its top and with interior base angles of approximately 60° . A moment's reflection, however, shows that this cannot be right. Since one sits closer to the left side than the right, the top and bottom must converge in the latter direction. But it is not easy, through reflection alone, to complete the construction. Counting the convergence of the top and bottom, there are, in fact, three significant departures from the naive response.²⁴ Among the responses I have received, the majority are essentially the naive response, though a significant minority incorporate one of the departures from this trapezoidal shape. Only very rarely does a response incorporate two departures, and no one in my experience has produced all three on a first exposure to the problem.

It is sometimes objected, however, that this example merely reveals the limits of our memory for shapes and so has no relevance to a theory of perception. Consider, then, the following experiment. While standing straight with your hand four inches from your eye, estimate the ratio of the apparent distance from your wrist to the end of your middle finger to the apparent width of your foot. Typical responses are off by a factor of five, and many are even less accurate.²⁵

Such experiments, of course, are not conducted with the apparatus and formality of contemporary experimental practice in psychology. To dismiss them on this ground, however, would be to miss the point. The experiments are not primarily intended as protopsychological exercises that report the responses of experimental subjects. Rather they are exercises that the reader can reenact with a minimum of difficulty to provide subjective experiences with the potential to undermine the influence that a certain rhetorical tradition and a certain picture exercise on our thinking about perception. As such,

they are not intended as conclusive refutations of the camera analogy but as ways of making intelligible to ourselves the possibility that it is wrong. I shall now outline a distinct argument that it is in fact wrong. In the absence of such preliminary exercises, however, the degree to which we are gripped by the analogy is likely to prevent any argument from being effective.

I shall call the argument that the camera analogy is fundamentally misguided the wide angle lens argument. The conclusion is a consequence of two facts, well known to anyone familiar with photography and, indeed, in a somewhat different formulation, recognized by theorists of perspective representation since the 15th century. Stated in terms of modern camera terminology, we can say that among 35mm camera lenses the ones that produce the most natural looking shapes and distances have a focal length of approximately 50mm and that such lenses produce an angle of vision of approximately 45°. Our perceptual experience, on the other hand, seems to give us an angle of vision of roughly 150°. And since a lens capable of taking in such a wide angle produces extreme distortion of shape at the periphery, as well as very significant distortion of apparent distance, our photographs cannot reproduce the apparent shapes and distances we seem to be given over the wide angle of vision we seem to enjoy. The problem becomes even more acute when one considers movie cameras, since in panning across a scene with an even moderately wide-angle lens, shapes and objects seem to change--a very apparent dynamic distortion that has no counterpart in our ordinary visual experience.

It hardly needs to be said that the point is not one about current lens technology but about the possible ways of mapping three dimensional space onto a two dimensional plane. As such it has been recognized explicitly since the late 1400's.

When Alberti first described a system of single point perspective in his treatise De pictura, he stressed that the artist should find the appropriate point and angle of the visual pyramid. . . . When Marolois described the process he described far more specific guidelines. He maintained that the angle of vision should be more than 60° but less than 90°. . . . Marolois derived these limitations from earlier sources. The idea can be traced back to the 1480's when it appeared in Piero della Francesca's De prospectiva pingendi. Such limitations upon the angle of vision were central to the traditional Renaissance concept that perspective gave scientific validity to painting.

It was a concept shared by Alberti. He, however, does not seem to have considered the consequences of an artist who consciously chose to view his subject at an abnormally large angle. Piero realized that such a painting would appear distorted. An artist could thus create a distorted image of reality while strictly adhering to the laws of perspective. This situation was unacceptable to theorists who argued for the scientific validity of perspective. Consequently an important element in Piero's theory was that wide angle vision, where distortions are most visible, should be forbidden. (Italics added)²⁶

That this result is fatal to our tendency to think of our visual experience as literally like a picture (i.e., to thesis (1)) has not generally been recognized. And this, I conjecture, is for several different reasons. On the philosophical side, the distinction between thesis (1), which the wide angle lens argument undermines, and thesis (2), which it leaves intact, is rarely made as clearly as it should be.²⁷ On the nonphilosophical side, there are considerations in the sociology of knowledge that explain why a camera-analogue conception of visual perception would have appealed to artists since the Renaissance and to early modern scientists.²⁸

Why, though, couldn't we advance a modified version of thesis (1): that having a visual experience is like an image projected on a curved surface? Actually, as I shall go on to point out, there is an important truth in this thesis. But it is not a line open to the proponent of (1). For it suggests (quite correctly on the view that I shall develop) that we are given depth as a primitive property. And once this is acknowledged, the motivation for describing our experience as image-like in any sense is undermined. We are, in fact, given objects at an indefinite variety of distances from us, not just those distances that fall on a smooth curve of any particular shape. And, as I shall argue, this visual experience of multiple depths is basic: these depths are not inferred on the basis of depth cues contained in some more primitive visual experience of a different sort. In particular they are not inferred on the basis of a visual experience as conceived in thesis (1).

