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Representationism Versus Perceptionism

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REPRESENTATIONISM

versus

PERCEPTIONISM

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The validity of the claims of epistemology depends, like that of any other such claim, upon verification. Both Representationists and Perceptionists believe they adequately account for what they maintain. Both verify what they hold to be an adequate explanation of valid knowledge. But both cannot be right; either one has the true explanation, the other the untrue, and vice versa, or both are wrong. But there is consolation in the fact that they do not concur in all details.

The Representationist holds that the perceiving subject is immediately aware of only subjective states. These internal objects, states of the modified self, are present immediately to the Ego. These states, data, modifications, must have an adequate cause. Since these data have a characteristic of externallity, the cause for them must be external. Only thus indirectly do we know external objects.

The Perceptionist, on the other hand, holds that what is immediately present to the perceiving subject, is the object being perceived. That the self is modified is not denied, but the fact that the self or Ego is immediately aware of this modification, is denied. In other words, the object is perceived directly by means of the process of perception. The object is perceived directly, and not the means by which the object is perceived.

It is evident that a grave disparity exists between the Representationist and the Perceptionist. It remains to be seen how each of these defends his respective position. We shall give, in the following pages, arguments for both sides, and accept the more practical and most evident.
II
REPRESENTATIONISM

Chapter 1.
Representationistic Appearance of Descartes' Reasoned Realism

The roots of Representationism, like those of other "non-conforming"1 philosophies, may, presumably, be traced to the reasoned realism of Rene Descartes. The reason for this accusation, according to some thinkers, is the fact that the existence of ideas is prior to the existence of external objects, as the following quotation indicates. Speaking of the qualities hardness, heat, light, color, scents, sounds, he says that

"certainly, considering the ideas of all these qualities which presented themselves to my mind, and which alone I perceived properly or immediately, it was not without reason that I believed myself to perceive objects quite different from my thought, to wit, bodies from which those ideas proceeded;" and he continues with a truth not denied by any Scholastic, and very few non-Scholastics even find reason to doubt:

"for I found by experience that these ideas presented themselves to me without my consent being requisite, so that I could not perceive any object . . . unless it were present to the organs of sense. . . . And because the ideas which I received through the senses were much more lively, more clear, . . . more distinct than any of those which I could of myself frame in meditation, . . . it appeared as though they could not have proceeded from my mind, so that they must necessarily have been produced in me by some other things. And having no knowledge of those objects excepting the knowledge which the ideas themselves gave me, nothing was more likely to occur to my mind than that the objects were similar to the ideas which were caused."2

In general, the mind, apart from its essence—thinking thing or substance—has ideas which are clear and distinct(mathematical propositions etc)

1. By "non-conforming" is meant not in total concord with Moderate Realism generally, and Percepcionism specifically.
2. Meditations on the First Philosophy, Rene Descartes, Med. VI
Besides these there are those effected by imagination and feeling (he means by "feeling" what in Scholastic terms amounts to sense-perception), which have a characteristic of externality. According to Descartes, these latter must be caused by objects external to the body because no better explanation is available. It is true that these ideas could have been caused by God. But since He

"has given me no faculty to recognize that this is the case; but a very great inclination to believe (that they are sent to me or) that they are conveyed to me by corporeal objects, I do not see how He could be defended from the accusation of deceit if these ideas were produced by causes other than corporeal objects."¹

So we have the mind possessing ideas of external reality. The mind knows or apprehends only ideas properly and immediately². By means of these ideas the existence of material and external objects is established. This is very definitely a representationistic standpoint.

Mind exists (and in a way functions) independently of matter. Body too, is independent of mind. This breach between mind and body does not permit of spanning. Obviously, the mind cannot immediately apprehend external and extended reality in any form. Therefore the logical and inevitable conclusion is that the mind can apprehend directly only its own affections.³

To discern the remissness of Descartes¹ theory of knowledge, among other things, requires no perspicacity. For a theory of knowledge to be adequate and acceptable the gap between the ideal and the real orders must be bridged if knowledge is to be of the real order.⁴

1. Meditation VI
2. Meditation VI
3. New Realism in the Light of Scholasticism, Sister Mary Verda, p.34
4. This does not mean that knowledge can be only of external objects. But to begin with, all knowledge must be grounded in experience of the external world by means of the senses.
Chapter 2.
Representationistic Aspects of Kant's Transcendental Idealism or Critical Rationalism

Immanuel Kant's representationism is more obvious if we may use, as incriminating evidence, some of his own specific statements. The very fact that critics generally denominate his philosophy as "transcendental idealism," more than implies that external reality and subjective states—the relation between them—are identified or not adequately accounted for. But idealism, as we shall see, is the fate, the inevitable necessity, of any philosophy which fails to reconcile the two spheres of reality—extramental and intramental realities—and which fails short of explanation of the origin of the intramental states and their precise relationship with the external realm.

Regarding the knowledge of external objects, which is not knowledge of external objects as they are in themselves, as Perceptionists hold, he says:

"... All our intuition is nothing but the representation of phenomena; that things which we see are not by themselves what we see," so that if we eliminate the subjective form of our senses, "all qualities, all relations of objects in space and time, may space and time themselves, would vanish. They cannot, as phenomena, exist by themselves, but in us only."

And there can be no question as to the meaning he attaches to representations:

"We have representations within us, and can become conscious of them; but however far that consciousness may extend, and however accurate and minute it may be, yet the representations are always representations only, that is, internal determinations of our mind."

1. The relation between subjective states and external reality.
2. By "intuition" Kant means sense-perception.
3. Transcendental Aesthetic of Critique of Pure Reason, I. Kant, second revised edition of Max Mueller, p. 54
4. Transcendental Analytic, Critique of Pure Reason, p. 161
Representations are all we are immediately aware of. And resentfully, Kant asks by what right do we add to these representations a reality beyond that of the subjective? By what right has this subjective reality, the representation or phenomenon, any reference to an objective reality? It does not have because it cannot have. There is no transcending the subjective order. The only objectivity about any mental phenomenon lies in its being universal and necessary. If a representation is judged to be necessary (there is really no judging taking place, but merely the spontaneity of concepts is unconsciously set into motion) and universal, then, and only then is it objective.

