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Patterns of Perception

Abstract

Our ordinary concept of perception contains a seeming tension: we think of perception as a direct awareness we have of mind-independent objects through their effects on our senses; yet we also acknowledge that what is perceived is affected by how we interpret or classify the data that comes through our senses. Implicitly accepting this dilemma, theorists of perception divide as to which intuition should prevail: some maintain that concepts are in play all the way down; others that perceptual awareness is wholly immediate and concrete. This dissertation argues that we do not have to choose. The patterns of perception sustain a distinctive form of ‘nonconceptual classification,’ in which property spaces organize sensory matter so as to preserve rather than discard its concreteness and detail. What then is classification without concepts? What sort of abstraction, generality, representation, or form does it entail? And what ramifications then for thinking about the roots of language and reason, and of our awareness of the external world?