

# The arguments from illusion and hallucination

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The ‘argument from illusion’ is the most important argument in favor of the sense datum theory of perception. This ‘argument’ is best regarded as two distinct arguments: the argument from hallucination, and the argument from illusion. The difference between hallucination and illusion.

## 1 The argument from hallucination

Despite Ayer’s use of the phrase ‘argument from illusion’, the argument he presents would be better described as the ‘argument from hallucination.’ It can be formalized as follows:

1. In every experience, there is an object of your awareness.
  2. In the case of hallucination, the object of your awareness cannot be a material thing.
  3. The objects of awareness are the same in the case of hallucinatory and veridical experience.
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- C1. Material things are never the objects of experience.  
C2. Every perceptual experience has something other than a material thing as its object.

## 2 The argument from illusion

We can run a similar argument based on the possibility of illusion rather than hallucination:

- 1\*. Whenever it seems to you that you are perceiving something  $F$ , there is something which is  $F$  that you are perceiving.
  - 2\*. In the case of an illusory experience of some object as  $F$ , there is no material thing which is  $F$  which could be the object of experience.
  - 3\*. The objects of experience are the same in the case of illusory and veridical experience.
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- C1. Material things are never the objects of experience.
  - C2. Every perceptual experience has something other than a material thing as its object.

### **3 Are the objects of perceptual awareness the same in veridical, illusory, and hallucinatory experience?**

The conclusion of these arguments follow from their premises, and premise 2 is not open to dispute. So the key premises for evaluating the argument are P1/P1\* and P3/P3\*. Here are two arguments for P3/P3\* given by A. J. Ayer in his *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*.

#### *3.1 The 'no difference in kind' argument*

Ayer suggests that if the objects of veridical and illusory perceptual experiences were different kinds of things, we should expect this to issue in some qualitative difference in the perceptual experience. But it does not.

“When I look at a straight stick, which is refracted in water and so appears crooked, my experience is qualitatively the same as if I were looking at a stick that really was crooked. When, as the result of putting on green spectacles, the white walls of my room appear to me to be green, my experience is qualitatively the same as if I were perceiving walls that really were green.” (6)

Does it follow from the fact that two experiences are indistinguishable that the object of one's awareness is the same in the two cases?

#### *3.2 The argument from progression*

The fact that veridical and illusory perceptions “may form a continuous series, both with respect to their qualities and with respect to the conditions under which they are obtained.” (8)

The example of approaching an object from a distance; the problem with this example; the meaning of ‘veridical perception’ when the property in question is the size of an object.

A better example: alteration in the color of a wall under changing lighting conditions. An example involving hallucination; ‘veridical hallucinations.’ Lying in a hospital bed looking at lights above you.