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WHY PERCEPTION MATTERS

abstract

What I would like to do in what follows is to explain how, in my view, realism cannot but engage with perception. But we have to be careful here. I am not saying that reality is nothing other than perceptual experience. That is certainly not how things are: rather, that is precisely the mistake we have to avoid, although this mistake is very often made by the many, and often well-informed, people who dismiss realism as a sort of sensism. The route that leads from aisthesis to realism is more tortuous and goes by way of some matters that are not only central to the history of modern philosophy, but also apt to recur like a persistent disease.

keywords

Epistemic trust, scepticism, phenomena, anti-reductive ontology, fundierung

1. Language

The first thing that it is important to get straight is why, in the twentieth century, and especially in its second half, perception came to seem so irrelevant for philosophy. The answer is simple: the big questions had all to do with language, and in the heyday of the “linguistic turn” it did not make much sense to pay attention to something that seemed at best to be a secondary matter that could be dealt with by science – perhaps a second-level science such as psychology as it is traditionally conceived by philosophers. This was a widespread attitude, which went hand in hand with antirealism, and that established a far from casual parallelism between a lack of interest in perception and antirealism. We might cite the following list: Davidson, Derrida, Dummett, Feyerabend, Foucault, Gadamer, Kuhn, Putnam (middle period) Rorty, Van Fraassen, Vattimo. These are just eleven philosophers, but they make up a championship team, and not one of them has studied perception. We may go further: not one of these philosophers, unlike their predecessors in the previous fifty years – from Husserl to James, from Bergson to Aliotta – would have even thought that perception deserved to be considered as a matter of philosophical interest.

This was the period in which it was held, as Gadamer put it, that “the being that can be understood is language”¹ or, in Derrida’s slogan, “there is nothing outside the text”.² Things were much the same among analytical philosophers, where Davidson claimed that we encounter not perceptions but beliefs,³ and Goodman spoke of worldmaking in the same terms as the construction of an artwork.⁴ What was called the “linguistic turn”, both in analytical and in continental philosophy, was in the end a conceptual turn. What we are and how we live is made of history, language, traditions and texts. And even what is “out there” in the world of nature is not what we are shown by the senses, which are always deceptive, but rather is what is interrogated by paradigms, by the great conceptual constructions with which scientists give shape to the world.

Typically, when a philosopher has no theory of perception, or is not interested in having one, it means simply that he is in the grip of one, and

1 Gadamer, H. G. (1960), *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Mohr, Tübingen.

2 “Il n’y a pas de hors-texte”, literally (and a-semantically) meaning “there is no outside-text”, see Derrida, J. (1967), *De la grammatologie*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris.

3 Davidson, D. (2001), *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* Clarendon Press, Oxford.

4 Goodman, N. (1978), *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hackett, Indianapolis.

of a bad one at that, which generally leads him to claim that perception is dominated by concepts – at least in the Kantian sense that intuitions without concepts are blind, which is then enriched by examples in which perception is determined by our culture, our expectations, our habits and practical ends. The philosopher who does not attend to perception holds that perception is not a philosophical matter. The reason for this oversight can be sought in the privilege accorded to concepts in the construction of experience⁵ and not, we ought to note, in the wholly reasonable scientific and philosophical *re-construction* of experience.

2. Perception What these attitudes presuppose, so as to justify the supposed superiority of the conceptual over the perceptual, is a sort of trick by which perception is expelled from the realm of philosophy by simply exaggerating its shortcomings as a source of knowledge.

A classic example of this treatment can be found at the beginning of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*,⁶ where we see the condemnation of sensible certainty by way of the condemnation of the "this". The passage is well known: sensible certainty says "Now it is day", and Hegel asks to write this truth down, but twelve hours later it is out of date because in the meantime night has come on. The trick is fairly transparent, but it works pretty well. We start by thinking of perception as a source of knowledge, then we notice that this source is sometimes misleading, and we draw the conclusion that we must withdraw all credibility from perception and look for certainty elsewhere. The clear aim of disqualifying perception carries the significant philosophical advantage that it gives a huge boost to the realm of the conceptual, which is then given the task of keeping the truth firm against the illusions and tricks of the senses.

