

ABSTRACTS

for the international Conference “To Be in One’s Senses?”

27 & 28 September 2018,
University of Koblenz-Landau, Campus Landau
Rote Kaserne
RK.105

Maarten Steenhagen

The modal phenomenal principle

27 September, 02:00—03:30 p.m.

How much room does sensory experience leave for error? In this paper I distinguish between existential and modal versions of the Phenomenal Principle. The existential version is well-known and widely rejected. It states that if there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality (Robinson 1994: 32). The modal version has however received little attention and seems to be widely accepted. It states that if it seems to a subject that something sensibly appears to them in sensory modality M, then the subject has an experience of something in modality M. The modal version does not protect against error about the objects of experience, but protects against error about the sensory modality in which the world presents itself to us. I show how this principle is implicitly assumed in treatments of after-images, phosphenes, and hallucinations. I argue that we have no good reason to adopt it. Moreover, resisting the modal principle allows us to give a more natural account of some forms of non-veridical experience.

Christian Tewes

Integrated Object Perception. A Sensorimotor Approach

27 September, 04:00—05:30 p.m.

In recent decades the enactive approach to perception has been developed in sensorimotor terms. Proponents of sensorimotor enactivism have challenged the view that perception consists in the representation of a somehow pre-specified external reality. Drawing on system theoretical research and phenomenological considerations, they propose that, by contrast, perception is the product of an explorative activity that is mediated by sensorimotor contingencies. It cannot be denied, however, that the enactive sensorimotor theory of perception, like many other theories in the philosophy of perception, is modelled along the lines of visual phenomena. This leads to skepticism about whether this approach’s findings can (a) be generalized to other sense modalities, and (b) leaves open the question of how object perception arises by means of the interplay of crossmodal or multimodal integration. It is my aim in this talk to analyze whether it is justified to extend the sensorimotor approach to auditory experiences and how this might contribute an understanding of crossmodal object perception. Do we find (i), as predicted by the theory, modality-specific sensorimotor contingencies or principles that govern hearing? When sounds are the object of our sense perception, they lack, for instance, the sharp object boundaries that other ordinary perceptual objects have. This suggests that the experience of acoustic objects involves quite different contingencies or principles than vision. But (ii) if they are so different, how can they interact to generate an integrated and unified object of perception? To make headway here, the final part of my talk will explore how cross- or multimodal experiences might arise and fit into the enactive picture of perception.

Madalina Diaconu

Heat. A Phenomenological Approach

27 September 06:00—07:30 p.m.

Since Middle Age, the feeling of temperature has only exceptionally aroused philosophical interest. In particular, the phenomenologists' discomfort with the sense of temperature can be put down to the difficult relation between phenomenology and philosophy of nature, whereas phenomenological aesthetics still ignores thermic aspects of experience. In spite of the rather poor present body of knowledge regarding the phenomenology of heat (mainly due to Hermann Schmitz and Martin Basfeld), general assumptions and concepts of phenomenology can be applied to the thermal experience. In addition to this, the sense of temperature requires also a specific analysis, instead of simply reducing it to a subcategory of tactility. The lecture emphasizes the intricate connection between the own body warmth and the experience of outside temperature, the divergence between the felt temperature and the measured one and the affective dimension of thermic impressions. Further aspects regard the "double touch" by which one evaluates the own temperature, as well as width, depth and porosity as basic features of the "thermic body". Finally, the lecture identifies specific spatiotemporal aspects of feeling temperature and emphasizes the philosophical relevance of thermoreception and thermoregulation for the understanding our being in the world.

Filip Mattens

Sense, Sensor, Sensed: Reconsidering Tactual Affect

28 September 09:30—11:00 a.m.

For non-sighted subjects, touch is the perceptual modality that allows for the individuation of material things as determinate objects in space. Certain modern philosophers have argued that even sighted subjects ultimately owe their notion of a thing as a space-occupier to the sense of touch. In this way, touch would be our ultimate object-sense; it provides us, according to Kant, with the notion of an object in space which is the basis for all other perceptual properties that we ascribe to things. Over the last couple of decades, neuroscientists have come to determine a second touch system in human skin, besides the discriminative system that facilitates the precise perception of object surfaces. This second system provides affective input to the brain. I will briefly consider what these findings mean to the philosophical approach to object-perception and then reconsider the position of affectivity within tactual perception.

Stephan Regh

Primitive Colors and the Manifest Image of the World

28 September, 11:30—01:00 p.m.

Open a recent textbook on perceptual psychology and proceed to the chapter on color vision. Chances are high that you come across an astonishing metaphysical assertion; namely that colors are only apparently properties of the material world while, in reality, they are mere constructions of the eye and brain. The truth of such claims are subject to a historically rich and currently very active philosophical debate. Two interconnected questions lie at its heart: (1) Are ordinary objects really colored? (2) What, essentially, are colors?

