

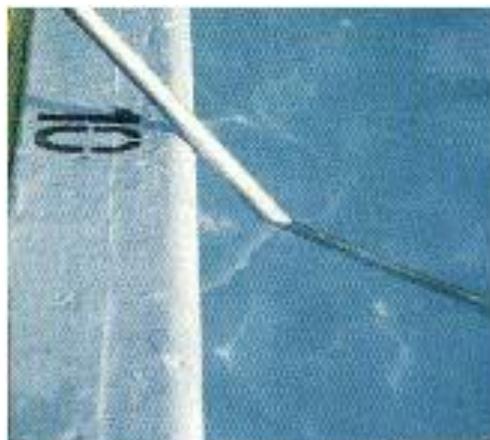
Comments on Sethi's 'Sensible Kinds and Sensible Instances: An Account of Property Individuation' – Ian Phillips

1. Sethi's Core Proposals

- *Perceptual Presence*: 'All sensory experiences [including hallucinations and illusions] make us aware of instances of sensible qualities like color and shape' (1).
- *Mind-Independence*: 'Physical objects have the colors and shapes that they do in a robustly mind-independent way' (2).
- *The Straightforward View*: 'All sensory experience makes us aware of instances of sensible qualities ... but the ontological status of these instances varies across veridical and delusive experiences' (3). Sensible qualities like colour and shape are 'ontologically flexible kinds'.

2. Phenomenology and Flexibility

- 'When I look at a straight stick, which is refracted in water and so appears crooked, my experience is qualitatively the same as if I were looking at a stick that really was crooked... [If, however,] when our perceptions were delusive, we were always perceiving something of a different kind from what we perceived when they were veridical, we should expect our experience to be qualitatively different in the two cases. We should be able to tell from the intrinsic character of a perception whether it was a perception of a sense-datum or a material thing. But this is not possible...' (Ayer, quoted in Austin 1962)



Ayer is asking 'too much of phenomenology'.

- Experience can be *deceptive*. A quality instance might *appear* to be some way it is not. An instance of crookedness might appear mind-independent despite not being so.
- Experience can be *silent*. Differences in ontological status might not show up in experience at all. A quality instance might not be presented as mind-dependent or independent.

Sensible experience

- Sensible experience provides *prima facie* support for the *Straightforward View* since it sometimes positively presents colour instances as mind-independent, sometimes as mind-dependent.
- 'Consider ... the kind of phosphene experience one has when pushing down on a closed eyelid. Alternatively, consider an experience of an after-image caused by fatigued opponent photoreceptors. In such cases, it is clear to the subject having the experience that the item she is presented with—the phosphene or the after-image—is mind-dependent. It is apparent to the subject just in virtue of the kind of experience she enjoys that the phosphene or the after-image exists only insofar as it is experienced. And nonetheless, the most natural description of such experiences invariably includes the ascription of sensible qualities—colors and shapes—to these entities.' (6)

- ‘There are quite mundane reasons why we do not regard afterimage experiences as having objective import. Our ordinary experiences are largely of a highly familiar and stable world. In contrast, armchair afterimages are typically feeble and fleeting. Afterimages are also typically experienced in full knowledge of their aetiology and the various counter-indications. ... When you experience this image, you know that you have been staring for thirty seconds at a figure on the page in an attempt to generate an afterimage. When you experience it, you also know that there are no Bob Dylan-esque holograms or strange lights floating around your office. You may also know that your eyes are closed. Finally, the image will ... tend to move when you move your eyes, and be difficult to occlude. In combination, these factors make it quite unsurprising that we do not feel any inclination to treat the experience as a genuine perceptual encounter with a publicly visible object.’ (Phillips 2013)



- ‘I could scarcely convince myself that the light was not still burning; it seemed as if I could see my real hand, the real objects on my table and even the pictures on the wall. These decidedly positive afterimages persisted for many seconds.... When I fixate with both eyes and then close them carefully after the last illumination, it is often difficult for me to believe that they are really closed. Observers often exclaim, “My eyes won’t shut,” “I’ve lost control of my eyelids”.’ (Swindle 1916)

3. Metaphysics and Flexibility

Ontological flexibility possible in general

- ‘The economic property of *being legal tender* [can be instantiated by] ... pieces of paper, verbal promises, bars of gold and digital processes’ (8)—an ontologically diverse set of items.
- ‘Physical objects (paintings, sculptures), mental entities (minds and their ideas), events (dances, plays), and abstract objects (stories, mathematical proofs)’ can all instantiate property of *being beautiful*.