This is even easier to see in Descartes.⁷ He begins by claiming that our knowledge comes from the senses, but that these sometimes mislead us, and it is better not to trust anything that has deceived us even once. To the objection that we are deceived only about things that are small or far away, Descartes replies that not only are there madmen who believe they are dressed in purple robes when they are in fact naked, but also every night we dream and hence what we perceive could be a mere representation. Here, the philosopher's unfairness to the senses is at least threefold. First

5 See typically McDowell, J. (1994), *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.). For a criticism of this, see my "Mente e mondo o scienza ed esperienza?", in *Rivista di estetica*, n. s., XII (2000), pp. 3-77.

6 Hegel, G. W. F. (1807), *Phänomenologie des Geistes*.

7 Descartes, R. (1641) *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, Michel Soly, Paris.

of all, he emits a radical sentence of condemnation in response to an occasional shortcoming: sometimes the senses mislead, *therefore* we must be systematically wary of them. Second, he supposes that the senses should be regarded as genuine bearers of knowledge, in that they bear “witness”. Finally, he thinks he can establish a radical scepticism by assuming a perfect equivalence between waking life and the dream state, which is clearly not true – I shall return to this shortly with the help of Austin.

Hegel and, before him, Descartes thus claim that all knowledge begins with the senses, but then hasten to show how unreliable the knowledge deriving from them is. This is a typical starting point, which we also find in the first lines of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁸ It is also precisely what Hume does quite explicitly⁹: his assumption is that knowledge comes from sensible experience and is based on inductive reasoning. But then, once he has shown that inductive reasoning is not one hundred per cent certain, he draws the sceptical conclusion from it. I repeat the central point here: the clearest fact about these strategies is that they *give an essentially epistemological role to the senses*, as if they were above all vehicles for knowledge, and then, having pointed out that sensible knowledge does not guarantee certainty, they withdraw all interest from sensibility. They pass from occasional doubt to global doubt, with an overload of science. This is where constructivism comes from: from the need to found, by way of construction, a world that has lost its stability, a world that (like man for Nietzsche) is “rolling away towards the x”. The result, however, is the opposite of what was expected, and is summed up in Price’s sentence quoted ironically by Austin: “When I see a tomato, there is much that *I can doubt*”.¹⁰

3. Construction The upshot of the classic trick with perception is thus twofold. On the one hand, experience is credited with a magmatic nature, thus assuming that there is no regularity in nature and likening sensible impressions to the representations of the imagination. On the other hand, the conceptual is given endless powers and is called on to put order into a matter that would otherwise be chaotic and incoherent.

As I have repeatedly pointed out,¹¹ Kantian philosophy became the philosophical mainstream over the last two centuries, because it was able to resolve the sceptical impasse defined by Hume’s critique of induction.

8 Kant, I. (1781=A, 1787=B), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Johann Friedrich Hartknoch, Riga 1781, A I, B I.

9 Hume, D. (1739), *A Treatise of Human Nature*, John Noon, London, p. 40.

10 Austin, J.L. (1962), *Sense and Sensibilia*, ed. G.J. Warnock, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.105.

11 See my *Il mondo eterno*, Bompiani, Milano 2001 and *Goodbye Kant! Cosa resta oggi della Critica della ragion pura*, Bompiani, Milano, 2004.

Following this view, knowledge does begin in the senses, but it does so only if the senses are fixed by conceptual schemes that are independent from experience and prior to it. As a result, “Intuitions without concepts are blind”,¹² a view that heralds a total collapse of ontology (what there is) into epistemology (what we know about what there is). And it is precisely against this background that we can explain the linguistic turn, that is, the claim that being, language and truth are closely associated with one another. It might be objected that there is nothing wrong with this collapse of ontology into epistemology. Yet, I am not convinced that it is so. In fact, the Kantian point of view (as we find it already in Descartes: think of the ontological argument) is hyper-constructivist, which is to say that it makes being dependent on knowing. It is against this backdrop that the postmodernist ideas arise according to which reality is socially constructed and there is no being independent from our manipulations.

