

Author's Note

I often find myself concerned with matters regarding the individual's experience. I believe the value of one's life can be measured by considering their experiences, and the simple goal of enriching these ought to be one's forward most pursuit. This can be accomplished through numerous means, such as bettering one's environment or pursuing a more worldly self. In this essay I will manifest the components of experience, reality and perception, in the forms of a window and a room so as to validate and provide aesthetic inspiration for my final piece.

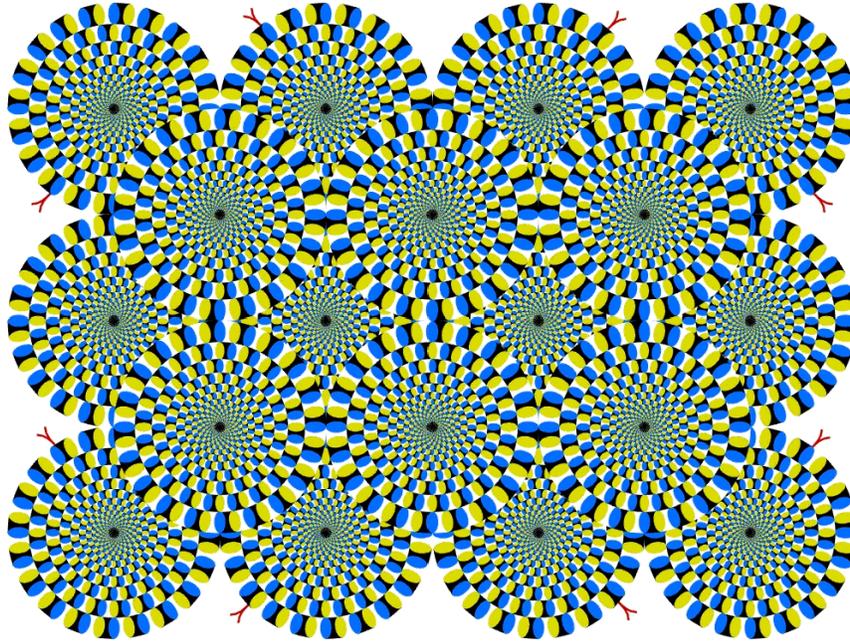
A window is to a room as perception is to reality

We cannot help but to perceive the world through windows. We are incapable of seeing the “whole picture,” we see in an eclipse. This is also true in regards to our beliefs. Science and religion only provide a snippet of greater truths or reality. That which we are unsure of, we must deduce, we must imagine. My project focuses on this bit of imagination. This bit of unknown is precious. We are often so consumed in our search for “truth” we begin to foster acrimony toward that which we do not know. I believe this should not be the case. Without that bit of unknown we would be lacking a driving goal. In order to properly articulate my objective in this project, I will establish an understanding of several key concepts.

Reality is often a tricky notion. Reality is the state of things as they actually exist, but can also include, in a broader sense, everything that is, has been, and will be, whether or not it is comprehensible or observable. There are also separate ways to regard reality: reality is that which one can experience based on perceived empirical data, disregarding the fact that your senses may be untrustworthy, or, reality is that which is absolutely true, regardless of how one perceives it. According to Stanford’s Encyclopedia of Philosophy, René Descartes contributed greatly to this field of study. In his *Discourse on the Method* he aims to create a set of principles that one can know as true without any doubt. He does this through a method referred to as methodological skepticism which works to reject ideas that can be doubted, and then reestablishes them in order to acquire a solid foundation for genuine knowledge. Descartes soon arrives at only a single principle: thought exists, The famous “I think, therefore I am.” He comes to this based on the fact that someone or something must be doing the thinking. Therefore the very fact that he is thinking proves his existence. He then concludes he exists, but is still unsure of the form in which he does so. That which he perceives is based solely on his senses. However, these senses have often proved untrustworthy. As a result, perception as a whole is unreliable.