From the way Kant speaks of the object of experience, one would think that it has being and existence external to the mind. The contrary, however, is true. The object is what the mind makes it to be. For instance, he says that intuition is possible only when the object is given. "And the object can be given only through a certain affection of the mind." ¹ He starts out well, and ends lamentably.

And then the synthesis of sense experience. In the function or formation of sense-intuitions synthesis is used. The synthesis is in the sense that "it signifies the function whereby the mind unconsciously applies an a priori form or category to a datum, and thus constitutes "experience by constructing an object of knowledge."²

We can see by careful analysis that perception is perception of nothing. The noumenon is not perceived. What is perceived is what the mind adds to

1. Transcendental Aesthetic
the "manifold" of experience from its store of a priori forms. Immediate awareness is possible only of the representation or phenomenon.

That Kant has reversed, theoretically, the process of knowledge, he openly admits:

"Hitherto it has been supposed that all our knowledge must conform to the objects; but, under that supposition, all attempts to establish anything about them a priori, by means of concepts, and thus to enlarge our knowledge, have come to nothing. The experiment therefore ought to be made, whether we should not succeed better with the problems of metaphysic, by assuming that the objects must conform to our mode of cognition."  

So we see, that if the categories, the a priori forms, must be eliminated if the mind is to conform to objects, and if they be firmly established by objects conforming to them, then the latter alternative must be accepted and maintained at all costs for the sake of the a priori forms.

In Kant's epistemology there is indeed conformity. Something conforms to something else. But let us see what this is. He perceived the futility of denying conformity of some sort. Conformity was essential to knowledge, and valid knowledge at that. Now he is unable to transcend the ego, the subjective self, in order to posit the conformity of Perceptionists. Therefore there remained no other alternative than the following. There were two elements in his knowledge, namely mind and its phenomena. If mind constructs the objects of knowledge, and this according to constructive principles, then it is natural that there be some correspondence between object and its source which source is the constructive mind. At any rate, the conformity in Kant's epistemology is the one of mental appearances or phenomena to mind.  

2. Epist., Coffey, Vol. I, p. 197. Also see: The Philosophy of Kant by John Watson, p. 3.
be clear that whatever qualities—primary or secondary—objects have, the mind has endowed the objects with those particular qualities, and they are all that the mind can be immediately conscious or aware of.

Kant advances the following argument to prove that we cannot know objects directly.

"If phenomena were things by themselves (these things-by-themselves are objects of direct perception for Scholastics, i.e. those of them who are Perceptionists), the succession of the representations of their manifold would never enable us to judge how that manifold is connected in the objects."¹

This statement is in entire accord with the later representationists—J. G. Vance and Roy Wood Sellars—who maintain that we do not perceive the object directly because of the manifold and various impressions of the same object on consciousness through the senses. We shall deal with these later.

In Kant's theory of cognition, knowledge is of a mind-created object.² There is no possibility of any knowledge beyond what takes place in the mind. Immediate awareness, therefore, must be of mind products, which in turn are attributed to objects. This is clearly a representationistic tenet. The representation is of an object, but not a representation in any way similar to the quality of an external object. The representation is attributed to an extramental object, and the object becomes no more nor less than what is attributed to it. In other words, the mind, by means of the a priori concepts, gives the being to the noumenon, which being it creates for it, (by being is here meant qualities, all qualities perceivable by the senses, individually and collectively). Thus, Kant, in a sense, may be classed as a ¹Transcendental Analytic, p. 155.
²Epistemology, Coffey, Vol. 1, pp. 185-186.
Representationist, and in every sense, a rationalist in whose theory a priori concepts, innate principles of the pure understanding, occupy a position of prime importance.
Chapter 3.
Physical Representationism of Thomas Case

Physical representationism is the theory of Thomas Case contained in his Book: Physical Realism. This theory is based, from beginning to end, upon current theories of the physical sciences. Science is "Knowledge at its best", and alone is equal to the task of disclosing to us the real nature of the qualities of external objects.

Physical Realism proceeds in a manner similar to the following: External objects reveal themselves to us by affecting the organism. Immediately apprehended is not the extramental object as it is, but the effect of the object on the physical organism. That the object really i.e. actually as a physical, extended, extramental entity, exists, this science assures us.

The effect of the object takes place within the organism, since the internal alone is immediately apprehended. And the physical realist is constrained to reason thus: "that since only internal processes can be apprehended directly and immediately, the objects existing in the world, and the world itself, must be inferred from this internal data."¹

Now these internal data or "effects", the direct objects of apprehension, the objects of which alone there is immediate awareness, are not psychical in nature. The discoveries of science compel the physical realist to so conclude. These effects, qualities of objects, are states of the perceiver's organism. And from these the existence of the external world is deduced and posited.

¹Holding to the logical principle that an inference can pass only to what is similar in kind, these internal sensible

¹New Realism in the Light of Scholasticism, Sister Mary Verda, p.59
data from which external objects are scientifically inferred must be physical, not psychical; otherwise effect and cause would be dissimilar.\textsuperscript{1}

Since the cause is physical, the effect must be, according to the principle of similarity of effect to cause. And we are immediately aware of the effect, not of the cause, the external object. We immediately perceive the effect, the nervous system modified by an external reality. In other words, we perceive the effect and infer the cause, the actual physical being. The inconsistency here should be obvious. The actual object, the cause of the effect, is extra-mental. But so is the nervous system as modified and of which modified nervous system the subject is immediately aware, extramental.\textsuperscript{2}

Physical realism, as related to theory of knowledge, is reducible to physical representationism, and this because of two reasons. The first is the presumption that the physical, the material, alone is real because of science's attestations. The second is that the direct object of immediate apprehension is the effect of the (and direct effect) physical existent external to the self. Now since the cause is physical the effect can be only physical. And this similarity in constitution of cause to effect, is more than the external object to the phantasm in Scholastic philosophy. By this we mean that the similarity in physical content between effect and cause of the physical realist, and phantasm and the external object of the Scholastic, are not identical. In the former the two elements are much more physical than in the latter. If nothing more, this is at least strongly implied.