IV. The Inflationary Phenomenology of Experience

As the preceding claims suggest, the deflationary argument--that in visual experience we are, in important respects, not given as much as the camera analogy requires--goes hand in hand with an inflationary argument--that in equally important respects we are given a great deal more than the analogy allows. And, as is also apparent, the best case for this claim lies in the visual perception of surface depth--i.e., the distances from us of the various surfaces that reflect the light that falls on our retinas. It is virtually impossible to deny that we see things at different distances from ourselves; we do not infer (at the personal level) these distances on the basis of cues contained in an experience as of a flat plane (or, as we have seen, a curved surface).

Given the undeniability of this fact, we might wonder how the camera analogy could have exercised the influence it has and does. In addition to the two points already made--that we confuse theses (1) and (2) and that a belief in thesis (1) had significant payoffs for early modern theorists of perception--I shall mention two more points in passing. First, sense-data theories as developed by Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Russell, and Ayer among others, which were the natural developments of thesis (1), had natural epistemological and semantic advantages, some of which are still not fully appreciated. Although philosophers have focused on the importance of sense-data in providing an incorrigible epistemological foundation in perception, their semantic advantages are, I would argue, far more significant. Visual sense-data--mental entities whose actual properties are the properties that ordinary objects seem to have in visual perception--allegedly bear a natural, i.e. nonlinguistic and nonconventional relation (typically resemblance, higher order isomorphism, etc., at least where spatial properties are concerned) to the world. Thus they are well-suited to ground our uses of language. Though linguistic meaning is constituted in part by word-to-word connections, unless these are grounded in something nonlinguistic--something outside the circle of word-to-word relations--we never get beyond a formal calculus to the possession of a meaningful language.²⁹

Of course it might be suggested that this role is played by real causal connections to external objects. But these connections cannot satisfy either the principle of charity or Frege's constraint. The former says that in the interpretive task of giving meaning to a subject's utterances and ascribing content to his or her intentional states, we must reveal the subject as rational and do full justice to that rationality. The latter says that we must ascribe contents in such a way as to explain differences in the cognitive

significance of linguistic expressions.³⁰ For example, there would be a difference in the content ascribed to 'Hesperus' and to 'Phosphorus' for a speaker who did not know that the terms are coreferential, because such a speaker could be rational in believing what he or she would express by saying "Hesperus is inhabited" and in not believing what he or she would express by saying "Phosphorus is inhabited." In this case the content would very likely take the form of different descriptions associated with the two expressions.

Now a theory which ascribes only linguistic descriptive content grounded in causal relations to external objects involves a vicious circle. We ascribe unmediated connections (i.e., unmediated by descriptive content) between referential expressions and objects in the world in order to break the circle of language-to-language (and word-to-word) connections, and we ascribe linguistic descriptions which mediate these connections in order to satisfy Frege's constraint. Thus if the resources available to us include only linguistic referring expressions, linguistic descriptive content, and bare causal connections (i.e., connections unmediated by any sort of intentional content) between linguistic expressions and objects in the world, the attempt to satisfy the requirement that language be grounded while Frege's constraint is simultaneously satisfied generates a vicious circle.

Adding sense-data to our stock of available theoretical resources is one way of dissolving this apparent dilemma. Sense-data satisfy Frege's constraint precisely in virtue of their pictorial character. Like images, they have no hidden sides. Hence there is no possibility of being given the same sense-datum without recognizing that fact. Sense-data, then, in virtue of being perceptual and nonlinguistic, halt the regress of language to language connections. But unlike ordinary objects, sense-data generate no Frege problems of their own. (i.e., the postulation of relations of direct reference between linguistic items--logically proper names--and sense-data introduces no violations of Frege's constraint.) Thus the introduction allows us to avoid the vicious circle just described. The upshot is that without sense-data, or something capable of playing the same role, we cannot simultaneously satisfy the constraint that requires a connection between language and the world unmediated by linguistic descriptive content on the one hand and Frege's constraint on the other. And in neither case is the constraint one that we could seriously contemplate giving up.

There is one final reason why the obvious fact that we perceive depth directly has not undermined thesis (1). There is a pervasive tendency to confuse directness at the personal level with directness at the level of subpersonal mechanisms. Clearly at the latter level our perception of depth is indirect and involves depth cues in the retinal image as well as processes that we might well describe as unconscious inferences. None of these obvious points, however, undermines the claim the depth is perceived directly at the personal level--i.e., that it is perceived and that it is not perceived on the basis of anything else that is perceived by, or given to, the subject.

The question then is how much more we are given in visual perception than is allowed by the camera analogy. In what follows I shall argue that both the philosophical arguments and the experimental literature suggest that we are given at least some kinds of causal relations and some sorts of third person agential activities and capacities, as well as real human possibilities in the form of opportunities for action.

V. Perception as Availability to Basic Action Capacities

In what follows I can sketch only the broadest outlines of a more phenomenologically adequate account of perception. Some aspects of the account have been developed more fully elsewhere.

