

MATTHEW NUDDS & CASEY O'CALLAGHAN

*Sounds & Perception: New Philosophical Essays*

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A Martian reading contemporary work on perception might be forgiven for thinking that humans had only one sense: vision. Witness the title of one popular recent collection: *Vision and mind: selected readings in the philosophy of perception*. Our obsession with sight is stifling. It leads to distorted vision-based models of the other senses, and it means that the distinctive puzzles raised by non-visual modalities are routinely neglected. With this pioneering and long-overdue collection of essays on auditory perception, Nudds and O'Callaghan aim to start correcting this state of affairs. They deserve much praise, not least for their own substantial contributions and splendid introduction.

The papers they have assembled are necessarily eclectic, aiming to introduce the reader to the wide range of issues raised by sound perception. Thus, the second half contains several contributions focused on aspects of two very special cases of audition—musical experience and speech perception—as well as a stimulating essay on the perception of silence. The question at the heart of the volume, however, is a deceptively simple one: what are sounds? The question raises many interrelated issues. Take two. First, are sounds creatures of space? If so, where are they located? Second, how do sounds relate to the material world, and, in particular, to their sources?

Pursuing these matters, the majority of contributors adopt an attractive methodology: an account of the nature of sounds must do justice to what it is like, subjectively, to hear them. How sounds *seem* should, so far as possible, constrain one's account of what sounds *are*. Given this shared starting point, the depth and extent of disagreement that emerges is striking. It turns out to be remarkably hard to agree over how sounds seem.

On the one hand, it is natural to hold that we hear sounds as being *at* the particular distal place where their source is located. We hear the bark to be where the dog is. Taking such appearances at face value, theorists locate sounds where their sources are. This involves sharply distinguishing between sounds themselves and the waves by which we hear them, just as we distinguish the objects we see from the light they reflect into our eyes. Locating sounds with their sources, Locke treats them as *properties* of their sources, the auditory analogues of colours. Appealing to temporal appearances, others insist that sounds are source-involving *events*. We talk of hearing dogs and doorbells as well as their barks and buzzes. Both proposals suggest an account of this source-perception: we hear sources either by perceiving their properties, or by hearing events involving them (e.g. their disturbings of the surrounding air).

On the other hand, it is no less natural to think that we hear sounds as coming *from* their sources, as propagating towards us. Taking these appearances at face value, we might either think of sounds as lobbed from their sources towards us like balls, or, alternatively, like gas, spreading out through space from their sources. Sounds, on this picture, are not akin to objects seen in virtue of reflected light-waves, but closer to the light itself. Indeed, it is tempting to conclude that sounds are identical to, or instantiated by, their associated sound-waves. On this picture, it is far less clear what to say about source perception. If sounds are the direct objects of perception, and sounds are merely the causal products of their sources, we must either explain how source-perception is possible (seeing an effect is not generally sufficient for seeing its cause), or dispute the existence of such a phenomenon.

The contributors appeal to a wealth of considerations in defence of their various accounts. Nudds draws on his beautifully clear overview of the science of auditory processing. O'Callaghan focuses our attention on a variety of acoustical phenomena: echoes, inference, and transmission through barriers. Casati and Dokic point to rare cases of spatial deafness, as well as to underwater hearing and auditory tunnel effects. Given the contentiousness of appearances, one might hope that some of these considerations offered purchase on the nature of sounds independent of their appearances. But such hopes are vain. Whether or not the nature of sounds is *exhaustively* determined by the way they sound to a normal hearer, as Scruton argues persuasively, an appeal to auditory appearances is unavoidable if we are to be sure that our focus is

genuinely on sound (as opposed to some related but distinct property or process). Since limning the appearances is far harder than we might have imagined, an appreciation of the legion forms of auditory experience is invaluable. We need all the help we can get.