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Perceptual Assumptions: An Argument Against Epistemic Immediacy

Isabella Maguire

University of Akron

ABSTRACT

Does objectivity live in perceptual states? In this paper, I address the question of whether accurate knowledge can arise from subject/object relations alone, given the occurrence of a perceptual state. I explore the direct realist view of immediate perceptual knowledge with a discussion of mind-dependent and mind-independent sensory objects and the interplay between subjective experience and environmental factors. I consider the possibility of epistemic perceptual immediacy under regular circumstances and in cases of hallucinatory or illusory experiences. I argue against the possibility of immediate accurate knowledge isolated from psychology and dispel the direct realist view. Returning to the continued debate about the acquisition of knowledge, my discussion looks to the resurfacing popularity of Cognitive Penetration Theory as a neuroscience-backed avenue for answers, and attempts to discern how much psychological factors aid in the development of our beliefs about reality.

KEYWORDS

Perception, Knowledge, Perceptual Immediacy, Direct Realism, Cognition, Cognitive Penetration, Psychology, Belief

INTRODUCTION

As I sit here typing this essay, I notice that there are currently several things occupying space in my conscious awareness. First, there is my laptop computer, which desperately needs to be plugged into an outlet. Secondly, I notice my mug of tea with steam rising from the rim of the milky white glass. This I will forget about, and it will get cold. There is also a candle softly flickering in the corner of my left eye. The list goes on.

Of the things that are present, I notice that I can make two general sorts of distinctions. The first is that I can distinguish between each of these things and recognize them immediately. The second, is that I can distinguish these individuals from the experience of myself. For example, there are other things that I am aware of, like the fact that my head hurts or that my wrist itches. I *know* my headache is part of my experience in a way that my laptop is not. Furthermore, I come to consider items like my laptop and the candle as existents in and of themselves. Where does this knowledge arise?

In this paper, I conclude that there must be an objective reality to which we have indirect access. We can derive partial knowledge from this objective reality by way of our subjective experiences. We cannot step outside of our own subjectivity. Consequently, we make evaluations about the nature of reality based on the subjective nature of perception. Because of this, I attempt to refute the direct realist stance on perceptual knowledge. I argue that we do not have direct immediate access to knowledge through perceptual states alone, as a direct realist view would assert. I argue that knowledge does arise from our interactions with this objective reality. I offer Cognitive Penetration Theory, or the view that mental states and psychological processes influence perceptual states, as a viable middle ground between direct realism and idealism. In this case, an idealistic view manifests as complete perceptual skepticism. Perceptual skepticism holds that knowledge is unobtainable through perceptual states because knowledge is dependent on the subjective mind. If idealism holds true, there is no reality outside of our own subjective experience for perceptual states to correspond to, and therefore, no objectivity at all. By introducing cognitive penetration's role in perception, I aim to support the claim that there is an objective reality to which our subjective experience corresponds, but thoughts and beliefs will always influence the perceptual process.

The naive realist, or common sense realist, maintains that the experiences I describe above amount to a direct relation of my awareness to the objects within its figurative grasp (Crane and French 2017). There is something about the objects themselves that, without involving my intentions, directly relates the object to my experiences of them, and conforms them to my mind. This directly gives me knowledge of the particularity of each object and enables me to experience their objectivity in relation to myself. Sense-data¹ is not needed to distinguish objective reality from my own experience (Crane and French 2017). In other words, I seem to possess (1) immediate accurate knowledge of the objects in my awareness, (2) distinguish (a) the experiential particulars of myself from that of (b) things less immediate to myself (like the candle), and (3) I seem to *know* that both of the latter categories (a and b) have equal existence in relation to each other.

