Independence and fallibility

PHIL 20229
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Availability/Difference and the Availability Requirement give us some guidance on which properties are represented in experience; but before turning to some particular candidate types of properties and relations, it will be useful to introduce two other principles about our perceptual representation of properties:

> *Independence*
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> If an experience can represent F as instantiated, then F can be instantiated unperceived in the environment of the perceiver.
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> *Fallibility*
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> If an experience can represent objects x, y, . . . as instantiating a property or relation F, then it can do so even if x, y, ...do not instantiate F.

The intuition behind these principles is that experience is, even if reliable, neither incorrigible nor omniscient with respect to any class of properties it represents as instantiated. These principles say that what perception represents are aspects of one's environment which are there whether or not one is sensing them; hence, for any candidate content of experience, we should be able to imagine experiences with that content in the absence of the sort of state of affairs which would make that experience veridical, and that state of affairs in the absence of an experience of it.

Each of these principles is open to objections based on certain claims which are necessary if true. If there are properties which are both perceptually represented and necessarily instantiated by every environment, these will be counterexamples to Fallibility; and if there are properties which can't be instantiated, but can be perceptually represented (like, on some views, colors) these will be counterexamples to Independence. I'm ignoring this complication here; to get around it we could add to the antecedents of our two principles, respectively, "if it is possible for x, y, ... to fail to instantiate F" and "if it is possible for o to fail to be in the subject's environment."

How might we argue for these principles? One sort of argument begins with an examination of the sorts of qualities which are (pretty) uncontroversially represented in experience, and notes that each of these satisfies Independence and Fallibility. The fact that all of these properties satisfy these two principles is some evidence that the principles are general truths about perceptual representation.

Two people who will not be impressed: certain sorts of idealists, and certain sorts of sense datum theorists.

I'm not worried about these guys: my target is really the view of people who hold that some perceptually represented properties satisfy Fallibility & Independence, but not all.

And in fact we can use the arguments of idealists to show that if some perceptually represented properties fail to satisfy Fallibility and Independence, then all do. We can of course agree with idealists about the truth of this conditional without agreeing with them about the truth of its antecedent.

One reading of Berkeley: Let S be a name for the shorts of shape properties represented in experience, and let C be a color property. Berkeley argues from the mind-dependence of the C-properties to the mind-dependence of the S-properties via the premise that it is impossible for something to have an S-property without having a C-property. He defends this premise via the impossibility of conceiving of a thing having a S-property but not a C-property, or vice versa. Analogy: our knowledge that it is impossible that a thing be red and green all over. Some complications about whether this form of argument is valid.