Disregarding the details, the physically representationistic propensity of Thomas Case is evident, and will become more so after we have considered some contemporary representatives of representationism.

1. New Realism in the Light of Scholasticism, Sister Mary Verda, pp. 59-60.
Chapter 4.
Science Ushers in Contemporary Representationism

We have seen that representationism is for the most part due to the progress of science. Its discoveries and conceptions have exercised considerable influence on philosophic thought. But to visualize this influence better it will be well for us to consider some pertinent statements of one or two scientists themselves, before we commence to evaluate contemporary representationism, or, what might appropriately be termed magnanimous idealism.

The first of the scientists we have in mind is no less a personage than the physicist, Ernst Mach. He devoted much time to the analysis of sensations, and finally, in an epitomized form, published the volume: The Contributions to the Analysis of Sensations, which embodies the principle philosophical ideas of the author as a scientist.

Ernst Mach begins with the assumption that the "ego" exists for "mere practical necessity." Then, "Thing, body, matter, are nothing apart from their complexes of colors, sounds, and so forth—nothing apart from their so-called attributes." Thus attributes as mental symbols make up things, bodies, matter, reality etc. Then, "... the world consists only of our sensations. ... we have knowledge only of sensations." And, "... all bodies are but thought-symbols for complexes of sensations." In one statement he says that bodies are "thought-symbols" and in another he goes on to say that "Bodies do not produce sensations, but complexes of sensations (complexes of elements) make up bodies." But a fair idea of his theory may

1. Critical Realism by R.W. Sellars, p.29. Scientific progress consists in tending towards thinking things and away from perceiving them. In other words, direct concern is with what is within mind. "Science does not deal with sensible qualities, but with quantities and causal relations."

2. Contributions to Analysis of Sensations, Ernst Mach, pp.6,10,22, resp.
be gathered from the quotation:

"We see an object having a point S. If we touch S, that is, bring it into connection with our body, we receive a prick. We can see S, without feeling the prick. But as soon as we feel the prick we find S. The visible point, therefore is a permanent fact or nucleus, to which the prick is annexed according to circumstances, as something accidental. From the frequency of such occurrences we ultimately accustom ourselves to regard all properties of bodies as "effects proceeding from permanent nuclei and conveyed to the ego through the medium of the body; which effects we call sensations."1

The representationism here, though founded on contradiction, seems to be as follows: The visible point of a needle is a permanent fact or nucleus. This needle is a needle whether it punctures the epidermis of my finger or not. The pain felt when the finger is pierced is an accident, it is not a quality of the needle, but the affected nerve in my finger; and this is all I can know—the affected nerve. This illustration is typical of every human experience. All we are immediately aware of is effect; the cause, of course, must exist. All human experiences are effects, complexes of sensations. Immediate awareness, apprehension, is of these solely.

The conclusion is that the external world is always determined or conditioned by the body. To changes in the body correspond changes in the external world. Modified physical organism means substantially modified object perceived.2 The principle of causality explains this particular interpretation: only the effect is actually and directly perceivable and perceived. And by this effect the cause is mediately or indirectly perceived. And from this is concluded that all effects are qualities of objects.

The representationism of Ernst Mach is evident, although it is less

1. Contributions to the Analysis of Sensations, pp. 9 and 10
2. Idem, pp. 8-10
physical than that of the physical realist. As we shall see, representationism becomes less physical, and gradually continues in that trend until it waxes identical with idealism, or better, magnanimous idealism.

Ernst Mach's representationism is less physical because, it seems, the effect, the complex of sensation, is less similar to the cause. The example of the needle and the pricked finger illustrates well. When my finger is pierced I feel pain. This complex of sensation cannot be found, as such, in the needle, although the needle caused it. Instead of saying that this representationism is less physical, a more appropriate designation would be to term it—the representationism—as less similar, if at all, to the cause, in contrast to the precision in similarity of effect to cause in the representationism of Thomas Case.

Before closing, we must note one grave error in Mach's procedure. Speaking of the sharp object, he says: "We see an object having a point S." This certainly implies direct and immediate perception of this object. It seems to indicate that the object is known and perceived, and not, as he maintains, the sensation of perception. There is nothing to indicate, on seeing this particular object, that the perception, the sensation, the complex of sensation, is directly perceived and the caused inferred.

Whatever be the final judgment, we may conclude that Mach's representations are less similar to their causes than the representations of Case. In the former, pain ought to exist in the perceiving subject. The pain is caused by a needle. In the latter (Case), if followed through logically, the pain the sudden discomfort, ought to exist in the needle.

Another representative scientist we wish to note is A. S. Eddington. We shall treat of him in the following chapter.
Chapter 5.
Representationism of Arthur Stanley Eddington More Emphatic

We have in A. S. Eddington what naturally results from a scientist suddenly turning philosopher. He holds that when

"an image or sensation arises in the brain" it "cannot purport to resemble the stimulus which excites it. Everything known about the material world must in one way or another have been inferred from these stimuli transmitted among the nerves."

In order to arrive at knowledge,

"The mind as a central receiving station reads the dots and dashes of the incoming nerve-signals. By frequent repetition of their call-signals the various transmitting stations of the outside world become familiar. We begin to feel quite a homely acquaintance with ZLO and 5XX. But a broadcasting station is not like its call-signals; there is no commensurability in their nature."

This, it should be clear, is identical with what Ernst Mach convincingly proposes. And then he continues:

"So too the chairs and tables around us which broadcast to us incessantly those signals which affect our sight and touch cannot in their nature be like unto the signals or to the sensations which the signals awake at the end of their journey."