The above view is tantamount to how we think about reality under familiar conditions. We do this everyday. Nobody needs to coax me into my belief that I exist, and that I exist with some separateness to the other objects which I experience. I can easily recognize and parse the objects in my experience and maintain a high degree of accuracy about what they are. For example, I know that the object in my pocket is a phone with a high degree of certainty. Were I to hand it to someone desiring to make a phone call, I am fairly confident that they would immediately dial a number and not question me as to why I handed them this particular object rather than any other. This is due to my belief that they are having a shared experience of the object as a phone, and as possessing all of the qualities of a phone. In short, I tend to believe that I and others can see the world around us objectively and without bias under typical conditions. Although it is advantageous for most of us to live this way, philosophers want to know what this suggests about the nature of perceptual states.

Returning now to the prior example of my experience typing this essay, the process of perception as described above seems to admit some knowledge. This case raises the question of whether immediate perceptual states contain knowledge in themselves, or whether perceptual states can give rise to knowledge only with the addition of the judgments made about them. My goal in writing this essay aims to address this question. In addition, I aim to confront the naive

1. Sense-data theory is a 20th Century Analytic theory which maintains that there are mind-dependent objects called sense-datum, which are exactly as they appear to be and of which we are directly aware when in a perceptual state.

realist and dispel this view generally. I do not believe that perceptual immediacy contains knowledge and will attempt to argue this point.

In order to approach the above claim, Section I of this paper will first introduce immediacy in perceptual states generally, and then explain two distinct notions of perceptual immediacy in greater detail. In Section II, I will focus on perceptual immediacy as it relates to knowledge and present a more formal version of the general naive realist view. Following this, in Section III, I will present an original argument contra the naive realist showing that epistemic immediacy is false. In Section IV, I will elaborate on my claims and attempt to justify them. Finally, in Section V, I will return to the central question: where does knowledge arise, and does objectivity live in perceptual states?

I. TWO NOTIONS OF PERCEPTUAL IMMEDIACY

Generally, the concept of perceptual immediacy may be understood in a more or less straightforward manner. By perception, I have in mind a state of awareness about the world (Crane and French 2017) and the presumed presentation of mind-independent objects to that of a knowing subject. For example, my visual experience of the colour blue and my auditory experience of a loud and sudden noise are both perceptual states (Antony 2009, 557–558). Perceptual states involve the processing of the signal relay in the neural network of the brain.

With respect to perception, the relationship between the subject and object has immediacy when the content of a given perceptual state is present to the mind independently of other factors and is without the intervention of another object or agential power.

When referring to *perceptual immediacy*, this expression could be describing a number of different notions. Todd Buras (2008) describes an immediacy relation as one where “the existence of an object distinct from the relata is not a necessary condition of the relation obtaining” (Buras 2008, 604). Buras differentiates between a notion of *absolute* immediacy and a notion he calls *qualified* immediacy (Buras 2008, 604–605). The distinction between these two notions being that *absolute* immediacy is a claim that two given relata need no intermediaries through which a relation can obtain. On the other hand, *qualified* immediacy allows for the intermediaries necessary where relation may obtain through sensory organs and nerves with a given relata. The latter notion is understandably the type of

immediacy modern naive realists were interested in, and also the preliminary kind of immediacy I am going to assume firsthand in the following discussion of perceptual immediacy. For the purposes of this essay I will be discussing two distinct notions of immediacy grounded in the perceptual process as presented by philosopher Georges Dicker (2006, 517–35).

Dicker presents a *psychological* notion and an *epistemic* notion of immediacy. He argues in the paper “Berkeley on Immediate Perception: Once More Unto the Breach” that the two notions are often conflated, which Dicker sees as misguided, and thus leading to major misrepresentations, especially in relation to the views of philosophers such as Berkeley and Hume. As such, Dicker takes special care to clarify and distinguish between his two presented notions of perceptual-based immediacy.

The *psychological* notion of perceptual immediacy, adapted from Dicker, claims that (an object) x is immediately perceived if that x is perceived without the perceiver performing any conscious inference pertaining to x (Dicker 2006, 518). In this case, psychological immediacy is said to obtain in a perceptual state when the subject does not have to make any adjustments in the way an object is perceived in order to perceive its true objective nature. This would imply a shift in the perceptual state rather than an assimilation of new knowledge about the nature of the perceptual object, given the case where psychological immediacy does not obtain.