The reverse causal argument from hallucination (e.g., Martin 2004)

- If we are aware of a mind-dependent quality instance in a causally matching hallucination, we must also be aware of a mind-dependent quality instance in veridical perception. How then can veridical perception present us with mind-independent instances?
- ‘The mind and the physical object secure the existence of one and the same instance’. This instance is both mind-dependent and independent. (See: Sethi, U. 2020. *Sensible Over-Determination. PQ.*)

Individuating quality instances

- *Simple Individuation*: For instances, f and f^* , of the same sensible quality, F , $f = f^*$ only if the ontological base of $f =$ the ontological base of f^* . (11) Where an instance’s ontological base = ‘the ontologically prior entities that explain [its] existence’ (11).

Sethi’s counter-example

- Both statue and clay weigh 10lbs. But only one instance of weighing 10lbs here.
- ‘Simple Individuation is too simple. It does not take into consideration the possibility that objects that are not identical but intimately related may share some of their property instances because of the nature of the ontological relation that they stand in.’
- Is this a counter-example?
 - (a) Ontological base of the weight *both the statue and the clay*. Then, the ontological base of $f =$ the ontological base of f^* .
 - (b) Ontological base of statue’s weight just the clay.



‘Head of a Girl,’ Wittgenstein (1925-28)

Revised individuation and causal relations

- *Revised Individuation*: For instances f and f^* of the same sensible quality, F , where the ontological base of f is o and the ontological base of f^* is o^* , $f = f^*$ only if either $o=o^*$ **or** o and o^* **stand in the right kind of ontological relation**.

- For instances r_1 and r_2 of the same sensible quality, *Red*, where the ontological base of r_1 is **perceiver, S's, mind** and the ontological base of r_2 is **a red cardinal**, $r_1 = r_2$ since *S's* mind and the red cardinal, *C*, stand in the right kind of **causal relation**.

Particular sensory states are individuated as such causally

- Consider a seamless transition between three sensory episodes:
 - (i) *SE1*: *S* enjoys a veridical perception of a red cardinal, *C*. Here *C* causes *S's* sensory 'state in the right way' (15).
 - (ii) *SE2*: *S* enjoys a veridical perception of a qualitatively identical red cardinal, *C**. Here *C** causes *S's* sensory 'state in the right way' (ibid.).
 - (iii) *SE3*: *S* enjoys a neurologically induced hallucination indistinguishable from *SE1* and *SE2*. This hallucination is not of any particular bird. *S's* sensory state is not caused by any bird.
- The sensory states in *SE1-3*, are different particulars which are individuated as such causally: 'a perceiver's sensory states are ... dependent for their existence, *qua* particulars, on the objects in the world that bring them about [i.e., causes them].' (16)

Two questions/concerns

- (1) Suppose we do individuate sensory states causally.
 - Causes and causally individuated effects typically don't share instances of common qualities. The heat of the sun and the heat of our sunburn is not the same instance of heat.
 - Sethi claims perception is disanalogous, for whereas both sun and skin can instantiate heat, our minds are the ontological bases of sensible qualities but do not instantiate them.
 - But why we should conclude from this that the sensible quality in veridical perception is a single over-determined instance. Why not think we have two instances: one instantiated by the red bird; the other not instantiated by anything?
- (2) Why think sensory states are individuated causally?
 - As relationalists, why not individuate sensory episodes by their *constituents*: by the objects/quality instances present to the mind in each (cf. Snowdon 1980)?
 - Sethi resists this: 'the relationship between the perceiver's sensory state and the physical object is not one of material composition. Instead, it is closer to a relation of causal individuation.'
 - But think of sensory states as events or states with constituent elements. Compare: marriages and spouses, cars and car crashes (French & Phillips 2020).
 - NB: If sensory episodes are individuated by their constituent objects/quality instances, not their causes, it's again not obvious Sethi's argument goes through. If a marriage instantiates goodness and a spouse does also, it's doubtful that this is the same quality instance.

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