As an alternative to the sense-datum account and to the account in terms of the descriptive linguistic content of belief, we can think of our visual perceptual experience in terms of our access to objects (what will on this account be the objects of those experiences) in virtue of our basic action capacities--particularly our demonstrative capacities. Take, for example, objects we can see. We have the capacity to point to them, indicate their extent, trace their outlines, move toward or away from them, find spots, if they exist, from which the view of the object is not occluded (or from which it is), etc. We know how to bring an object at the periphery of our visual fields into the center and how to detect and bring into view sources of movement outside the field in which we can see objects. We can shift our focus and we can shift our attention from one aspect of our visual world to another. And we have the capacity to recognize not only how we might move within the available spaces of a fixed spatial

configuration but how we could change the configuration, either by modifying objects or by rearranging them. If we have linguistic capacities we can answer questions about shapes, colors, and so forth.

These capacities are not to be thought of as things we do on the basis of a visual experience that exists independently of them. For it seems that the idea that we might have all the first order capacities of a normal subject but lack any visual experience is incoherent. This may not be immediately apparent in the light of the blindsight examples. Some subjects who report that they have no visual experience in an area of their visual field can, with prompting, answer questions about the visual properties of visual images that fall within that area.³¹ But it is important to note that the discriminative capacities of such subjects where visual properties are concerned never begin to approach those of a normal subject. And it is precisely the subject who has exactly the same first order capacities as the normal subject while lacking any visual experience--whom we may call the perfect blindsight subject--whose intelligibility is in question. Imagine looking at the keyboard of your word processor. Is it really intelligible to suppose that you could have all the same first order capacities regarding the keyboard--for example, to answer the same questions about the visual properties of the keyboard spontaneously and with complete confidence and to exercise all the same demonstrative skills and more generally all of the same nonverbal pragmatic capacities while having no visual experience where the keyboard was concerned? Or, consider a more dynamic example. Can you imagine driving in downtown Boston with the same degree of skill and confidence, avoiding pedestrians, erratic drivers, and new construction, reading signs, and scanning the street for parking spaces, while being completely blind?

Notice that we can assume that in having all the first order capacities of a normal subject you have the capacity to report on which things are visible from particular locations and in particular circumstances. For example, you can report that from a particular location the no-parking sign is hidden by the moving van, or that the piece of cardboard located perpendicular to your line of sight that would obscure your view of the plate seen at an oblique angle and not obscure your view of anything else would be elliptical. Thus it seems that as someone with all the first order capacities of a normal subject you would have all the (most important) information about apparent shapes with which sense-data theorists can justifiably credit us. And the same applies to apparent colors. A white cup illuminated by red light (say a spotlight) would be indistinguishable in color from a red cup in normal light right beside it. Thus it

seems that as such a subject you could learn to construct the (most important) sorts of descriptions that sense-data theorists regard as paradigmatically expressive of our first person access to the subjective character of our visual experience.³² Thus given all the relevant capacities of a normal subject, it seems impossible to say what blindness could consist in.

On the proposed account of visual perception, then, according to which it is a matter of our basic action capacities, visual experience is intentional, and so, by definition, has content. But in being essentially tied to action capacities this content is neither linguistic nor pictorial. Rather, we should think of it as providing semantic grounding in virtue of the constitutive connection between meaning and use. And since the uses in question involve actions, there is a sense in which the account is nonreductive. Visual perceptual content grounds language by taking us outside the circle of linguistic descriptions. But since it itself is intentional, it does not take us outside the intentional circle.

VI. The A Priori Argument for an Inflationary Phenomenology

What is the connection between this general approach to perceptual experience via action capacities and an inflationary phenomenology? That is, what is the connection between this approach and a phenomenology according to which we literally perceive such things as causal connections, the intentional activity of others, and the threats and promises as well as the opportunities for action--the real human possibilities--that our surroundings present us? The a priori argument for such a phenomenology stems from the claim that perception is what makes action possible by providing our demonstrative connection to the world. This is to say that there is a gap between our descriptive-linguistic beliefs about the world and our capacity for action. Indeed, it is precisely the point of the example of the passive subject that it makes manifest one aspect of this gap. The passive subject agrees with us about all the objective facts--those that can be expressed in the language of the natural sciences without demonstratives or indexicals--and yet finds our talk of action unintelligible. Since the passive subject also understands the inferential relations between the various elements of the agential vocabulary what he lacks, as I shall

suggest below, is something perceptual; he lacks the perception of opportunities for action that are genuine opportunities for him, or, in Gibson's terms, he lacks affordances.³³

As this suggests, however, another aspect of the gap between our descriptive-linguistic beliefs and our capacity for action lies in the irreducibility of demonstrative to descriptive content. In fact, it is the upshot of the criticisms of Stephen Schiffer's position in "The Basis of Reference" by Brian Loar, Gareth Evans, and others that demonstrative content is irreducible to descriptive content even as supplemented by the "essential indexicals" 'I', 'here', and 'now'.³⁴ Indeed, this is just another aspect of the fact that our system of descriptive representations requires semantic grounding--grounding in a relation to things in our surroundings that is nondescriptive and nonlinguistic: in other words, in a relation that is irreducibly demonstrative or ostensive.

According to the account of perception and consciousness outlined in the last section, however, the perceptual and the demonstrative are the agential. Being in a perceptual relation to the objects in one's environment is a matter of those objects being accessible to a wide range of one's basic action capacities--particularly those capacities that go to make up one's demonstrative skills. Thus being in a perceptual relation to the objects in question is being in a demonstrative relation, and this in turn is being in an agential relation to them.