Now, there is a slippery slope that leads from the negation of non-conceptual content to pan-interpretationism, and then to negationism. If only what is known exists, then anything – even the worst of crimes – of which we have lost all trace, has not existed. This is a possible outcome of Dummett’s claim, which he later denied for obvious reasons, about the non-existence of the past.¹³ If only the present exists, then past crimes were never committed and the Shoah never happened. I think that this is the strongest argument there is in favour of realism about the past. The same argument can be used in connection with perception: if perception does not count and only conceptual schemes do, then any sensual evidence can be denied.

Moreover, to claim, as Rorty did,¹⁴ that bidding farewell to objectivity can be valuably counterbalanced by solidarity seems not to take into account that solidarity can perfectly well be the principle that binds together mafia gangs or authoritarian regimes (as Putnam recalls, Mussolini supported pragmatism). But these are the political harms produced by that particular form of anti-realism that is postmodernism, about which I shall say no more here, since I have discussed them at length elsewhere.¹⁵ I rather wish now to respond to a simple question: why is the appeal to perception, which is so easy to disqualify from an epistemological point of view, such a powerful argument in favour of realism? At a first approximation, the answer is simple: *it is easy to disqualify perception from an epistemological point of view because it is not being treated as perception but as representation*. At this

12 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75.

13 Dummett, M. (2006), *Thought and Reality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

14 Rorty, R. (1989), *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

15 I have extensively argued in favour of this in my *Manifesto del Nuovo Realismo*.

point everything becomes very easy indeed. But if instead we treat it as perception – which is exactly what *Sense and Sensibilia* invites us to do – then the game is anything but decided.

4. Representation

In all this business the notion of “representation” is thus playing a central role. It is the idea of a medium that stands between perception and concept, between object and subject, being neither of them but also, if needed, (when perceptions need to be equated with thoughts) being both at the same time. Consider the following passage that Boghossian¹⁶ cites from Rorty: “None of us antirepresentationalists have ever doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us. What we question is whether they are representationally independent of us”. It is far from easy to know what to make of this passage, but it surely betrays itself as belonging to the same mind-set as “there is nothing outside the text” and “the being that can be understood is language”. Thus, everything is absorbed into this “representation” and it becomes inappropriate to speak of “perception”. I suppose that saying that the world depends on us representationally, though not causally, roughly means that the ways in which we represent objects are dependent on us, while the way in which objects are made depends on how they are represented by those who have made them.

What Rorty calls “representation” was known in Austin’s days as “sense data”, and this helps us understand what Rorty is referring to when talking of causal dependency. Let us take Austin’ analysis of how someone might get to the claim that we always and only perceive “sense data”: “the argument from illusion is intended primarily to persuade us that, in certain exceptional, abnormal situations, what we perceive – directly anyway – is a sense-datum; but then there comes a second stage, in which we are to be brought to agree that what we (directly) perceive is *always* a sense-datum, even in the normal, unexceptional case”.¹⁷ Austin has the merit of showing the pervasiveness of this incipiently totalising mechanism, which does away with any difference between perception and representation. Perceptions are completely assimilated to mirages, hallucinations, dreams or afterimages under the umbrella-word “representation”, and it is obvious that, in this way, perceiving is reduced to the level of mere illusion. In order for this trick to work, two things are called for.

The first is, so to speak, a sort of phenomenological carelessness. You would

16 Boghossian, P. (2006), *Fear of Knowledge. Against Relativism and Constructivism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.43.

17 Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p.44.

have to be very gullible indeed to mistake a greenish afterimage for a patch on the wall; of course it can happen, but it usually never does. The grain of what is perceived – and this is the point much insisted on in the recent debates on “non-conceptual content” – is much finer than that of what is merely thought, recalled or represented. You can look at a remembered sun without hurting your eyes; a remembered duck-rabbit does not shift; comparing two remembered colours is always problematic because the real shades have a finer grain than the memory of them. If this is how things are, then the whole trick consisted merely of assimilating, under the name “representation”, things that are in fact very diverse, only to draw the conclusion that the control and guide of representations derive from conceptual schemes, in line with the constructionism we mentioned earlier. The second element is what psychologists call the “stimulus error”, by which they mean the ease with which we replace an observation with an explanation. It is the ease with which, when we have our eyes closed, we reply “nothing” or “blackness” to the question “what do you see?”, when what we see are really phosphines and flashes. We do not include those in our description because we are talking about something else, namely a theory of vision for which the eye is like a camera obscura so that when the shutter is closed there is total darkness. It is not hard to find a trace of the stimulus error in the idea of the incommensurability of paradigms initially defended by Kuhn.¹⁸ This is an idea that, if taken to its logical conclusion, would lead us to say that Ptolemy and Copernicus did not have the same perceptual experience of the Sun. From this point of view, the contrast between the manifest image of the world and the true image can be seen as an instance of the stimulus error. *Thus we can see that the basic sense of the stimulus error is the confusion between ontology and epistemology.* Not to mention the fact that, when it comes to social objects,¹⁹ it is hard to draw the distinction between the manifest and the true image, which in fact, in objects such as mortgages and marriages, seem to coincide.

