

Properties in Sight and In Thought

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Perceiving an object seems to place the subject in a position to think a demonstrative thought about it in virtue of presenting the object, and thus placing the subject in a position to attend to it, and—on that basis—to ascertain it as the thought's subject matter. Perception also seems to enable perspicuous conceptual grasp of sensible properties (e.g. of Being Oval), and this—also by virtue of presenting and enabling attention to their instances. But despite the overall similarities between the role played by perception in both sort of cases, subtle differences between the two sorts of perceptual acquaintance emerge when cases falling outside the normal—perceptual illusions and hallucinations—get considered. Hallucinations suggest that the perception of an instance of a particular property might not be absolutely necessary for an acquaintance with the property. For example, hallucinating an oval shape or a crimson object seems as apt a basis for acquaintance with Being Oval or Being Crimson, respectively, as would an indistinguishable perception of an instance of each property in normal circumstances. By contrast, no hallucination—however faithful—can acquaint one with an external object. And illusions suggest, further, that perceiving and attending to an instance of a property might not be sufficient for acquaintance with the property. Some illusory experiences seem to enable conceptual grasp of one property—Being Oval, for example, while potentially involving perception of and attention to instances of another (Being Round).

The apparent peculiarities in the mechanism of perceptual acquaintance with properties can be fully accommodated on the basis on a novel understanding of what acquaintance with a property involves. On my proposal, having experiences with a merely apparent presentational character would suffice to place one *en rapport* with a specific property in virtue of displaying the property as it is essentially: that is, displaying its essential aspects with sufficient accuracy and determinacy.

As currently stands, on the other hand, the apparent difference in the mechanisms tend to get disregarded, and a model of acquaintance—fitting the case of particulars, on which the sort of discriminatory capacity involved in an acquaintance with an item would depend on the presence of a causal link to the respective item—gets applied to properties with few modifications. The extension of this model to properties is driven by a legitimate concern for substantial commonality among the instances of acquaintance. And, initially, it may seem that the commonality hinges on the same sort of discriminatory capacity being involved in all instances of acquaintance with an entity. But this impression reveals a blindspot for a viable alternative, on which the sort of discriminatory capacity involved in acquaintance would be sensitive to the entity's ontological category.