How, then, do we get the result that we perceive affordances? Our capacities for basic actions require that we be given things as doable--that we be presented not just with threats and promises (to use Gilbert Ryle's expression), but with opportunities. Moreover, the capacity for action requires that we be able to identify demonstratively what we might call the "environmental levers of action"--that we know, for example, that in order to leave the room we have to turn that handle.

The a priori argument, then, is that whatever else it is or is not, perception is our demonstrative link to the world. This link provides semantic grounding for our language and for the linguistic-descriptive content of our beliefs and is constituted by our basic action capacities. And our capacity for action presupposes that affordances are a part of our perceptual experience--the perceptual experience that separates us from the passive subject with whom we share all of our objective, descriptive beliefs. But this argument is abstract--largely because it appeals to interrelations among the referents of a small circle of expressions ('perceptual experience', 'demonstrative relation', 'basic action capacities', 'demonstrative

skills', 'semantic grounding', 'perception of affordances'). Because the account is explicitly nonreductive, circularity is not the issue. But an account that involves an extremely small circle risks being less informative than we might have hoped. To address this problem, I shall give another argument that we do in fact perceive affordances. Besides expanding the circle involved in the analysis, this has the added advantage of loosening the grip of the camera analogy on our visual perception.

VII. The Slippery Slope Argument for an Inflationary Phenomenology

That we perceive depth directly--that it is not, at the personal level, inferred on the basis of something that is given more directly, such as apparent shapes, is unlikely to be denied by many. Moreover, where the passive subject is concerned, we have seen strong reasons for believing that the difference between such a subject and a normal subject cannot be explained simply in terms of descriptive belief content. Nor could it be a matter of sense-data alone, since on the classical understanding, there should be no relevant difference in the sense-data available to the passive subject and his closest normal counterpart (i.e., a normal subject situated in the same position, with eyes open and working normally during the same period of time etc.). These two examples alone should be sufficient to undermine the camera analogy conception of visual perception. In addition to providing semantic grounding compatible with Frege's constraint, however, that conception has a further advantage--it provides a noncircular way of saying what our visual experience is like, a way which is independent of saying what it represents. We can talk, for example, about the layout of apparent shapes in a visual field in a way that seems independent of what they are the apparent shapes of. (Think of an unpainted paint-by-numbers canvas and note that while one may recognize all the shapes, one may completely fail to recognize the subject depicted.) And because we can do so, and do so in a way that is independent of the concepts normally used to characterize the objects and events that the perceptual experience represents, this conception of experience seems to give us a vivid sense, not only that our experience grounds our linguistic representations, but of how it does so. And because the conception has this advantage, it is unlikely that any one or two examples will make much headway against it. It will

be useful, then, to see something of the variety of ways in which this conception is violated by our visual experience.

(1) Orientation in Space. Along with the claim that we perceive depth directly, the analogous claim regarding many forms of orientation in space is relatively uncontroversial. As Peacocke puts it:

the experience of being in a tilted room is different from that of being in the same room when it is upright and the experiencer's body is tilted. Or again, a visual experience as of everything around one swinging to one's left can be distinguished from the visual experience as of oneself revolving rightwards on one's vertical axis.³⁵

Of course, it is clear that the experiential difference is largely a causal result of events in the inner ear, as well as other nonvisual orientational cues. But this is quite compatible with the experiences (and the differences between the experiences) being visual. (We may simply be aware of an visual difference and unaware of anything going on in the inner ear.)

(2) Personal Orientation. Imagine waking up in a room and not remembering or having any idea where you are. If the memories of your surroundings now come flooding back, there is an overwhelming inclination to say that when one has finally come to recognize the room, it looks different. This inclination, I would suggest, should be taken at face value: the room really does look different in the same way in which a city square or small park may look very different when one is thoroughly familiar with the surrounding city, from the way it looked on a first encounter. Again it might be suggested that there is a causal explanation: in these cases, perhaps, that all one's unconscious habits of looking (i.e., the unconscious eye movements used to scan the scene which is viewed in a single direction with one's head still in both experiences being compared) have changed from the earlier to the later experience. This is not an implausible suggestion, but again it misses the point. At the personal level it may be that no such difference is apparent. It may simply be the case that the same scene viewed from the same point in the same direction looks different on the two occasions.

(3) Gestalt Phenomena. The same pattern of shapes on a page may look very different depending on how it is organized as a figure and ground--for example, the familiar figure that may be

seen as two profiles separated by empty space on the one hand or as a goblet or vase on the other. The same point could be made about figures that from the perspective of gestalt principles can be organized into a number of equally good patterns. In this case too the point might be made that the different figures involve different unconscious habits of looking and again it is irrelevant. At the personal level there is a visual difference that has no camera-analogue counterpart.

(4) Aspects. In the case of the duck-rabbit or the Necker Cube, different aspects produce different visual experiences, even though the subject is perfectly well aware that the difference has no camera-analogue explanation. In other words, there is no difference that could be described in terms of a difference in the layout of apparent shapes, sizes, and colors in a visual field.