In recent decades, numerous philosophers have attempted to formulate theories that allow answering the first question positively, thereby saving visual perception from massive error. Traditionally, these theories pursue reductive strategies with regard to the second question. Colors, then, are either understood as properties that constitutively involve both objects and perceivers; or they are taken to be physical properties of objects that figure in scientific accounts

of the causal processes leading to color experiences. Proponents of the first strategy often identify the redness of a tomato with its disposition to cause characteristic experiences in normal perceivers under normal viewing conditions. Proponents of the second strategy typically identify the tomato's redness with its capacity to reflect certain percentages of incident light at each wavelength. Both parties agree that colors are nothing over and above some other properties of objects that allow to be fully characterized without using color vocabulary.

Recently, however, an alternative view emerged that challenges this common ground. It is called color primitivism and makes the following claims: *Colors are irreducible, sui generis properties. Their nature is independent of perceivers and perceptual states. It is also not exhausted by patterns of selectively reflecting light or any other properties that commonly appear in scientific explanations. Still, colors are truly possessed by ordinary objects. Under suitable viewing conditions, they can be reliably perceived.*

I shall argue that primitivism is a very plausible theory of colors. To this end, I will first call attention to a number of commonsensical beliefs that we are likely to form on the basis of day-to-day visual experience and ordinary language use. I shall highlight that no credible theory of color should abandon these beliefs without good argument. In a second step, I will argue that reductive accounts of color needlessly violate at least one of these beliefs. On the one hand, theories that identify colors with perceiver-related properties of objects are incompatible with commonsensical assumptions about the persistence- and change conditions of colors. On the other hand, theories that identify colors with light-reflectance properties of objects conflict with intuitive beliefs about similarities and dissimilarities of colors, for instance that orange is more similar to red than it is to blue. I will conclude that only the view that colors are irreducible properties can accommodate our commonsensical beliefs. Finally, I shall present some considerations to the effect that we have every reason to attribute colors, thus understood, to the things around us.

Giulia Lorenzi

Sounds in a Vacuum. A Defence of O'Callaghan's Theory

28 September 02:30—04:00 p.m.

In the contemporary debate about the metaphysics of sounds, the dispute about the existence of sounds in a vacuum has played a central role. In this field of studies, the two most articulated positions are expressed in Casati and Dokic's theory (1994) and O'Callaghan's (2007), and they differ completely over this ontological trait. Indeed, Casati and Dokic support a distal theory of sounds as events and they suggest that a sound is "only" a vibrating event of a source. While O'Callaghan proposes a distal theory of sounds as *relational* events and he considers the presence of a surrounding medium to be a necessary condition for the existence of a sound.

Casati and Dokic (2014) submit the thought experiment of sounds in a vacuum (which appeared for the first time in Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*) to O'Callaghan to bring out the difference between their positions and to suggest that their rival defends a counter-intuitive position. In particular, they present the perceptual situation of a sound of a tuning fork in an evacuated jar and imagine opening and closing the lid of the jar. They think that the vast majority of perceivers will come to say that, in that particular case, there is only one sound that cannot be perceived continuously. To support their position, Casati and Dokic also compare the experience of the jar with three visual cases of the tunnel effect.

On the other hand, O'Callaghan tries to find good reasons to reject Casati and Dokic's objection. Firstly, O'Callaghan discusses the visual analogies presented by his rivals. Secondly, he shows that the thought experiment cannot lead to certain metaphysical results. Nevertheless, he does not try to argue that, in the jar situation, it is possible to perceive a sequence of sounds, instead of a single sound that pops into and out of perception.

Here, I focus mainly on the perceptual aspects, rather than on the metaphysical elements, involved in the thought experiment. Firstly, my aim is to demonstrate that Casati and Dokic's perceptual intuition is less reasonable than they think. I deploy Bozzi's phenomenological account (1960) of the aggregation and separation of sounds to show that it is plausible to perceive a sequence of different sounds instead of a single sound. Secondly, I want to suggest that this difficult case forces us to consider another relevant and oft-ignored element in this debate: the metaphysical and perceptual nature of silence (Sorensen 2009). Indeed, in their accounts of sounds both O'Callaghan and Casati and Dokic do not provide an analysis of silence. My final goal is to show that Casati and Dokic's position leads to difficulties in the explanation of the metaphysics and the perception of silence and, for this reason, it becomes more counter-intuitive than O'Callaghan's.

On the basis of this argumentation, I want to provide a new argument in favour of O'Callaghan's general theory of sound as a relational event.

Louise Richardson

The Trouble with Sounds and Smells (for the Naïve Realist)

28 September, 04:30—06:00 p.m.

If the scales are tipped in favour of Naïve Realism about colour over Physicalism, it's for two reasons. First, Naïve Realism's core claim is intuitive, or phenomenologically mandated. Therefore, to endorse Physicalism is to accept that the intuition is false, the phenomenology misleading. Second, there are arguments that block the acceptance of physicalism, such as the argument from structure. Furthermore, these two reasons work together in favour of Naïve Realism about colour: in the absence of the 'blocking arguments' it would be less problematic—and less dogmatic—to impute error to the intuition or phenomenology as the Physicalist must do. The trouble with sounds and smells is that whilst Naïve Realism is just as intuitive and phenomenologically mandated about these qualities, it is far from clear that analogous 'blocking arguments' against Physicalism about these qualities can be found. This, I will argue, is a problem not just for one who wants to defend Naïve Realism about auditory and olfactory qualities. It is also a problem for the Naïve Realist about colour (and about perception more generally).

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