Perception is the organization, identification, and interpretation of sensory information in order to understand the environment. Perception is all we have to interpret the external world, but, as previously stated, it can often prove to be erroneous. This is most commonly demonstrated by illusions or hallucinations. Perception, as we generally understand it, seems to be impossible. The arguments which give rise to this problem can be divided into two: the argument of illusion and the argument of hallucination. The argument from illusion can be described in the following steps:

- 1 When one is subject to an illusion, it seems to one that something has a quality, F , which the real ordinary object supposedly being perceived does not actually have.
- 2 When it seems to one that something has a quality, F , then there is something of which one is aware which does have this quality.
- 3 Since the real object in question is, by hypothesis, not- F , then it follows that in cases of illusion, either one is not aware of the real object after all, or if one is, one is aware of it only “indirectly” and not in the direct, unmediated way in which we normally take ourselves to be aware of objects.
- 4 There is no non-arbitrary way of distinguishing, from the point of view of the subject of an experience, between the phenomenology of perception and illusion.
- 5 Therefore there is no reason to suppose that even in the case of genuine perception one is directly or immediately aware of ordinary objects.
- 6 Therefore our normal view about what perceiving is—sometimes called “naïve realism” or “direct realism”—is false. So perception cannot be what we normally think it is. (Stanford University, “The Problem of Perception”)



This argument concludes that the things of which we are aware of are not the ordinary objects in the external world which we naturally take ourselves to be aware of. Similar to this is the argument of hallucination represented by the following:

- 1 It seems possible for someone to have an experience—a hallucination—which is subjectively indistinguishable from a genuine perception but where there is no mind-independent object being perceived.
- 2 The perception and the subjectively indistinguishable hallucination are experiences of essentially the same kind.
- 3 Therefore it cannot be that the essence of the perception depends on the objects being experienced, since essentially the same kind of experience can occur in the absence of the objects.
- 7 Therefore the ordinary conception of perceptual experience—which treats experience as dependent on the mind-independent objects around us—cannot be correct. (Stanford University, “The Problem of Perception”)

this concludes that our ordinary conception of perception is highly problematic. Descartes further demonstrates the limitations of the senses with the “Wax Argument.” In considering a piece of wax, one’s senses inform the viewer of its characteristics. When the wax is put near a flame it completely changes, yet the viewer is still able to identify the melted wax as the same thing. To properly grasp the nature of the wax, one should put aside the senses and use their mind. The overlap and conflict between perception and reality becomes ever apparent as the subjects are explored. The realization of our flawed senses greatly hinders our search for truth. to combat this, Descartes constructed a system of knowledge which deems perception unreliable and instead relies only on deduction.

Deduction is the process of reasoning from one or more general premises to reach a logically certain conclusion. there are multiple forms of deductive reasoning including the law of detachment, the law of syllogism, and the law of contra positive. The law of detachment starts

when a conditional statement is made, and a hypothesis (H) is stated. The conclusion (C) is then deduced based on the statement and hypothesis.

Example:

- 1 If H, then C (conditional statement)
- 2 H (hypothesis stated)
- 3 C (conclusion deduced)

The law of syllogism begins with two conditional statements and forms a conclusion based on combining the hypothesis of one statement with the conclusion of another.

Example:

- 1 If H, then C
- 2 If C, then R
- 3 Therefore, if H, then R

The law of contra positive states that, in a conditional, if the conclusion is false, then the hypothesis must be false as well. Example:

- 1 If H, then C
- 2 C is not the case
- 3 Therefore we can conclude H is not the case

The above systems of logical deduction are sound and valid. An argument is valid if it is impossible for its premises to be true while its conclusion is false. An argument is sound if it is valid and the premises are true. Descartes holds that deduction and reasoning are the most sound ways of interpreting the external world. Later, he offers the concept of a benevolent God and thus gains faith that that God does not wish to deceive man and has provided him with accurate sensory systems. This means that all we experience through the senses would be the case, therefore the sense would be a reliable bases for reason. Descartes establishes the possibility of garnering knowledge regarding the world based on a combination of deduction and perception.