(5) Mechanical Causality. Michotte's experiments in the perception of causality suggest that under well-defined circumstances a sequence of images on a screen (of the sort that might be produced by a two-dimensional animated film) can produce a visual impression of causality that is distinct from the visual impression of the pattern of movement itself.³⁶ Taken at face value, these experiments suggest that there is an aspect of our visual experience that is irreducible to a pattern of shapes in motion within a visual field--and hence an aspect that is incompatible with the camera-analogue account. Indeed, it is the camera analogy that seems to have led Hume to claim that there is no impression of a causal connection: and Michotte is normally interpreted as having provided strong evidence that Hume was wrong.³⁷

(6) Intentional Causality. Current research in this area, like Michotte's is based on patterns of movements among shapes on a screen. Interpreted at face value, it indicates that there is a visual impression or experience of intentional causality or third person agency. (Some shapes, for example, are seen as "helping" or "hindering" other shapes in the latter's attempts to bring about some goal or end state.)³⁸

(7) Affordances. J. J. Gibson argued that we perceive affordances, or objects of use--things that will support us or shelter us, that will provide escape routes or hide us from danger, or the routes or means to desired goals--directly.³⁹ Although Gibson's claims are not always easy to interpret, it is natural to take him as saying at least that we are not given a visual impression or experience of pragmatically neutral objects or situations on the basis of which we impose an interpretation or infer a description that

entails their utility. Rather, at the person level, their usefulness is given to us directly in visual perception.

As Sartre puts it

When I run after a streetcar . . . there is consciousness of-the-streetcar-having-to-be overtaken . . . I am then plunged into the world of objects . . . It is they which present themselves with . . . with attractive and repellent qualities.³⁹

And to say that such pragmatic qualities are given directly is simply to say that there is nothing given in our visual perception that is given more directly and on the basis of which the utility of such objects and situations is given. And we can understand this claim by analogy with the claim that (normally) one's raising one's arm is a basic action. To make the latter claim is not to deny the existence of causal processes that mediate between the occurrence of the intentions to raise one's arm and one's arm going up. Rather, it is to say that there is nothing one does--no other action one performs--in virtue of which one raises one's arm.

IX. Conclusion

If none of these things is essential to perception what is? And is there no sense in which perception necessarily provides a given element in experience? In fact there are a number of sense all closely related.

(1) Perception is necessarily given in the sense of

- (a) providing an element that is nonlinguistic and nondescriptive
- (b) being prior to language and descriptive content.
- (c) grounding language and descriptive content subject to Frege's constraint--in other words providing semantic grounding.

(2) Perception is necessarily given in the sense of being intimately tied to our capacity for demonstration and demonstrative reference. Some would say that our perceptual experience makes perceptual demonstratives available,⁴¹ but this would at least seem to presuppose a prior and completely

independent account of the content of perceptual demonstratives, and it is unclear where such an account would come from. I would prefer to say that perceptual experience puts us into a demonstrative relation to the object of the perception (an actual relation to an actual object if 'perception' is being used as a success term, and if not, then at least a virtual relation to an actual or virtual object). Another way to put this is to say that perception makes it possible for us to act in the world on the basis of our beliefs (beliefs that are about the world) when we are in an appropriate perceptual relation to it.

(3) Perception is necessarily given in the sense of there being something it is like from the subjective point of view to have a conscious perceptual experience.

These three claims, though they come from very different areas of contemporary philosophy are closely related. The first point, that language must be grounded is, as we have seen, an extremely general one in the theory of meaning. It is implicit in Russell's contention that the logically proper names refer to sense-data and, arguably, in the entire empiricist tradition. It is mentioned explicitly in epistemological contexts by Ayer, as we have seen, and by Anthony Quinton many others and should hardly be controversial. As Ayer puts it

. . . It is necessary that, besides the rules which correlate symbols with other symbols, our language should also contain rules of meaning, which correlate symbols with observable facts.⁴²

The point that language must be grounded while simultaneously satisfying Frege's constraint is perhaps more controversial. (Actually, the point is not one that is vigorously denied on the basis of cogent arguments. Rather, it is one with regard to which the profession is currently in denial.) It is, nonetheless also implicit in Russell's choice of sense-data as the referents of logically proper names. Any solution to what I have called elsewhere the problem of perspectival grounding⁴³ must do at least as much as Russell's theory does and do so without the (by now) all too evident drawbacks of a sense-datum theory. Theories like Pitcher's or Armstrong's that make perceptual experience a matter of belief acquisition or a disposition toward belief acquisition far from doing more than Russell's theory do less--they provide no account at all of perspectival grounding.⁴⁴

The second point comes out of more recent work in the philosophy of language: work on essential indexicals, de re and de se thought, and demonstratives.⁴⁵ Perry's point that our ability to act in the world depends on our ability to deploy propositions couched in essential indexicals such as 'I', 'here', and 'now' has been widely assimilated. One's belief that the Department meeting starts at noon and one's desire to arrive on time can produce (in the appropriate way) action only if one is capable of recognizing something which can only be expressed in terms of such an indexical--e.g., it is now (almost) noon. The same point, however, applies to demonstratives. One cannot leave the room as a basic action unless one can recognize something couched in demonstrative terms such as that that is the exit. And like our capacity to recognize what would be expressed through the use of essential indexicals, our capacity to recognize what would be expressed through the use of demonstratives is basic. As we have seen, it is irreducible to any of our capacities for linguistic-descriptive understanding. But as the last example suggests, such a demonstrative capacity depends on our perceptual capacities. (The claim is not that every basic action requires our perceptual contact with the object of the action. One might reach for, and move, something such as a gear shift lever in the dark. The claim is simply that our agential capacities and our demonstrative capacities depend on some perceptual capacities.)