Comparatively, the *epistemic* notion of perceptual immediacy maintains that (an object) x is immediately perceived if x is perceived in such a manner that both its existence and true nature can be known completely. This true nature is known on the basis of the subject’s present perceptual experiential state (Dicker 2006, 518). This notion of perceptual immediacy asserts that perceptual states themselves admit of knowledge about the perceptual object with no additional qualified mediate referential (Lyons 2017).

While the prior case of psychological immediacy is interesting, I am presently more concerned with Dicker’s second distinction of epistemic immediacy as relating to the questions treated in this paper. The notion of whether a subject can have epistemic immediacy in perception returns to the question I originally posed: does the immediacy of a given perceptual state give us objective knowledge in itself, or is accurate knowledge always the result of some relation to the perceptual process? The naive realist believes that the immediacy of a given perceptual state

provides objective knowledge, so, in the following section I will dive deeper into the naive realist's views on perception and knowledge.

II. EPISTEMIC IMMEDIACY AND THE NAIVE REALIST

Now, I would like to return to the naive realist view, which I briefly sketched in the introduction. For the naive realist, or direct realist, there is psychological immediacy, but also epistemic immediacy. As I mentioned earlier, the naive realist is committed to immediate accurate knowledge through the direct subject-object relation alone. Naive realism maintains that this relation admits to absolute truth about the nature of reality through the direct contact of the perceptual object with the knowing subject. This leads to the conclusion that the world simply *is* the way I directly perceive it to be, and that I always have direct access to the objective nature of reality, which I can accurately distinguish from that of my own subjective mental states.

It should be noted here that the direct realist view differs on a few key points from a similar view, the *indirect* realist view, or *representationalism*. Indirect realism generally holds that, perceptually, I am directly aware of my own subjective experience. My experience is the lense through which I am indirectly aware of an existent objective reality (Lyons 2017). I can interact with the objective particulars that I have awareness of, and so, I am able to assert that there is an objective reality apart from my experience that I am able to access. The direct perceptual immediacy relation asserted by the direct realist holds that I am directly aware of the external world and immediacy in my perceptual states give me access to reality *per se*.

As stated in Section I, Todd Buras (2008) notes that this direct immediacy relation, with respect to perceptual states, is not simply a logical relation. The object-subject relation is not free from obvious intermediaries, namely the sense organs and neural pathways, and is therefore also a kind of *qualified* immediacy (Antony 2009, 557–558). This is a necessary distinction, as I wish to point out that the naive realist believes that the obtaining immediacy relation is simply free from intermediary objects of thought, rather than a relation completely free from the perceiver's subjective experience. Experiential immediacy is foremost. The subject is always bound by environmental and bodily factors.

Returning to the notion of epistemic immediacy, Buras points out that most direct realists admit to epistemic immediacy in perceptual states. He writes that modern philosopher Thomas Reid, a direct realist himself, is committed to a kind of epistemological immediacy. Although, he notes that Reid never explicitly distinguishes between his own epistemic commitments and those of other immediacy aspects (Buras 2008, 615).

With all of these distinctions in mind, Buras presents the following formalized version of the naive realist's view (Buras 2008, 612):

a (the subject) immediately perceives *b* (an object) if and only if *a* perceives *b*, and it is not the case that if *a* perceives *b*, then there is an *x* distinct from *a* and *b* which is an object of thought for *a*.

The above is the version of the naive realist's claim which I will address with a counterclaim in the following section. For now, I would like to take up the position of epistemic perceptual immediacy and explore this assertion in detail.