- 5. Dream** There is an even clearer proof of this. In Descartes, the disqualification of the senses goes hand in hand with the disqualification of madness and dreaming as sources of knowledge. When observing that the senses mislead us about things that are small or far away, he also objects that he could be mad or, without seeking the hyperbole, that, like every man, every night he dreams

¹⁸ Kuhn, T. (1962), *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago, Chicago.

¹⁹ I have vastly discussed the difference between natural, ideal and social objects in *Documentality. Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012.

and takes for real things that are only representations.²⁰ As we know, fifty years ago this passage was central to an acrimonious dispute between Derrida and Foucault,²¹ where the latter upheld the exceptional nature of madness, while Derrida held that the true hyperbolic scepticism was that of the dream, namely something that happens to everybody and is not at all extraordinary. Precisely because they are ordinary, dreams potentially undermine every datum of sensible knowledge, given that it could simply be a dream-state. What is curious here is that neither party took into account the concrete aspect of dreams, or the fact that it is very difficult to mistake a dream experience for a real one. For sure, following a widespread and little examined commonplace, we can come to suppose that dream-states can really be systematically confused with waking experiences. But suffice it to recall, on the other hand, how taken aback we are when a dream seems real and how much trouble we have shaking it off, which means that in most cases the difference between dream and wake is very clear indeed. Now, at the heart of Austin's genuinely anti-Cartesian argument there lies a consideration of the specificity of dreams compared to waking experience. Indeed, as we have just seen, Descartes' dream argument offers Derrida the path to radical scepticism: every perception could be a representation and every representation could be a dream-state. Yet, the assimilation of dream and perception is not at all justified, if we look even cursorily at perception. Locke had already seen the point²²: if you look at the Sun in a dream, your eyes do not hurt as they would in reality; if you drink absinthe in a dream, you do not get drunk. There is a specific trait of perception, namely its peculiar "grain", that is lost in dreams, so that the identification becomes problematic and, with it, the whole line of thought that Descartes wants to build on it.

In the end, it is the dream argument that most fully illustrates the antirealist bent that is at the core of the notion of "representation". As Austin recounts it, this argument runs more or less as follows. One night, Helen dreams of the Taj Mahal, which she has never visited, though she may have seen photographs or films of it. No one would say that, in her dream, she is perceiving the Taj Mahal, because what she is having is a purely mental representation of it. It is also worth noting that we cannot tell to what extent what she is seeing really resembles the Taj Mahal, given that such identifications in dreams often go beyond matters of shape and, in

20 Descartes, *Metaphysical Meditations*, First meditation.

21 Foucault, M. (1961), *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Plon, Paris; Derrida, J. (1963), "Cogito et histoire de la folie", in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, LXVIII, pp.460-94; then in (1967), *L'écriture et la différence*, Seuil, Paris.

22 Locke, J. (1689), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Thomas Bassett, London.

any case, it is implausible to suppose that when someone represents the Taj Mahal to himself, he does so in the smallest details. Suppose then that Helen travels to India and sees the Taj Mahal. The representation-friendly thinkers will say that in the first case Helen was perceiving the Taj Mahal indirectly, but that she had to do with “sense data”, that is, representations, in both cases. Which seems like a bizarre slovenliness about the phenomenological features of these two experiences. But was it not with an argument of this sort that Descartes did away with sensible certainty?