Here too, we have causes and effects. The extended object external to the perceiving subject "incessantly" is making impressions upon the senses. These extramental objects only "broadcast . . . signals" which are unlike the object sending them. The "stirring of consciousness" by sensation and by image, and resulting in knowledge, only "transmutes the whole" of nature's "story." 2 We are far from being immediately conscious of what nature is endeavouring, by its broadcasts, to actually communicate. What is received is

2. Idem, p. 38
so distorted that it disfigures the real; no resemblance exists between the object and what it produces in the organism.

This is the world science reveals:

"That environment of space and time and matter, of light and colour and concrete things, which seems so vividly real to us is probed deeply by every device of physical science and at the bottom we reach symbols."¹

Again we have here relegated to immediate apprehension what is revealed upon introspection and reflection only. Reflection, reflection alone, shows that the process of cognition exists. The object is known by means of sensation, but the sensation never reaches the level of consciousness where it becomes object of immediate awareness.²

Science has made many valuable contributions to every field of endeavour. But it has added very little, if anything, to theory of knowledge. When we perceive objects we still perceive them directly. Neither the object nor the subject have been changed by discoveries of modern science. We continue to apprehend immediately and perceive directly.

2. Elements of Epistemology, J. T. Barron, pp. 106-107
III
THE REPRESENTATIONISM OF CRITICAL REALISM

Chapter 1.
Representationism of Roy Wood Sellars

Critical Realism is a contemporary school of philosophy, which, we might say, is the natural result of scientific progress. Scientific discoveries have dissuaded modern non-conforming philosophers to such an extent as to reject idealism together with intuitive realism, and to propound a via media, which of course amounts to nothing short of objective idealism (by objective idealism here is meant: all the ego can know immediately is the subjective state which is the effect of an extramental cause). We shall now attempt to present this via media, or representationism proper.

We have seen that A. S. Eddington held that perception was of signs or symbols. That is the word of a scientist. Now Sellars agrees and says that science perceives only signs or symbols which require conceptual interpretation. "Science does not deal with sensible qualities, but with quantities and causal relations." He remarks that scientists are pretty generally agreed that things as perceived are different from what lies behind the perception or appearance.1 In other words, we are aware of perception directly, but not of object. "... perception is a mediate process and not an event in which the thing is revealed as it is." And as criticism of Natural Realism he says: Natural Realism is "not a theory of what takes place, but a statement of what appears to take place." "Natural Realism is the philosophy dominant even among philosophers when they are not in a reflective mood."2 The Natural Realist is in error because perception is a mediate process.

But we shall see that the "reflective mood" adds nothing to perception; it only brings to light what is never perceived. But the question under discussion is not what reflection reveals, but what is perceived.

His foremost argument against Natural Realism is the fact that "Perception has conditions which do not appear in that which is immediately perceived." Therefore perception is not valid, but very fallible. Such a contention is ordinarily not expected of a philosopher. If our senses revealed all conditions, all qualities, and every possible percept the object is capable of conditioning (this of course is not direct), there would be no need for our higher faculties.

Of no meagre importance, with Sellars, is "The lack of concommittant variation between percepts and things." By lack of "concommittant variation" he has in mind the fact that at a distance of a few feet I perceive an object of a certain size. At a much greater distance this same object is perceived much smaller. In other words the variation in my percepts does not correspond to the object, because the object does not vary, while my percepts do.

Professor Stout is quoted as exemplifying this thus: "If anything X exhibits variations which are not shared by Y, X and Y must be distinct existences." But Mr. Sellars frustrates his position by the following counter-assertion: "We constantly have to discount our percepts by means of past experience in order not to be misled." But we must be misled because past experience too is by percept, or appearance, or dependent upon them. But he continues: "There can be no doubt that we must go beyond present physical

stimuli to account for percepts. The past is somehow active, and the past is personal.\textsuperscript{1} If the past is personal, how can we avoid being misled? This avoidance is impossible; deception is inevitable.

To discount appearances, percepts, by reference to the past, implies the existence of a real, actual something in the past that is not an appearance. Certainly, to discount appearance by appearance is no more acceptable than the acceptance of the last appearance as true.

And in this same trend of thought, insisting that the present percept, in order to become veridical, must be compared with the past: "Truth, so far as the percept is concerned, lies behind us instead of before us."\textsuperscript{2} But this we have indicated to be erroneous.

However, he endeavours to substantiate the tenet that the percept partakes of truth only after having been discounted by the percepts of the past. (He does not say that the present percept is discounted by a past percept, but this is strongly implied).

Only qualities of objects, which qualities "lend themselves to mathematical and physical analysis" are capable of being described and explained accurately. "The primary dimensions of things and processes, such as extension, movement, mass and energy, can be used for the purpose of exact description and explanation because they are measurable and lend themselves to mathematical and physical analysis. For this reason results can be obtained which are not variable from moment to moment as is the case with the secondary qualities."\textsuperscript{3} This is very similar to the earnest contention of T. Case.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Critical Realism, R.W. Sellars, p.27. In this connection is pertinent New Realism in the Light of Scholasticism, Sister M.Verda.
\item \textsuperscript{2} Crit. Real. R.W.Sellars, pp. 12-16.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Idem, p. 16.
\end{itemize}
But wherefrom invariable results? Every sort of scientific experience is based on perception, thing-experiences. But these are appearances, and appearances are not to be relied upon. The percepts are objects of immediate awareness; but percepts are unstable.

That the primary qualities are stable and measurable, is due to sense perception directly revealing the object perceived. If the secondary qualities are not stable, neither are the primary. He relegates the secondary qualities to the personal side, qualities perceived with the "perceptual perspective." But he does not evade the fact that qualities, whether primary or secondary, are founded on direct perception.

The principle of causality is employed to account for the effects directly perceived: "... things are there where we judge them to be; but we do not perceive them. Instead, we perceive the percepts causally connected with them, and these percepts are spatially and temporally more directly related to the brain than to the things with which we ordinarily identify them."¹

As for the percept being real, and apprehension of extramental object being direct,—these are impossibilities if "to be real is to be susceptible of being perceived or of affecting that which is susceptible of being perceived."² In other words everything must be real that the human being cannot reach. Reality is inapproachable to the perciipient subject. The representationism here portrayed should be evident.