When I am in a state of awareness, I must also simultaneously be in a perceptual state, as a state of awareness must be awareness of *something*. It seems as though the knowledge of my experience, therefore, has simultaneity with the experience itself. The content of my experience contains the features of my awareness about something. The thought of my observation of the mug of tea on the table is the *aboutness* of what it is like to currently have the perceptive experience of the mug on the table (Kind 2010, 902–903). In other words, this thought is the only necessary thought I must have in relation to my perceptual experience of the mug in order to experience its particular objective reality as a mug. But, do I even need this? In fact, the features of my awareness seem to be present and direct whether I have any thought about them at all.

Any given perceptual relation may be informed by a given thought or belief about it,² but the relation in itself obtains in both (a) the event that my belief changes, and (b) a non-belief state. For example, if I am presented with an ambiguous image, I may be unable to discern what it is, but it would be absurd to assert that I am not aware of the image itself as an image contained in my perceptual state. I am aware of the image whether I can discern it or not.

2. Cognitive Penetration Theory suggests that there is an influence of cognitive factors on sensory aspects of the perceptive process.

So, what epistemic commitments can I have, if any? If the direct realist also wishes to assert epistemic immediacy, then the non-belief based perceptual relation must admit objective knowledge. To refresh, a commitment to epistemic immediacy entails that perception is immediate whereby a given object is perceived in a such a way that, both its existence, and its true nature may be known on the basis of the perceptual state alone. Therefore, if the perceptual state gives me direct access to reality, then I will also have knowledge of the perceptual object by necessity. In this sense *to perceive* may be equated with what it is *to know*.

Under every perceptual condition I, therefore, must also have epistemic immediacy. If I have the conformity of my experience with the actual state of reality, only then am I in a perceptual state. Thus, it seems that in order to maintain this epistemic assertion, the direct realist must maintain that we are either always perceiving directly, or that we are not always in a state of perceiving.

In this case, a state of awareness cannot be one and the same with a perceptual state. If this is the case, then awareness is not always awareness *of something*, as I asserted earlier. For the naive realist asserting epistemic immediacy, it seems that a basic state of awareness may obtain without a perceptual state. I would like to briefly dwell on this point, as it seems to be one way to explain how I could have awareness of an ambiguous image, but be unable to discern what it is, if a direct perceptual state should give me knowledge. If I am to follow through with this epistemic commitment, then it seems that awareness and perceptual states cannot be referring to the same conscious state.

If I am wrong about what I am aware of, then, in this case my perceptual state will be directly influenced. This influence would lead to mistakenness and false-beliefs, which come about from inadequate knowledge, or a lack of immediate knowledge. So, this leaves the direct realist view in an interesting place with respect to commitment to epistemic immediacy.

Perhaps, to say that I can have a false perceptual belief is to, as Dicker points out in Section I, conflate epistemic immediacy with the distinct notion of psychological immediacy. The conclusion, then, for the direct realist is that a perceiver only has knowledge when they are experiencing a perceptual state. If I am mistaken about *what* is in my field of awareness, then I am not *in* a perceptual state.

Finally, in order for the direct/naive realist to assert epistemic immediacy, the following must hold up. Epistemic perceptual immediacy asserts that (a) states

of awareness are not always perceptual states, and that, (b) if the perceiver is mistaken about the existence and nature of a given perceptual object, then (c) that given state of awareness is not also a perceptual state.

III. CONTRA EPISTEMIC IMMEDIACY AND THE NAIVE REALIST

I will now offer some opposition to the direct realist. I believe the naive realist is incorrect in all of their assertions, but am here only aiming to refute the general naive realist view, addressing the specific falsity of epistemic immediacy within perceptual states.

For the naive realist to assert epistemic immediacy in a direct subject-object relationship, all of the conditions listed in Section II must be met. Therefore, to effectively dispel the notion of epistemic perceptual immediacy, a perceptual relationship between a knowing subject and a given perceptual object must be shown to obtain in a state of awareness where (1) the subject is mistaken about the true nature of the perceptual object, or (2) when the subject is mistaken about the objective mind-independent existence of the perceptual object. If, either (1) or (2) obtains in a state of awareness, then states of conscious awareness must be *of something*. If this is the case, then states of awareness are always perceptual in nature, and a subject's experiential state is also a perceptual state. If true, then the subject's perceptual state does not imply immediate objective knowledge of a given perceptual object, and epistemic immediacy is false.