the final point comes out of the study of consciousness in the philosophy of mind. As we have seen, the perfect blindsight argument undercuts the plausibility of analyses of conscious perceptual experience in terms of second order representation. This is because, as I have argued, it seems inconceivable that we could have all the first order capacities of a normal subject and lack conscious visual perceptual experience. The alternative, as I have argued elsewhere, is to recognize that what the normal blindsight subject lacks is not the second order representation of first order (unconscious) perceptual states. Rather it is the accessibility of the objects of his or her first order states (e.g., the images flashed on the screen in the experimental set up) to a wide range of basic action capacities, including particularly demonstrative and phenomenal capacities.⁴⁶

If this last point is correct, then we have completed the circle of conceptual dependencies. Action (in the world) requires demonstrative capacities which require (conscious) perceptual capacities which require agential capacities (particularly those that I have called demonstrative and phenomenal). The conclusion is that these capacities form a tightly connected domain of mutual dependencies. This

domain grounds our linguistic descriptive capacities in the sense that it takes us outside the circle of language to language or symbol to symbol connections (recall Ayer) and it does so in accordance with Frege's constraint.

Suppose then that we take seriously the claim that the positive "essence" of perception is to ground language subject to Frege's constraint by (roughly) putting us in a demonstrative relation to objects in the world. Then there seems to be nothing to rule out our being given affordances--opportunities for action--directly. We have seen too many difficulties with arguments based on the camera analogy to suppose that they could block such a suggestion. Nor, as we have seen, is it ruled out by any considerations of what perception must be like if creatures like us are to have states with content and contact with their world. And certainly phenomenology--that is, considerations of how our perceptual experience seems to us from the first person perspective that we can be and very often are given directly not simply the shapes and colors of the objects with which we interact. As the slippery slope argument suggests, we seem to be given depth, gestalt properties, aspects, meaning properties, causal properties, and some intentional properties, directly. And the arguments we have been considering suggest that there is no reason not to take this apparent fact at face value.

The foregoing considerations suggest that nothing rules out our perceiving affordances directly. I shall now argue that in fact we must do so. For the passive subject is like us as far as all the contents of our intentional states are concerned that can be expressed without an essential use of any specifically agential concepts (the nonagential concepts, for short).⁴⁷ Indeed, we can tell the story of the passive subject so that not only does he share all of our nonagential beliefs, but having been an active subject, he has a perfectly competent grasp of all the inferential roles associated with our agential concepts. Here is an analogy. At the end Louis Malle's Damage, the main character recalls meeting, after several years of separation, the woman for whom his obsession has destroyed his career and family and says: "She looked like anyone else." We can assume that in this state of incomprehension of the actions of his earlier self, the character would remain capable of applying all the predicates to the former object of his love that did not imply the special character of his relation to her. But further, we can imagine that he recalls all too well the characterizations with these implications that he applied in the past and that he can trace their conceptual connections and inferential roles with the same facility and competence as his

former self. Indeed we can even imagine that he remains competent to say with regard to counterfactual situations that he could have experienced but didn't, what it would have been appropriate to say and believe. What we can imagine him lacking in this disenchanted state is no part of the inferential roles of the concepts that expressed his obsessive love, but any sense of what in his experience made it reasonable to apply them.

Like the disenchanted lover, the passive subject lacks nothing of the conceptual roles of our agential vocabulary but their experiential grounding. This presupposes, of course, that there is no inferential route from an understanding of our nonagential conceptual scheme to a genuine understanding and appreciation of agency. That this is so is made clear by the fact that for any objective characterization that purports to locate his agency as an objective feature of the world, we can imagine the passive subject saying that he hopes that feature will come to characterize him. We have, in other words, as we have seen, an analogue of Moore's argument. The passive subject says, in effect, that he understands full well the advantage it would be to him if events in his brain caused (in certain appropriate ways) his limbs to move. But we can nonetheless imagine that despite this appreciation, the utter incomprehensibility of our suggestions that he do something remains unchanged.

It is this inferential insulation of the agential and nonagential perspectives that forces us to accept the direct apprehension of affordances to explain what we have and the passive subject lacks, as well as to explain how our agential concepts are to be grounded. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that we inhabit a different world from the passive subject or that our conceptual schemes are incommensurable-- where both of these claims are understood in the sense in which comparable claims regarding theorists guided by different paradigms have been ascribed to Kuhn.⁴⁸ In both cases the richness that allegedly characterizes perceptual experience plays a crucial role in generating the incommensurability. In the Kuhnian case, the inability of theorists in the grip of different paradigms to understand fully each other's theories stems from two sources. First the concepts of neither theory can be definitionally reduced to the concepts of the other. (And, needless to say, there is no third theory in which they can be defined). Second, since each theory generates its own theory laden perceptual experience, there is no neutral basis for comparison. Similarly, in the case of the normal subject and the passive subject, there is no definitional reduction of the normal subject's agential concepts in terms of the objectivist notions in terms

that the passive subject understands. And because the passive subject lacks our agency-laden experiences, there is no way in which he can simply learn our agential concepts ostensively.