We must conclude that Professor Sellars is both scientist and philosopher. This seems to be a disparagement to either pretention. To attain to the truth which any branch of knowledge has to offer, invariably specialization is required. Otherwise the Adage: "Jack of all trades, master of none is worthless, devoid of meaning and application.

2. Idem, p. 29.
Chapter 2.
Instrumentalism of John Dewey is Representationistic

To leave no doubt as to the scientific influence, basis, of representationism, the philosophy of a scientist, as specifically related to theory of knowledge, of the calibre of John Dewey must be mentioned.

With John Dewey "consciousness . . . denotes awareness or perception of meanings." The subject-matter of awareness is things in process of change. Awareness means attention to events taking place in mind. Objects are "events–with–meanings." His representationism is vivid in the following: Real objects "signify the cause of certain qualitative and immediate effects." The instrumentalistic representationism is contained in: " . . . things . . . that later come to be known, are primarily not objects of awareness, but causes of weal and woe, things to get, others to avoid."

He too, uses the principle of causality: "The conscious or perceived affair is itself a consequence of antecedent conditions."

We are immediately aware of an effect in the mind. This effect is caused by an extramental object. There is not so much a relation of effect to cause, as there is of the effect to future action. What we immediately apprehend is the cause of action to be experienced. Direct and immediate apprehension of extramental entities is not to be found in Instrumentalism.

1. The Philosophy of John Dewey, Joseph Ratner
   Essays in Experimental Logic, pp. 94–95, 176–178.
   Experience and Nature, pp. 122–123.
Chapter 3.
Final Consideration of Representationism

The representationist claims that what makes us feel we are in direct contact with external reality in perception, is "curious pertinacious bias", "unconscious objective bias", "natural objective bias", "strong pathetic belief."¹ John G. Vance says that only a group of sensations is immediately given. He maintains:

"I look outward, inward, upward and find no more than sensations, feelings, thoughts, desires, or imagery of some kind—all psychic events at best. What am I to myself, in fact, but an ever-changing group of psychic occurrences?"²

We are aware of sensations and other states of mind. Beyond these we cannot reach:

"Beyond these phenomena, of sensation and thought, whether they be reliable or not, or what comes to the same, beyond the presentational order we may never pass. Without hinting obliquely at any Kantian limitation of knowledge it is clearer that we may never know more of things than we find within our consciousness."³

He struggles to avoid idealism, but this is impossible if subject is directly aware only of his mental states.

In final analysis, Representationism holds: knowledge is a three term relation. There must be a subject; there is an object; and between these two there is what they designate "datum", "essence", logical, "neutral entity," and "character-complex."

1. Reality and Truth, John G. Vance, pp. 1-3
"Perception is, ... imagining character-plexes out there in the world, together with an implicit attribution of existence."¹ In perception "we do ... immediately grasp or apprehend ... outer objects. But it is a logical, essential, virtual grasp."² Therefore there can be no direct apprehension of object. This does not mean that the apprehension is of a mental state. The mental state has ontological existence. The datum has none. "There do exist, in or in intimate connection with the brain, a series of "mental states," which have the qualities which make our data appear."³ The datum is not the mental state. It cannot be because mental states vary with individuals; essences, data, character-complexes do not.

C. A. Strong interestingly elaborates on the datum:

"... the datum is the logical essence of the real thing. By "essence" I mean its what divorced from its that—its entire concrete nature, including its sensible character, but not its existence."⁴

The data are not actual external existences; they are not internal or psychical existences "either representative of the external ones or non-representative." They are logical entities and not "identifiable with the things we perceive, but are only the detached concrete natures or "essences" of those things."⁵


3. Idem, p. 26

4. Idem,

5. Idem, pp. 223-224;
Descartes held primary qualities to be extramentally real, while of secondary qualities he had "confused and obscure" ideas. Coffey, Epistemology, Vol. II, pp. 139-140.
Data are presentments of objects from the point of view of the organism, they are not objects themselves. 

"In short, when we speak of anything as a "datum," that which makes it a datum, the givenness, is not given along with the thing. It is an external denomination, it consists in a relation between the thing given and something else." Somewhere in between the givenness and awareness lies the datum. There is no direct contact either between object and datum or awareness and object. 

Professor Strong holds that if the datum were existent, an epistemological dualism would be unavoidable. The datum must be continuously existent; if the datum were not continuously existent, we would have representationism, says Professor Strong.

Data are not existences, but universals, the bare natures of objects. Since they are universals, they can have only one existence. As far as the percipient subject is concerned, all he does is affirms the existence of real things. The universal is a sort of continuum the existence of which the subject recognizes.

Joseph Thomas Barron comments on the datum: 

"The datum is the essence (or character-complex) which through perception is taken to be a character of the perceived object. The latter causes the appearance of certain character-complexes in the percipient subject. These character complexes are the data—the objects of awareness in the percipient subject—which are projected by the subject into the extramental world, or which are imagined to be in the objective world."

1. Essays in Critical Realism by Durant Drake et al. p. 226
2. Idem, p. 228. This "something else" is the subject ego, or "I".
3. By projected is meant recognized or the "real" thing affirmed.
And if perception is to be true, these data must be identical with the qualities of the perceived object.

Error in perception is due to the fact that data are dependent on the individual organism. The data vary "in their character with the constitution of the sense-organs and the way in which these are affected." Only secondarily and indirectly are data affected by the external object. The following quotation illucidates:

"... We have no power of penetrating to the object itself and intuiting it immediately, but are dependent for our information concerning it on the effects which it is able to produce within the body. In a word, data are subject to the law of psychophysical correlation."¹

Thus we see that the datum obstructs direct perception of the external universe. The external object of perception becomes the Kantian noumenon and the object perceived becomes only the content of perception.