In response to the naive realist position, I will now offer a formal counterargument to epistemic immediacy as follows:

- P1.** If a perceptual state obtains with incomplete immediate perceptual knowledge, then epistemic immediacy is false.

- P2.** If a perceptual state obtains in a state of awareness in which the subject is mistaken about *either*, the true nature, or mind-independent existence of an object, then perceptual states obtain despite incomplete immediate knowledge of an object.

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- P3.** Perceptual states *do* obtain when the subject is mistaken about the true nature of an object.
- P4.** Perceptual states *do* obtain when the subject is mistaken about the mind-independent existence of an object.
- P5.** Perceptual states obtain, *both* when the subject is mistaken about the true nature, and mind-independent existence of a given object (conjunction, P3, P4).
- C1.** Perceptual states obtain with incomplete immediate perceptual knowledge (*modus ponens*, P2, P5).
- C2.** Therefore, epistemic immediacy is false (*modus ponens*, P1, C1).

As I have asserted throughout the development of this paper, naive realism entails that a direct subject-object relation allows for the subject to experience and to know mind-independent reality. This knowledge obtains in the moment of subject-object conformity alone. Thus, perceiving is equated with *knowing* in the sense that perceptual states grant access to the true nature of reality whereupon a given perceptual object is apprehended. For the naive realist, what it is to know reality is simply the conformity of the subject to the object within a perceptual state. When I am in a perceptual state, I am simultaneously in a state of *knowing*.

In one way, my defense may highlight an issue with the kind of perceptual immediacy the naive realist wishes to maintain, but in another way, this exercise might simply serve to exemplify the problems that arise where epistemic and psychological immediacy are confused. Despite this risk, I argue that the kind of subject-object relationship the naive realist asserts entails epistemic perceptual immediacy. Therefore, if perceptual epistemic immediacy is false, then naive realism/direct realism is also, arguably, false.

The following section is devoted to the defense of my counter argument, primarily focusing on the justification of premises three and four.

IV. EXPLANATION AND JUSTIFICATION

Accurate knowledge of and about objects in my field of awareness seems perceptually immediate under familiar, or 'normal' perceptual conditions. But, when perceptual conditions are novel or ambiguous, the absence of accurate immediate knowledge becomes clear. Jennifer Church (2010) expresses a similar observation in her paper "Seeing Reasons." Church states that "we experience objectivity only when we discover consistency across perspectival change" (Church 2010, 641). Conditions in which my state of awareness is also of *something* must admit of a perceptual process. This is the process by which I am able to make sense of what it is that I am aware of.

In premise (3) of my argument, I say that a given perceptual state obtains within a state of awareness regardless of whether the subject is mistaken about the true nature of a perceptual object. It would be absurd to claim that I am not aware of an object that I consciously recognize, but is it not also absurd to claim that my awareness of an object is absent of any perceptual state?

To illustrate my point, I will return to the example of an ambiguous figure briefly mentioned in Section II.

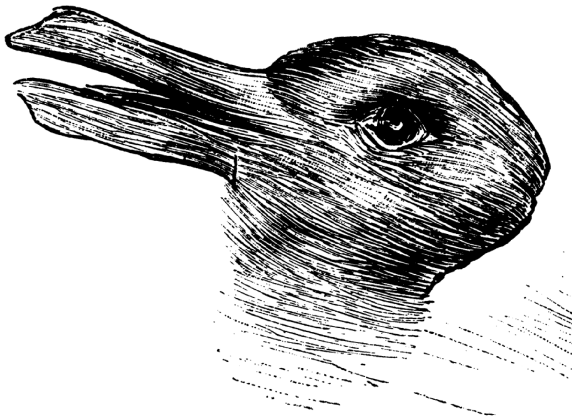


Figure 1.1 Duck-rabbit illusion, Anonymous Illustrator, 1892. „Welche Thiere gleichen einander am meisten?“ Fliegende Blätter. Braun & Schneider.