If this analysis is roughly correct, then it follows that there could not be a completely passive subject--at least not if subjectivity requires intentional states. For according to the analysis, conscious perceptual experience requires the accessibility of the objects of perception to a wide range of basic actions, particularly of the demonstrative and phenomenal variety. And since (it has been claimed) intentional states have genuine content in virtue of their ties to perceptual states, a completely passive subject should be, on this analysis, a conceptual impossibility.⁴⁹ But this is really just to reemphasize what has already been said--that perception, a capacity for demonstration, and a capacity for basic action form a tightly connected domain of mutually supporting relations.

It is not simply for dramatic effect, then, that the example is one of a slowly encroaching passivity. If we imagine the stages of the subject's progress toward passivity prior to those of the example, we should perhaps suppose that what is first lost is the capacity for deliberate action based on explicit practical reasoning--that Hamlet-like the subject loses the connection between reason and action--indeed that the process of reasoning becomes antithetic to action. This is consistent, of course, with the persistence of relatively well entrenched routines, the performance of which we can suppose to cease at a later stage. Even then, however, we can imagine that the subject remains capable of spontaneous responses to exceptionally strong stimuli--the subject hears what sounds like a riot in the street and leaps up to look out the window or sees you about to drink what he takes to be a poisoned glass of wine and leaps up to knock it out of your hand. And as the example is described, we are certainly imagining that the subject finds verbal stimuli so powerful that he responds spontaneously--at least until the spontaneity of his speech has been undermined.

By this stage, however, or at least by the stage at which the subject's verbal responses have become somewhat more laconic, we can well believe his claim not to find action genuinely intelligible. But we can still imagine, I think, that if full-blown affordances are gone--except perhaps at the brief moment at which spontaneous actions are performed--there are nonetheless attenuated counterparts--memories of things "done," hopes for a "normal" future--sufficiently anthropomorphic and agential in character to

generate a domain of perceptual, demonstrative, and agential connections rich enough to ground the content of intentional states.

Indeed we know that this must be possible because we know that in cases of extreme depression the domain of agency and of the self shrinks. All that remains is that we describe the experience of a subject for whom this has occurred with devastating effect.

I saw things, smooth as metal, so cut off, so detached from each other, so illuminated and tense that they filled me with terror. When, for example, I looked at a chair or jug, I thought not of their use or function--a jug not as something to hold water and milk, a chair not as something to sit in--but as having lost their names, their functions and meanings; they became things⁵⁰ . . . Living in an environment empty, artificial and apathetic, an invisible, insuperable wall divided me from people and things.⁵¹

And after such an experience the return of agency has the force of revelation.

With the astonishment that one views a miracle, I devoured with my eyes everything that happened . . . They were useful things, having sense, capable of giving pleasure. Here was an automobile to take me to the hospital, cushions I could rest on . . . And to the stupefaction of the nurse, for the first time I dared to handle the chairs, to change the arrangement of the furniture. . . What unknown joy, to have an influence on things; to do with them what I liked and especially to have the pleasure of wanting the change.⁵²

Footnotes

1. We can take factual here to include anything expressible in a nonagential--and for reasons that will become clear later, nonnormative--vocabulary. These necessary omissions aside, there is no drawback in construing the domain of the factual as widely as possible.
2. Accounts of agent causation are clearly not objective in this sense, since the concept of an agent is ineliminable. An account which simply yokes agential and objectivist concepts together without explanation, however, is hardly illuminating.
3. Freedom and Belief (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). See especially Ch. 2.

4. Most such analyses have been understood in this way. If, however, the analysis is a posteriori, then the argument against it would have to appeal to what I have called the property dualism argument. See “Curse of the Qualia” and “Why the Property Dualism Argument Will Not Go Away.” We needn’t address these issues here, however, since an a posteriori argument would not address the problem of the meaningfulness of the agential vocabulary.

5. Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (New York: Penguin, 1977).

6. Mackie, pp. 31, 35, 40, 42.

7. Mackie, p. 29.

8. Mackie, p. 40.

9. Mackie, pp. 29, 35.

10. Mackie, pp. 35, 40.

II. Mackie, p. 23

12. Compare this to Smith’s claim about beliefs and desires being independent existences. The Moral Problem (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 12.

13. Mackie, p. 42

14. Smith, p. 12

15. The radical difference between the perspective of a normal subject and the perspective of a subject in the grip of a pathology that approaches that of the passive subject has been extensively documented in both literature and clinical psychology. I address this further in the conclusion.

16. Mackie, p. 38

17. Mackie, pp. 38-39.

18. Mackie, p. 39

19. E. H. Gombrich, "Illusion and Art," in R. L. Gregory and E. H. Gombrich, eds., Illusion in Nature and Art, p. 208, quoted in Joel Snyder, "Picturing Vision," Critical Inquiry, Spring 1980, p. 500.