Apart from the phenomenological negligence, dreams are also subject to the same hyperbole that is applied to senses. As for the latter, from the fact that senses sometimes mislead, the conclusion is drawn that we should be systematically distrustful of them. As for dreams, the fact that in some cases we seem to have veridical experiences is transformed into the claim that dreams and veridical experiences are made of the same stuff. Yet, the senses mislead us just as little as dreams resemble reality (and in any case we sooner or later wake up). As Austin observes, it could hardly be seriously suggested that dreaming of being presented to the Pope is “qualitatively indistinguishable” from actually being presented to the Pope.²³ In any case, ever since I gave up smoking I have been having frequent dreams – accompanied by strong feelings of guilt – of smoking, but funnily enough these do not leave a cough nor the taste of smoke in my mouth (neither in the reality nor in the dream); so it is unlikely that I am mistaken. In short: “Does the dreamer see illusions? Does he have delusions? Neither; dreams are *dreams*”.²⁴ The argument according to which life is nothing but a dream, with all the powerful antirealist value it carries with it, is based on simply leaving out the fact that dreams are dreams and that we are rarely mistaken about this, so much so that – and here I risk repeating myself – we notice it distinctly when we have a particularly realistic dream and are surprised by it. One good test of whether you are dreaming or not is to pinch yourself. If you do not wake up, then it may be unpleasantly true that you are not dreaming but are awake.

6. **Unamendability** Ultimately, the interesting feature of perception is this: rather than a source of information or an epistemological resource, it should be regarded as a barrier to our constructivist expectations. In a certain way, the function of perception is similar to Popper’s falsification, except that here it has an

²³ Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p.48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27.

ontological role rather than an epistemological one.²⁵ In perception what really counts are the lines of resistance, or what I call “unamendability”,²⁶ It is at this point that we find the importance of perception as well as the ontological meaning of aesthetics as *aisthesis*. It is the fact that it does not confirm and realise our expectations and knowledge, but rather it controverts them, showing clearly that there exists something distinct and separate from us. The unamendable may even be an error, a delusion, nonsense, but it certainly is something.

Now, this resistance seems to have intrinsically something to do with the real in the ontological sense. As Austin notes,²⁷ the best way to get at what “real” means in a given context is always by way of what it excludes. If I say “this is real beer”, I do not say much; but if I say “this is not really beer” (perhaps because it is alcohol free), then I have said something substantial. In any case, it is easy to see that perception helps us recognise the inappropriate use of words of everyday language, here too serving a negative rather than a positive role. Starting from this obstinacy or unamendability, I would like to set out four paths by which *aisthesis* leads to realism. It may be noted that none of these have to do with knowledge-gathering, unlike in sensism or naturalism. Rather, they run perpendicularly to epistemology, to what we know, and lead instead towards being: towards what there is. These traces are non-conceptuality, objectness, naivety and ontology.

7. Non-Conceptuality Let us begin with the notion of “non-conceptual content”, which has been much debated in recent decades.²⁸ It is an essentially contrastive notion. It has to do with the whole sphere of experience that lies outside concepts and that defines an external world as unrelated to knowledge – which can even be recognised in Kant when he refers to the “synopsis of sense” preceding the syntheses that lead from perception to concept.²⁹ In short, non-conceptual content tells us that there is something out there to give sense to our knowledge-gathering and moral practices, and thus to our knowledge and actions.

Non-conceptuality is a resistance, an unamendability, something that cannot be ignored. At the same time, it can also be seen as an autonomous organisation of experience, thus reducing the importance attributed to

25 Popper, K. R. (1935), *Logik der Forschung*, Julius Springer, Wien.

26 For a deeper discussion of the notion of “unamendability”, see my *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*, pp. 39-42.

27 Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, pp. 70-71.

28 The start of the debate in matter is usually attributed to Evans, G. (1984), *The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

29 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 97.

conceptual schemes in the organisation of the world. In fact, the activity of conceptual schemes mostly regards knowledge, and it seems excessive to attribute to them also the organisation of ordinary experience, as is claimed by the philosophies that share the Kantian-hermeneutical mind-set.