This belief in a benevolent God, or a God in general, works to simplify the concept, but begins to enter the realm of faith, which I tend to disregard in matters of truth as it, in most cases, is not based on empirical data, but rather pure conjecture. But, in regards to this project, religion is a perfectly valid way of interpreting the universe, as the piece is meant to be experience through the eyes of the beholder, granting an individualized viewing. It is a window just as science is. Science and religion both provide a snapshot of the truth and the individual is left to choose which they prefer, and ultimately they will be left with the task of deducing their own thoughts regarding the whole truth. They must fill in the cracks left by that which science and religion do not explain, or do not explain adequately. That which we experience largely dictates our understanding of the universe. Perception and reality are both components of experience.

Experience, as a general concept, is the knowledge or skill acquired by an individual over a period of time, or an event or occurrence that leaves an impression on someone. Experience is the root of empirical data. There are several different types of experience. Physical experience occurs when an object or environment changes observably. Mental experience involves consciousness and intellect experienced through memory, emotion, perception, and imagination. Mental experience also includes unconscious thought. Emotional experience deals with things such as love and, in many cases, empathy. Social experience involves the society in which one lives and the development and observation of skills and tendencies within such. A

newer form of experience is virtual or simulated, which can enable one to “experience” something purely cerebrally. This is often considered alongside the problems of illusion and hallucination.

Another aspect of experience is its immediacy. “First-hand experience” roots itself in direct, personal sense perception of an event, and is left to the beholder’s interpretation. “Second-hand experience” can offer multiple points of view and is often experienced through empathy with those who experienced the event in the “first hand”. A “third-hand experience” manifests itself in rumor or hearsay and is often unreliable. The concept of experience is central in regards to measuring the value of an individual’s life. This idea is reflected in my piece.

Having established the key concepts I used as inspiration to physically synthesize a piece for the sake of aesthetics, I can begin to describe the piece itself. For my final project I created a piece that inspires exploration through the components of experience and, ultimately, conclusions based on deduction. The individual viewer’s perception of the piece is essential to its success. I intend to force deduction and exploration by using windows as portals which open into the piece’s content. The piece is a series of three 18 by 18 inch panels with images on them ranging from macro to micro in descending order. The leftmost image depicts the universe, 10 to the power of 20 meters away from the center image, an explosion. The rightmost piece depicts quarks inside of protons, 10 to the negative 15th meters in. This range of perspective lends itself to the concept of experience and works to represent our pursuit of and progress in understanding the universe.

Over the images is a blank panel, forming a sort of box. The front panel has a rectangle, reminiscent of a window, cut into it so as to allow a small portion of the interior to be seen. Inside of the boxes are several light sources so as to illuminate the interior, effectively drawing attention and inspiring curiosity among the piece’s viewers, as well as creating a focused light originating from the windows emphasizing their importance. The three pieces are mounted on a wall, once again, reminiscent of windows.

The concepts presented and explored in this essay continue to hold the world’s interest. Experience, perception, and reality are undoubtedly complex and abstract ideas that are constantly evolving and changing based on the individual. Our understanding of the universe often varies. The individual is forced to rely on their own deductions in order to make sense of their surroundings, they are forced to use their imagination. I believe this bit of imagination ought to be experienced by the individual and is essential in enriching one’s experience. In presenting my final piece, I hope to create a microcosm of this larger goal and create a sense of individual experience. The cracks in traditional explanations of the universe should be filled by one’s imagination for it provides a sense of individuality and the luxury of wonder without fear of being incorrect.

With this piece, I hope to provide my viewer with the luxury of wonder and replicate, in a small sense, what ought to be one’s forward most pursuit, the enrichment of experience.

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