The ambiguous figure pictured above is a common example of a visual illusion. By simply looking at the image it is difficult to tell whether it illustrates a duck or a rabbit. I can capture the image as an object in my field of visual awareness, but I do not have immediate knowledge of the true nature of the object. I do not immediately know *what* the object is, I just know *that* it is an object in my awareness. My experience of the object is unfamiliar and, once I recognize the object as an object, my perceptual state begins the process of discerning what the object is. If I were presented with this image and was told it is a sketch of a rabbit, I would then be more likely to justify it as being a rabbit, and so, it would no longer be ambiguous in that sense.

Apart from this, my perceptual state is absent of epistemic immediacy about the object's true nature. Therefore, I can consciously switch back and forth between the presentation of, either a rabbit, or a duck, without knowing whether it is either. It would be absurd to assert that I am not in a perceptual state upon becoming aware of the image. It is in my visual system. I can take it in, imprint it in my memory, and recall it later with the same confusion about what it is that I had been looking at. It is my perception of the image which allows me to do this. The realization that I can do all of these things shows me that (1) I am in a perceptual state, (2) I have imperfect knowledge about *what* the object truly is, and (3) my perception of the object can be informed by something outside of my perceptual state. Point (3) touches on the thoughts of Church, who believes that prior perceptions about a given object allows the subject to have an accurate and demonstrated thought about a given perceptual object.³

Premise (4) asserts that a perceptual state obtains in awareness despite mistakenness about the mind-independent existence, or objectivity, of a given perceptual object. In other words, I might know that my head hurts, and this is immediate to me as part of my self-experience. This is a subjective experience. Whether the cold mug of tea, or my laptop, really exist apart from me is another story entirely.

I can be mistaken about whether I know exactly what an object is upon perceiving it, but I also assert that perceptual states obtain in awareness whether there actually is a mind-independent object at all. To explain this, I will employ another example.

3. See note 2.

If I am driving down a dark road on a clear night, I might believe that my perceptual state is epistemically immediate where I am aware of the road stretching out in front of me. If I were not clearly consciously aware of the road, I would fail to maintain a straight path for very much longer. If I were to suddenly hit a person who happened to be walking across the road, the presence of the person was not included in my conscious awareness. I am aware of the road, but clearly not the person I just massacred. In this case, there is a perceptual deficit.

Clearly, I am aware, as I see the road and other features of my awareness. I am also in a perceptual state, as I am aware of objects and actively discerning them in order to maintain my driving. My perceptual state is consistent. So, it is therefore, in a sense objective, as Church points out. I am aware and I am perceiving, and yet I made a mistake about the mind-independent features of reality and smashed a person, whom I mistook for a feature of the dark road. Therefore, perceptual states seem to obtain in a state of awareness despite mistakenness about the objective existence of its features.

In another, positive example, I could be in a perceptual state where I believe something to be present that is actually absent, rather than a deficit in my perceptual state, whereby I miss an object actually present. I could be hallucinating a perceptual object. I believe this perceptual object exists mind-independently, but it does not. If I were to hallucinate a doughnut on the table in front of me, I would be aware of that particular perceptual object. In this case, I can observe the doughnut, and describe *what* I am aware of. I can pick out its particular features. Maybe, it has pink icing and purple sprinkles. Based on my experience of the doughnut, I believe it has objective mind-independent reality. If, however, I attempt to bite into the doughnut, and bite through thin air, I would discover that I am mistaken about the existence of the doughnut completely. Nonetheless, I seem to be reacting to stimuli in my field of awareness, and am thus *in* a perceptual state. Despite my mistakenness, I am perceiving something, and am simply mistaken about the objective nature of *what* it is that I am aware of.