8. Objectness Insofar as it is connected with non-conceptual content, the very notion of “object” is linked to the idea of a world that is organised and that possesses its own features, to which we have access through simple perception with no need of an intervention from the conceptual. It is the sphere of what I call “objectness”. For instance, even before they learn a language, children are able to divide reality up into objects,³⁰ something which – if Kant was right – should be impossible, given that they presumably do not possess the scheme of substance as the permanence of something through time. The idea is that, at least to some extent, meanings are in the world, incorporated in objects that offer affordances – to use Gibson’s term³¹ that has a significant predecessor in Fichte’s “*Aufforderungscharakter*”, as referred to reality.³² Organisation is first of all in the world, then in the eye and only lastly in the brain; the hyper-constructionist mind-set assumes the diametrically opposite hierarchy. Meanings are not all in the head, and this explains why there can be such strong interactions among beings belonging to different cultures (as well as having different conceptual schemes and perceptual apparatuses).

9. Naivety What emerges is a “naïve physics”³³ or a “second naïveté”.³⁴ The world presents itself to us as real without necessarily on that account claiming to be scientifically true. In short, what emerges is a theory of experience. The naïve realism in question is minimal. All it wants to do is save the phenomena and take into account our experience of the world. Also, it has obviously nothing to do with metaphysical realism, which assumes a world of ordered meanings independent of us. In particular, naïve realism assumes that there exists a specific family of objects – social objects – that are entirely dependent on subjects, while not being subjective themselves. If you

30 von Hoften, C. E. & Spelke, E. S. (1985), "Object Perception and Object-directed Reaching in Infancy", in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, CXIV, pp.198-211.

31 Gibson, J. J. (1979), *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

32 Fichte, J. G. (1796), *Grundlage des Naturrechts* (“Zweiter Lehrsatz”), Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Fromman-Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, ch.I, par.3, pp. 342-51.

33 Bozzi, P. (1990), *Fisica ingenua*, Garzanti, Milano.

34 Putnam, H. (1994), "Sense, Nonsense and the Senses", in *The Journal of Philosophy*, XCI, iss.9, where he associates Reid, James, Husserl, Wittgenstein and Austin to naïve realism.

give up on this naivety, you risk taking on a philosophy that is wholly false. This naivety was already what Reid called experience, and in fact he criticised the empiricists' epistemologisation of experience: "he [Berkeley] maintains (...) that sun and moon, earth and sea, our own bodies, and those of our friends, are nothing but ideas in the minds of those who think of them, and that they have no existence when they are not objects of thought".³⁵ This passage gives exactly the idea of what is meant by the epistemological hyperbole. If no one would be ready to regard their own friends and relatives as mere representations, why should we assume that the sun and the moon are such?

10. Ontology Let us take a passage from the still partially antirealist Putnam, the Putnam of:

What is factual and what is conventional is a matter of degree; we cannot say 'These and these elements of the world are the raw facts; the rest is convention, or a mixture of these raw facts with convention'. What I am saying, then, is that elements of what we call 'language' or 'mind' *penetrate so deeply into what we call 'reality' that the very project of representing ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language-independent' is fatally flawed from the start.* ³⁶ [italics in the original]

It is surely so. But that does not stop this something independent from existing or from making our science true, otherwise we would be unable to explain surprise and disappointment, and furthermore we would have to go back to saying *sic et simpliciter* that there is nothing outside the text.

Description and explanation are never a pure copy of reality. For this reason the distinction between ontology and epistemology is essential, also and precisely so as not to fall into the confusion of metaphysical realism. All well and good, but what does it mean, then, to return to perception, and how does this change things? It is not at all a matter of returning to perception as truth, which I do not think was ever upheld by anyone, precisely because of the experience of the deceits of the senses – as well as the fact that things can be true even though no one perceives them, as is obvious to everyone. Rather, we should concentrate on perception as being unconstrained by our

³⁵ Reid, T. (1785), *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, John Bell and G. G. J. & J. Robinson, Edinburgh & London, Essay 2, chapter 10, p.166.

³⁶ Putnam, H. (1992), *Realism with a Human Face*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), p.28.

constructions. There is an ontology that is independent of epistemology. The conceptual is very important, but is only concerns epistemology. There is a whole non-conceptual world, and this world is ontological: it exists and it manifests itself often through the resistance it puts up. In the end, it is this robust sense of reality that sets an insurmountable limit to every constructionist hyperbole. And this limit – fundamentally this limit – makes up the greatest merit of perception. It is in this sense that what exists, ontology, is essentially what resists.

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