If all that the percipient subject is immediately conscious of is the appearance or representation, how does he know that it is an appearance or a representation? If this is followed logically, the answer is negative—he can never know. And if from immediate awareness of psychic states, we infer, by principle of causality, existence of a real cause, an extramental world, how can this be established? The answer again must be negative—it cannot be established. The best that can be done is to hold (if the subject or ego is immediately aware of conscious states, psychic events) that the self or ego causes them. How can I know the cause to be external if I never perceive directly, or immediately apprehend, the object of which I am immediately aware? If I am aware or apprehend directly, only of data within

¹ Essays in Critical Realism, D. Drake et al., p. 225
me, the only explanation, i.e. logical explanation, is that the present
data were caused by myself, the ego or self. But the representationalist
firmly contends that the representation is not of the subject's creation.

It is solely experience from which we learn that effects must be
produced by causes, that effects are similar to the causes which produce
them. And this experience is direct perception, i.e. causes and effects
have their foundation in direct apprehension of external objects. If not,
then the "self" constructs appearances or representations, of which the
self is directly conscious.

Just why do the representationalists deny the self-evident facts of
perception? The reason is the lack of "concommittant variation" between
the object as it is and the percepts of the object as experienced by the
perceiving subject. They are willing to accept immediate perception if
changeable perceptions of the same object can be accounted for. (They are
aware of the irrefragability of the senses. What they need is a correct
interpretation of the facts science presents. This PERCEPTIONISM, as far
as is possible with the discoveries of science, the constitution of the
human organism, and the ability of the human mind to interpret to the
extent feasible, adequately does. In the following pages we shall present
the more evident views of the theory of PERCEPTIONISM, and shall endeavor
to show the futility of such a theory as REPRESENTATIONISM, and the need-
lessness of the latter.
IV
PERCEPTIONISM

Chapter 1.
Representationism Summarized

For the sake of convenient comparison we present here in summarized form the salient features of Representationism. Representationism is the theory maintaining

"that the non-Ego, as distinct from the Ego, is not a primitive datum of conscious awareness; that only the Ego is apprehended first and immediately; that from its data there is evolved and mediated a conscious discrimination or distinction between a non-Ego and the Ego, and a spontaneous belief in the distinct reality of the former. This position is variously described as Representationism, or the Theory of Mediate or Representative or Inferential Sense Perception." \(^1\)

External reality produces a mental image or what is known as a representation, in the subject perceiving. The image is immediately present to consciousness. Apprehension is directly of this representation (or image). And external reality is perceived through this representation.\(^2\) In other words, external reality is mirrored, represented in representation, and by inference from the representation, external reality is established as existent. This extended, external reality is apprehended through the internal data or objects of direct awareness. This subjective data is referred to the real qualities and nature of reality by the principle of causality and the principle of similarity of effect to cause. The mind, of course, does this referring. This, in general, is what Representationism ardently professes as substitute for both idealism and intuitive realism.

We see in this mediate perception that the object does not, at any time reach the level of consciousness, is never directly apprehended. The subject is immediately aware of data, which result from the process of percep-

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1. See following page.
tion. The data are the means by which the object is known. But the data are apprehended directly, and the object indirectly. Knowledge of object is solely what is inferred from the medium or data.


2. Idem, p. 66.
Chapter 2.
The Theory of Perceptionism

Perceptionism is the theory of immediate or intuitional or presentative perception. According to this theory

"the species sensibilis expressa, the whole mental modification and process, with its resulting state or condition, is only the means by which the external thing is directly presented to and consciously apprehended by the perceiver: the process is not constructive of a mental object which would be itself first apprehended, and in and through which, as an image or representation, the represented external reality would be mediately apprehended. The mental or psychic effect of the action of the external reality on the mind, and of the mental reaction thereto, does not itself come into consciousness or become an object of direct awareness."¹

This "psychic effect" exists, but it reaches consciousness only upon reflection and introspection. It is only the means which enables the subject to apprehend the object directly. In the act of perception, excluding the possible immediate awareness of phantasms or mental images, "it is the external reality itself (i.e. some phase or aspect of it) that is ... immediately present to, and apprehended by, the perceiver."²

The chief argument against this theory, of the representationist, is that direct perception of the qualities (whether primary or secondary) cannot be direct for the reason that: sense qualities exist only in the subject because the object perceived produces "vibratory motions of the air or aether" which the subject apprehends immediately as qualities of the object, using the principle of causality to substantiate the con-

². Idem, p. 67.
tention. These "vibratory motions of the air or aether" stimulate the human organism, resulting in data denominated as representations of qualities of extramental reality by the principle of causality. The physical effect of these vibrations is what the subject perceives as the several qualities of external objects. The data or representations of qualities in the extra-subjective realm of existence, are "specifically determined in the perceiver by the influence of the external reality." But the real proper and common sensibles as determining the actually existent object external to the subject, are not univocal with the data or representations. But they are analogous to the external qualities because the data "are cognitive representations produced in the mind by the external material qualities." If this be so, the actual qualities existing in the external object independently of perception, must, in Kant's sense, be noumena—things-in-themselves—which forever remain unknowable. To cite Jeanniere for specific exemplification, we have:

"A thing cannot be known by the (consciously, directly apprehended) impression it produces; for (a) the impression is not the thing; (b) nor is it an effect that faithfully expresses (or represents or mirrors) the thing; for (c) it is an effect received by (or wrought in) the (conscious) subject and received conformably with the mode of being of the latter (secundum modum recipientis). Wherefore there is no relation of resemblance between the impression and the thing."

With the perceptionist "resemblance" between object and phantasm, or between object and idea, is revealed upon reflection and introspection. In perception there is no resemblance. The object is perceived directly and apprehended simultaneously; apprehension and perception are direct.