Based on the examples provided, it seems that I can have perceptual states without the immediate accurate knowledge assumed by the naive realist. I perceive a given perceptual object of which I am aware without knowing its true objective nature upon initially perceiving it. From these observations, it follows that epistemic immediacy in perceptual states must be false.

V. RETURNING TO THE QUESTION OF PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Finally, I will return to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: where does knowledge arise, with respect to perceptual states, and can objectivity live in perceptual states at all? I will begin this discussion by first addressing the second portion of this question.

In the previous section, I established that perceptual states are present in awareness regardless of immediate knowledge of a given perceptual object. With this in mind, it seems that I know when I am experiencing a mind-independent object. While the question of whether we can directly perceive any objectivity remains open, I believe that, in some sense, I must say that the answer is yes. I do have some objective knowledge of a perceptual object provided by subjective perceptual states. In order to escape a sort of Humean idealism, I must be able to say that my experience of the laptop in front of me differs from the subjective experience of hallucinating a perceptual object, as in the example of the doughnut.

The interplay between objective reality and subjective experience is what provides me with knowledge about the nature of the world. The combination of sensory experience and a perceptual state tells me that there is an object in my awareness, and provides me with some knowledge about whether it exists and what it could be. I do not know exactly *what* its true objective nature is, but I always know that something is present. I can have imperfect knowledge of what is present, and while this knowledge may not be complete, it is accurate for the most part, allowing me to successfully navigate my surroundings and communicate with others. To return to the point discussed in Section IV, Jennifer Church directly states “we experience objectivity only when we discover consistency across perspectival change” (2010, 641). It is only when consistency is absent that we question objective reality. This could be due to purposive vagueness in the object itself, as in the case of the illusory image example.

Based on the short discussion above, I will now address the first half of the question. How does knowledge arise, if there is some knowledge present in perceptual states? One possibility, as Church states, is that “it is perception that secures the particularity of the objects of our thoughts, not the other way around” (2010, 639). From this assertion, I could conclude that perceptual knowledge gives us some idea of what there is, objectively speaking. Further, objective knowledge may follow from perceptual states rather than solely from cognition about the

content of perceptual states. Conversely, cognitive penetration theory, which assumes the influence of cognitive processes on perceptual states, suggests that perceptual states are influenced by prior and co-occurring cognition and psychological factors.

Either way, we seem to need something objective, whether we begin with reference to objective reality, or end with an approximation of it. But, is this a satisfactory answer to the knowledge question? In current discourse, the final answer of this heavily debated topic is still open, prompting a possible refashioning of views like Cognitive Penetration Theory, which has new empirical backing (Vetter and Newen 2014, 62–75). and suggests that higher level cognitions, like thoughts and beliefs, directly influence sensory perception. If this is the case, then the presence of an individual's experience and beliefs about a given perceptual object may prevent the veridicality of knowledge in perceptual states completely. On one hand, it seems that some knowledge must be present in perceptual states. This allows for the correspondence with an objective reality existing apart from my experience of it. On the other hand, the possibility of cognitive penetrability calls into question whether the subject is ever actually experiencing an object as it is. If perceptual states rely heavily on prior psychology, how could it occur to the subject that the regularity in their environment had shifted? Upon returning to my apartment after a month, it might suddenly seem to me that the furniture had been re-arranged by my roommate. This could be because prior experience of my apartment does not match its current state, or I am able to match my prior experience to the sensory experiences of my current perceptual state. Possibly, I simply expected it to be a certain way and forgot, which is why I tripped over the coffee table upon entering.

As I previously argued, an objective reality of some sort is necessary in order to avoid falling prey to idealism manifesting as perceptual skepticism. I do not hope to create a false dichotomy between idealism in the extreme sense and the sole possibility of one remaining option. I merely wish to direct attention to the renewed sense of hope in Cognitive Penetration Theory. The theory raises doubts about whether perceptual experiences grant us access to an outside world. It raises the possibility that mediate (Carrier 1969) perceptual states are always and completely permeated by both prior and cocurrent psychological processes.

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