20. Gombrich, p. 240, quoted in Snyder, p. 501.

21. Snyder, p. 515.

22. Sense and Content, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 12.

23. Bertrand Russell, Problems of Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); A. J. Ayer, The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge (London: Macmillan, 1962); Robert J. Swartz, ed., Perceiving, Sensing, and Knowing (New York: Doubleday, 1965), Section II.

24. The correct shape is wider at the top than at the base and has interior base angles of approximately 105° on the left and 135° on the right. Thus the three departures from the trapezoid are the convergence of the top and base, the greater width at the top, and the very significant difference in the base angles.

25. If the distance from the foot to the eye is 5'4", then the hand is 15 times closer to the eye than the foot. If the real ratio is 11/2 to 1, the ratio of the apparent lengths is 24 to 1. For taller subjects the ratio will be significantly higher. Typical responses are in the neighborhood of 5 to 1.

26. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Perspective, Optics, and Delft Artists around 1650, (New York: Garland, 1977), pp. 70-71

27. To see the point on the philosophical side, consider the problem that in viewing a row of columns perpendicular to the line of sight, the projections of the end columns on a transparent plane between the row and the viewer will be wider than the projection of the middle columns. It is sometimes thought that the problem is addressed by pointing to the curvature of the retina or the claim that what determines the character of our visual perception is a matter of the size of the angle and not the projection of that angle on a transparent plane between the object and the eye. But to say that the character of our conscious perceptual experience is a matter of the visual angle and not the projection on an appropriate plane is just to say that such experience is not pictorial in character--that no picture corresponds to the way in which the world is given to us in visual experience. And the same applies to the point about the curvature of the retina. The question is not what mechanism produces our experience but what it is like to have that experience.

This distinction is recognized by Gombrich, "Standards of Truth: The Arrested Image and the Moving Eye," Critical Inquiry, Winter 1980, pp. 237-273. See especially pp. 266-273.

28. Such sociological considerations range from the increased status accorded to artists as the ideology of perspective representation developed to the increased significance attached to visual observation and the consequences of this development for early modern science. See Wheelock, pp. 85-86; Snyder, p. 523.

29. Ayer, pp. 87-88, 107.

30. For example, referring expressions 'N' and 'M' differ in their cognitive significance if and only if there is some predicate expression 'F' such that the subject could be rational in believing what he or she would express by saying 'N is F' and not believing what he or she would express by saying 'M is F'.

31. See Larry Weiskrantz, Blindsight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

32. See footnote 23.

33. James J. Gibson, The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum, 1986), pp. 127-128, 134.

34. Stephen Schiffer, "The Basis of Reference," Erkenntnis 13 (1978), pp. 171-206; Brian Loar, Mind and Meaning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 99, n.1; Gareth Evans, The Varieties of Reference (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 173 n.44; David Austin, What's the Meaning of "This"? (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), Chapter 3.

35. Peacocke, p. 9.

36. A. Michotte, The Perception of Causality (New York: Basic Books, 1963).

37. See T. R. Miles, "Commentary," Michotte, pp. 410-415.

38. Dan Sperber, David Premack, and Ann James Premack, eds., Causal Cognition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Part III.

39. Gibson, pp. 127-128, 134.

40. Jean-Paul Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1992), pp. 48-49.

41. Peacocke, "Does Perception Have a Nonconceptual Content?" Journal of Philosophy 98 (May 2001), p. 244.
42. Ayer, p. 112; Anthony Quinton, The Nature of Things (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 126-130. Ayer's claim is discussed in Michael Williams, Groundless Belief (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 46-56; Quinton's is discussed in Laurence Bonjour, The Structure of Empirical Knowledge (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 65-72.
43. "Consciousness and the Problem of Perspectival Grounding," paper read at the Workshop on Consciousness Naturalized, Certosa di Pontignano, Siena, May 28, 1999.
44. George Pitcher, A Theory of Perception (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); David Armstrong, "Perception and Belief," in Jonathan Dancy, ed., Perceptual Knowledge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).
45. Schiffer, "The Basis of Reference"; John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," *Nous* 13 (March, 1979), 3-21; Loar, Mind and Meaning; Evans, The Varieties of Reference; David Lewis, "Attitudes De Re and De Se," reprinted with a Postscript in Philosophical Papers, 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 133-159; David Austin, What's the Meaning of "This"?.
46. In "Consciousness and Perspectival Grounding." For a theory according to which consciousness is a matter of second order representation (thought), see David Rosenthal, "Two Concepts of Consciousness," in his The Nature of Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 462-477.
47. The passive subject could, for example, accept logical laws embodying agential notions--e.g. For every x, if x is an agent then either x is an agent or x is a prime number.

48. Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962).

49. Indeed the analysis suggests that strictly we should not say that we see affordances, since conscious visual perception of any kind presupposes a capacity for action, and the capacity for action presupposes the perception of affordances. It might be better, I think, to say that we have conscious visual perceptual experience and a capacity for action as a result of our being given affordances directly.

50. Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl (New York: Penguin, 1951), p. 55.

51. Autobiography, p. 83.

52. Autobiography, p. 106.

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