1. Quotation from Jeanniere in Epistemology by P. Coffey, p. 72.
and immediate.

The perceptionist holds that when an object is before him, and his faculty of perception is normal (abiding by the laws of perspective), he perceives the object directly and immediately. He is conscious of the object directly. He does not deny the existence of media. The air or aether exists and intervenes. It may be vibrating too. But that does not alter perception any. Then there is the existence of the datum. But the datum or phantasm or image, does not make perception indirect or mediate. The air, the phantasm, and all else existing and brought into existence during perception, (e.g. the affected nervous system, the brain etc.)—these the subject does not become aware of until he reflects. He is aware directly and immediately of the object.

The datum of the Representationist exists likewise for the Perceptionist. But the datum (whether vibratory motions of the air or aether, or affected nervous system, or change in perspective of the object perceived), is not directly and immediately perceived. That the datum exists, who will deny? But that it exists as object of immediate awareness, the perceptionist firmly and justifiably denies. The facts of perception present to immediate awareness, or in immediate apprehension, the object as it is. When I see a red apple, it is a red apple I am immediately aware of; I apprehend immediately a red apple. The medium by which I apprehend the red apple immediately, exists. But it does not reach the point of consciousness until I reflect upon the medium. I am not aware of the medium until I reflect upon it. What I am directly and immediately conscious or aware of is the red apple. Upon reflecting
I find that a medium exists and plays its part during the process of perception. I find that during the process of perception the medium is the means by which I immediately and directly apprehend or perceive the red apple.

If the perceptionist can account reasonably and accurately for absence of "concommitant variations" in certain perceptions (this absence of "concommitant variations" is the fundamental argument of the representationist against both idealism and presentative realism), he nullifies the chief contention of mediate perceptionists, and totally destroys faith in representationism. This the perceptionist does with facility simply by appealing to reason with the facts available.

On perceiving a straight stick lying on the ground, I spontaneously judge it to be a straight stick because the sense presents it so. I perceive a straight stick. Now this same stick immersed partly in water appears crooked. I immediately judge it to be crooked, because it so appears. Yet I know the stick is straight. This is what the representationist cannot account for: the same stick appearing straight at one time, crooked at another time.

The answer to this spurious difficulty is that there are conditions in perception which must be taken into account.

"Reflection on the facts of sense experience, on our spontaneous judgments regarding the immediate data of sense, and particularly on the occasional illusions or deceptions or erroneous interpretations of which we are the victims, convinces us that we can rely on these spontaneous judgments only when the whole conscious process takes place under normal conditions, and that we can, by attending to the actual conditions, either at the time or at least by reflection after the fact, either forestall or correct erroneous spontaneous interpretations. These conditions are partly
on the side of the perceiver and partly on the side of
the perceived datum or object.¹

And the requisite conditions are: a) the perceiver must be mentally and
physically in a sane and healthy condition. He must be able to distin-
guish between datum of perception and datum of imagination. The sense
organ must be free from disturbing and abnormal conditions, in order to
present datum as it is presentable under normal conditions. b) The
external datum: spatial and physical conditions of object under per-
ception, and the same conditions of the medium between object and
perception agent or percipient subject must be normal. These condi-
tions are essential if perception is to be perception of what actually
is. If conditions do not change, the perception of a straight stick
will be always a straight stick. It is obvious that a straight stick
lying on the ground at one moment, and then immersed in water at an-
other moment, cannot appear the same under the varying conditions.
The stick is the same, but the conditions are not constant. This
sufficiently accounts for the much preached absence of "concommitant
variation."

Our perceptions of an object are not necessarily always the same.
The very fact that senses are used prohibits identical perceptions of
an identical object. The sense organs determine perception to a con-
siderable extent.

But if perception is determined by conditions of the subject's
sense organs, how can the senses report truth, i.e., how can the percept
correspond to the object of which it is the percept? The answer is

when all the conditions of an actual external perception are normal, the qualities of the presented sense datum can be rightly affirmed of the perceived external reality, inasmuch as those qualities are qualities of this reality as normally presented to consciousness. It does not imply that those qualities, presented to consciousness, are wholly independent of the determining influence of the sense organs. It recognizes that in all perception the qualities of the presented sense datum are partially determined to be what they are by the organic nature or structure and conditions of the perceiver's own material or corporeal sense organs, through the instrumental functions of which the external reality is presented to the individual perceiver's consciousness.¹

The following sentences are extremely important to the solution of the problem which sense-organic-determinations of datum bring about:

"But when these organic determining factors, on the subjective or "self" side of the process, are normal, and, being normal, are the same for all normal individual perceivers, their determining influence on the qualities of the external reality presented through their operation is not indeed denied, for it is undeniable, but is tacitly and rightly ignored as being something essentially involved in the subjective, organic side of the presentation of external reality to the perceiver's mind or consciousness. Hence the individual perceiver abstracts from this presupposed, uniform influence of his own organic nature as a sentient being, on the reality which he perceives, when he . . . judges this reality to be as it is presented."²

In other words, the continuous and normal influence of the organism, influence experienced by all normal individuals, upon the datum may be "ignored". Thus perception is valid in spite of the determining influence of the sense organs.

Because of the normality of these determining factors, their inevitable participation in the process of perception, perception becomes

2. Idem, p. 98.
necessarily direct and immediate. We ignore the normal influence. We ignore what we are not immediately aware of. This includes the datum as far as perception is concerned. The datum is revealed only upon reflection; so are the influences of the organism. In perception we are not conscious of the influence of the sense organs, neither of the datum. What we perceive directly and immediately, and consciously, is the external object as it is.

Perception must be direct if knowledge of object perceived is to be valid. If perception is other than direct, knowledge, valid knowledge, of external object is absolutely impossible. But even the representationist will admit he has valid knowledge, certitude. What truth-value would there be to an idea if the percept from which it is abstracted were not an accurate representation of the extramental object? None.

