

The Perceptual 'Machinery' of the Brain

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ABSTRACT

In the philosophy of perception, there are two main conceptions of the relationship between the brain and perceptual experience, the Capacity View and the Generative View. On the first, the processes in/states of the brain are a *necessary* condition for perception; they enable perception, giving you, in combination with normally functioning eyes, appropriate lighting conditions, etc., the capacity to see the objects in front of you. On the second, by contrast, those processes or states are both necessary and *sufficient* for perception; they produce or generate perceptual experiences in you.

Direct realists about perception typically subscribe to the Capacity View. On it, if there are any phenomenal properties to speak of, they reside in the objects perceived, *not* in your experience. Sense Datum theorists and intentionalists, on the other hand, typically are committed to the Generative View: phenomenal properties are the properties of your experience, wholly produced as that experience is by your brain. Now, if the Capacity View is true, it is at best an open question whether or not an envatted brain would be subjected to a robust hallucination were we to stimulate its processes or states typically associated with perception, whereas the Generative View seems to *entail* such hallucinations. In this talk, I will bracket the first view and critically examine the second.

I shall argue that the possibility of such hallucinations rests on a certain stipulation about the perceptual 'machinery' of the brain, a stipulation which is an added extra to the initial assumption of brain states or processes being necessary and sufficient for perceptual experience. That stipulation is perhaps best expressed in the idea the brain works as a piece of machinery to begin with. Yet, at least from the philosophical point of view, we need not think of brain this way. Sufficiently specific regularity in its workings is an assumption yet to be argued for.

An alternative conception, based on this possible lack of regularity, is, importantly, consistent with the Generative View but *does not entail* hallucinations of the above kind. And, in turn, if we suppose this conception true and nonetheless want to insist on the possibility of inducing hallucinations in an envatted brain *somehow*, this will come at a high price. I will explain why. Crucially, if my arguments are correct, then the main alternatives to Direct Realism about perception have much less going for them than is widely supposed. The same holds for the very idea of phenomenal properties of experience itself. And, perhaps, for the possibility of envatted-yet-experiencing brains as something epistemology – not only of perception – should contend with.