

BIVs: Space and the Neglected Letter

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Leading question: Can a candidate BIV subject make an Object/Place distinction?

Assumption: The ability to make such a distinction is required if one is to conceive of oneself as possibly a BIV (as ‘in’ a vat and as having experiences consistent with that possibility – viz. experiences just-like-us).

§1. *Locatives and locatedness*

Locative expressions: ‘in’, ‘at’, ‘beside’, ‘under’ etc. etc.

Locatedness relations: being in, at, beside, under etc.

We can distinguish between object-object ‘in’ relations and object-space ‘in’ relations.

- **Object-object** ‘in’ relations: the *Place* is another object or set of objects. Call this an Object/*object*-Place distinction.
- **Object-space** ‘in’ relations: the *Place* is a region of space. Call this an Object/*space*-Place distinction.

Object/object-Place ‘in’ relations often satisfy four desiderata:

1. The Object is (typically) smaller than the Place
2. The Object is (potentially) mobile relative to the Place
3. The Object is immersed in or enclosed by the Place so that neither are path-connected
4. The Place exercises *locational control* on the Object

We can say that an object is unequivocably ‘in’ another when it satisfies 1-4

- Object-space ‘in’ relations can also be shown to satisfy desiderata 1-4

Early question:

- Could a candidate BIV ‘subject’ conceive of object-object locatedness relations and hence conceive of itself as a brain ‘in’ a vat, *without* being able to conceive of object-space relations?
- Not relevant. We conceive of objects as distinct from the space-Places they occupy and *our visual phenomenology concurs*.

§2. *Koffka’s Constraint*

Koffka (1935): *Duo-representation*.

- Part of the environmental field is *twice* represented
- Duo-representation in 3-dimensions?

“If an opaque, material ‘ordinary’ object is perceived to *occupy* space and so be at a *space*-Place, space is apprehended as ‘stretching’ behind the figure, such that that occluded

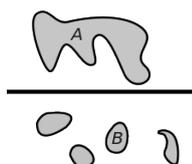
region is experienced as present in experience and connected to and continuous with regions in full view *as well as with the space-Place which the opaque object occupies?*

Assumption:

- ✓ This phenomenology is acute.

§3. Koffka's Constraint: A reification

- A space is connected if it cannot be broken up into two or more pieces - A is a connected space. B is not.



- A path-connected space is a *connected* space in which a *continuous* 'path' can be drawn from one point to another
- When it is claimed that the space-Place an object is apprehended as occupying is apprehended as *connected* with adjacent places, the assumption is that those connected spaces are also apprehended as *continuous*

Puzzle: How could a BIV subject have *that* phenomenology?

Campbell (1994) isolates two ways in which empirical content can be given to the connectedness of space

- (i) by a subject's self-movement through it
- (ii) by a subject's appreciation, independently of its own movement, of the movement of objects through space, where here the subject must appreciate the identity of the object over time

M *Movement* is required to give empirical content to the connectedness of space

- Suppose *Movement* is a condition on the possibility of making an Object/space-Place distinction.

§4. A Simple Argument and Anscombe's Insight

1. BIVs could have experiences just-like-me
2. My experiences articulate an Object/space-Place distinction and so register the connectedness of space (*Koffka's Constraint*)
3. The connectedness of space can only be given empirical significance in worlds in which movement is possible
4. BIVs cannot move
5. BIVs cannot register the connectedness of space
6. BIVs can't have experiences that articulate an Object/space-Place distinction
7. BIVs cannot have experiences just-like-me

Contradiction!

BUT the argument is question-begging!

M_E *Experience* of movement is required to give empirical content to the connectedness of space

Can M_E be satisfied in the vat?

No! *Experience* of movement, as we conceive it, is **non-separably describable**

Elizabeth Anscombe (1962):

“When I say: “the sensation (e.g. of giving a reflex kick) is not separable” I mean that the internal description of the ‘sensation’ – the description of the sensation-content – is the very same as the description of the fact known; when that is so, I should deny that we can speak of observing that fact by means of the alleged sensation” (my emphasis, 1981, p.72)

- Experience of movement *cannot* be characterised independently of movement
 - Movement takes place *in space*
 - Space exercises *locational control* on the moving (in this case) subject
- ➔ Shape and connectedness of space is explanatorily relevant to a characterisation of experience of continuity and freedom

Shape of space *explanatorily relevant to* ➔ phenomenology

- In VAT – no connection between apparent connectedness of envatted space and experience of continuity of movement – joint upshot of murkier, noumenal vat-tending machinations

Tentative conclusion: Let us grant that BIVs *experience* something else – movement*

§5. *A non-physicalist upshot*

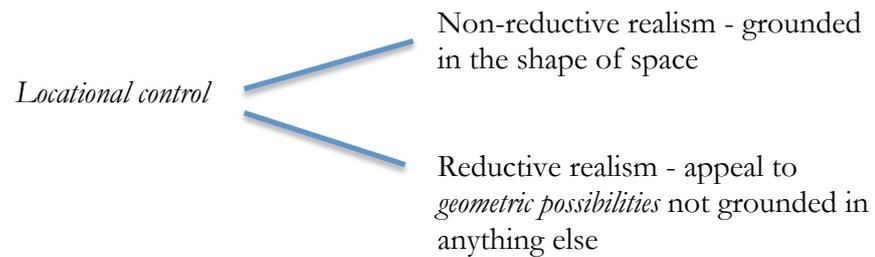
- Suppose that BIVs experience movement* not movement and that M is a condition on making an object/space-Place distinction
- If correct, this goes some way to unsettling the possibility of BIVs having experiences just-like-us

What is the significance of this fact?

- a) Configurational aspects of conscious visual experience (F-G articulation)
- b) Visual experience of empty regions

Non-reductive Realism – space is something over and above the material or physical entities it ‘contains’. A species of **non-physicalism**.

Reductive Realism – space is nothing more than material or physical entities and the spatial relations between them. A species of **physicalism**.



a) Configurational aspects of conscious visual experience

Physicalism + configurational features = brute appeal to possibilities

b. Visual experience of empty space

“If an opaque, material ‘ordinary’ object is perceived to *occupy* space and so be at a *space-Place*, space is apprehended as ‘stretching’ behind the figure, such that that occluded region is experienced as present in experience and connected to and continuous with regions in full view as well as with the space-Place which the opaque object occupies”.

- Suppose it is a datum that *some* of those places *in full view* are empty
- Reductive Realism = error theory
- Suppose the error is at the level of *experience*
- Different questions arise for distinct perceptual theorists.

For instance:

- Are ‘empty spaces’ *phenomenally* represented, perhaps in virtue of some ‘inscrutable’ phenomenal property, “not constructed from colour” (a move which Robinson (1994, p.206) castigates as ‘bogus’)?
 - Is the subject *aware* of the presence of what we call ‘empty regions’ in virtue of her awareness of boundaries of her visual field (say, as Richardson (2010) and Soteriou (2011, 2013) hold)?
- Latter case > reductive realism about space (physicalism) must be combined with a *non-reductive* appeal to a property *of a subject*: awareness
 - Former case > reductive realism about space requires something like the ‘bogus’ move *and it is not clear that it would not be ad hoc* – why would putatively ‘empty’ regions look the whatever way the ‘inscrutable phenomenal property’ has them look?

§6. *Conclusion*

- The explanatory prospects are brighter for the non-reductive realist about space – for the purposes of this talk, a non-physicalist - something that reflection on the neglected letter teaches...