Even lack of "concommittant variation" in perceptions does not invalidate the theory of perceptionism. When I perceive the straight stick I apprehend it directly and immediately, and spontaneously judge it to be straight. I cannot perceive in any other way. I must see it as it appears to the sense of vision. After the stick has been immersed in water, I perceive directly and immediately the stick as crooked. I must perceive it thus because that is the way in which it appears to me under those conditions. And that is the way in which the senses present the stick to me. There is no error involved because the senses do not err because they do not judge. Error lies solely in judgment. And the senses only present what is before them; they do not judge, therefore they do not err as the representationist would have us believe.
The perceptionist, as Scholastics generally hold, says NIHIL EST IN INTELLECTU QUOD NON PRIUS FUERIT IN SENSU. The representationist reverses this and says: NIHIL EST IN SENSU QUOD NON PRIUS FUERIT IN INTELLECTU. That is, of course, presuming that the datum involves the intellect.

Representationists, taken as a whole, are mediate perceptionists. A typical exponent of this group says: "... perception is a mediate process and not an event in which the thing is revealed as it is."\(^1\) Another spokesman for this group, but speaking in different words, says: "... we, once stimulated from without, draw our appreciation of what things are from within.\(^2\) Mediate perception with the representationist means that the object of direct and immediate awareness, apprehension, is the datum. From the datum, using the principle of causality, or the principle of similarity of effect to cause, the external object is inferred. Thus it is maintained that this external object is mediately perceived.

But mediate perception? This is a contradiction in terms.

Supposing the above few sentences to be true for the moment, the representationist has this difficulty to solve: In every mediate perception reason is an indispensable factor. But animals have no reason.

Therefore animals have no mediate perception. Since an human being has his rationality, is identical with an animal, an human being has no mediate perception. If perception is not mediate, there is no other alternative, as far as is known to philosophy up to the present time, than that perception is immediate. It is generally agreed that animals have no

1. Critical Realism, Roy Wood Sellars.
faculty of reasoning. Yet they perceive. Now if they perceive and have no reason, they must perceive immediately since they have no reasoning power. And in human perception no reason is utilized. Therefore human beings must perceive immediately. When a human perceives, he must perceive directly and immediately the object external to him. (We are only speaking of perception of objects external to the perceiving subject.)

Every human action has a direct stimulus or cause. This stimulus or cause immediately precedes the effect or action following. Thus, if the representationist position is to be accepted, it necessarily follows that when a child reaches for the moon, he ought to reach into the head because that is where the object he desires is immediately apprehended. The datum is the thing the child reaches for because that is what he perceives immediately. The absurdity is glaring. Or for instance, when a horse is approaching a water trough, why does he move towards it? If representationism is true, the horse ought to try and break entrance into the place of existence of the datum. For that is what he perceives immediately and that is what he is tending towards. Certainly the representationist will not say that the horse infers the existence of the external trough by the principle of causality. It is extremely evident that representationism must step aside to make room for perceptionism. To tell the truth, it does not need to step aside for it never held any position in actual life and experience. If representationism were true, human progress would indeed be considerably hindered, for, if nothing more, time is required to perceive the datum and then to infer the object. Whereas in perceptionism no time element is appreciated.
V
CONCLUSION

We have seen that the object, in perception, is immediately and directly apprehended, and not the datum, the means by which the object is immediately and directly apprehended. The datum exists end the process of perception exists. But these never reach the level of consciousness until the subject wills to consider them in reflection. Perception of an object must be direct because no reason is involved in the process.

The representationist claims that his theory is based on the foundation of scientific discoveries. It is true that science has contributed much in physics, in chemistry, to physiology in the analysis of sense organs, the nervous system, the brain, also to psychology, and to all other physical sciences. But what has it done for philosophy? Practically nothing. Science has added nothing to enable us to understand perception differently. It has added nothing to the subject; nothing to the object. Where its contributions do come in is in the medium between the subject and object. But this medium never reaches immediate awareness in the process of perception. Whether science has enlightened us as to the medium or not, perception is still direct and immediate of the object. Science has revealed many interesting facts about the constitution of the object, but this does not alter immediate perception of the same object; it adds nothing. When I perceive a red apple I immediately apprehend a red apple. That science has discovered vitamins which were not known twenty years ago, makes no difference in my direct and immediate apprehension of the red apple. Or that this same apple is seventy-five to eighty-five per centum water (75-84.6 per cent.), contains three-tenths
per centum (0.3 per cent.) ash, four tenths per centum (0.4 per cent.) protein, one and two tenths per centum fiber (1.2 per cent.), thirteen per centum arbohydrate (13.0 per cent.), and five tenths per centum fat (0.5 per cent.), does not in the least modify or transform my perception of a red apple. These are very important discoveries in many respects, but despite them, I still perceive directly and immediately a red apple. These facts of science are not immediately apprehended in perception. Therefore, the contributions of science neither remove nor add anything, from and to, my direct perception of the red apple.

These just mentioned are facts pertaining to the object of my perception. Science has contributed much to our knowledge of the medium existing between the object and the perceiving subject. So far as perception is concerned, this knowledge is never directly apprehended; those facts never reach consciousness during the process of perception. This is evident to unbiased consideration.

The representationists try hard to evade the stigma of idealism. But so long as they maintain that only the datum is immediately perceived, they must accept the penalty. If only the datum, essence, the character-complex, is immediately apprehended, reality of which the datum is a representation, must forever remain unknown and unknowable.

The representationist admits everything that the perceptionist recognizes; he lives and acts just as the latter lives and acts. But he interprets the facts erroneously. He apprehends immediately only the datum, and to avoid being considered an idealist, he attributes the datum to a reality external to the abode of his datum. But this is nothing
more nor less than a magnanimous idealism. He has no right to accept as known or knowable the extramental world, but he does to be in good standing with his critics.

Perceptionism has weathered the storms of many centuries. Why? Because its explanation of reality conforms with reality. It takes into account the facts disclosed by perception and intellection. Its explanation appeals to and convinces, every normally intelligent human being. The red apple exists external to the subjective self. The subject perceives it directly and immediately and apprehends it immediately. Neither the datum nor the process of perception is denied. But neither the datum nor the process of perception is immediately and directly apprehended. The object of immediate perception is directly and immediately apprehended. Immediate awareness is of the object. All humanity attests to this because that is the manner in which external reality is revealed to it.

FINIS
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