

# Kenneth E. Hobson

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## Positions

Lecturer, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Iowa State University, Fall 2008 – Spring 2010

## Education

Ph.D., Philosophy, The University of Iowa (2008)  
M.A., Philosophy, The University of Iowa  
M.A., Philosophy, Biola University  
B.S., English, Western Oregon University

## Areas of Specialization

Epistemology; Philosophy of Perception

## Areas of Competence

Ethics; Metaphysics; Philosophy of Mind

## Teaching Experience

Lecturer, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Iowa State University

- Introduction to Philosophy
- Moral Theory and Practice

Graduate Teaching Instructor, Department of Philosophy, The University of Iowa

- Introduction to Ethics
- Introduction to Philosophy
- Principles of Reasoning

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Philosophy, The University of Iowa

- Introduction to Ethics
- Philosophy and Human Nature
- Philosophy and the Just Society

## Publications

Foundational beliefs and the structure of justification, *Synthese* 64, no. 6 (September 2008), 117-139.

## Dissertation

*Real appearances: the metaphysics and epistemology of direct realism*

This thesis defends a version of relational direct realism according to which perception of physical objects is constituted by direct acquaintance with instances of color and shape properties that characterize physical objects and with the surfaces of those objects. This contrasts with compositional direct realist theories, which appeal to representations to mediate perception. Further, hallucinatory experiences involve direct acquaintance with property instances that do not characterize any physical object. This contrasts with disjunctivist theories, which deny that there is a common ontological component present to awareness in both hallucinatory and non-hallucinatory experiences.

## Presentations

In defense of relational direct realism

- Central States Philosophical Association, Meeting (St. Paul, Minnesota), September 2008

Foundational beliefs and the structure of justification

- American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meeting (Portland, Oregon), March 2006

- Iowa Philosophical Society, Annual Meeting (Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa), November 2005

### **Professional Development**

Attended *University Teaching Seminar*, presented by the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Iowa State University, August 2009. Sessions attended were “Teaching Large Classes,” “Teaching with Bloom’s Taxonomy,” and “In-Class Discussion and Informal Group Work.”

Participant, *2008 APA/AAPT Graduate Teaching Seminar*, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, August 2008. This is selective biennial seminar for graduate students and recent graduates sponsored by the American Philosophical Association and the American Association of Philosophy Teachers. Acceptance is competitive.

### **Professional Service**

Referee, *Erkenntnis* (2008)

### **Awards, Fellowships, & Grants**

Presidential Fellow, The University of Iowa

Teaching Assistantships, The University of Iowa

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## Dissertation Abstract

### *Real appearances: the metaphysics and epistemology of direct realism*

Committee: Richard Fumerton (Director), Evan Fales, Laird Addis, David Cunning, Cathleen Moore (Psychology)

According to indirect realism, conscious perception of a mind-independent external physical world is partially constituted by direct acquaintance with internal sensory entities. Minimal direct realism denies this: conscious perception is not constituted by acquaintance with internal sensory entities. Articulating a positive account of direct realism requires considerations of two related issues.

The first issue concerns psychological mediation. Compositional direct realist theories affirm that the occurrence of internal psychological entities partially constitutes (mediates) perception of physical objects. The occurrence of these internal psychological entities, which are typically conceived of as states with representational content, is a state that does not include physical objects or any of their components as constituents; nonetheless, in contrast to indirect realism, compositional direct realism denies that we can become aware of internal psychological entities in a way that is more direct than our perceptual access to external physical objects. Relational direct realist theories deny that conscious perception is even partially constituted by the occurrence of internal psychological entities, affirming instead that perception just is (or is constituted by) an irreducible psychological relation that includes the physical objects or some of its components as constituents.

The second issue concerns common factors. Common factor direct realist theories affirm that perceptual experience is (at least) partially constituted by ontological entities that are common to phenomenologically indistinguishable veridical and hallucinatory perceptual experiences. Non-common factor direct realist theories (which include disjunctivist theories) deny that hallucinations and perceptions are states of the same mental kind. Each of the two responses to the mediation issue can be combined with one of the two responses to the common factor issue, giving us four variants of direct realism. I defend a version of relational common factor direct realism, which I call the real appearances theory.

The central idea of the real appearances theory is that perception of physical objects is constituted by direct acquaintance with mind-independent sensible quality instances (instances of phenomenal color and phenomenal shape properties) that characterize those objects. Direct acquaintance is not a cognitive or representational state; rather, it is a real relation obtaining between independent entities. In hallucinatory cases, we are acquainted with sensible quality instances that do not characterize any physical object. Instead, they constitute purely visual objects (sense data). While these hallucinatory objects may not be ontologically dependent on our acquaintance with them, they are undoubtedly nomologically dependent on the causal conditions prerequisite for this awareness. The causal version of the argument from hallucination is rebutted by denying that the proximate neural cause that is sufficient for hallucination is also sufficient for perception, because in the latter case, the temporally extended sequence of causally related states leading from the object to the final neural state constitutes the proximate sufficient cause. The time-gap argument is rebutted by denying the principle that the object of acquaintance must be temporally simultaneous with the subject of acquaintance. Finally, the real appearances theory does not entail the denial of any scientific discovery in the empirical study of perception, so arguments based on empirical considerations are ineffective against it. At most, certain discoveries may disclose the extent of our ordinary misperception of the world.

While the theory retains genuine hallucinations, illusions must be treated differently. In putative illusions, objects we perceive seem to have properties they do not have. Given that sensible quality instances characterize either physical objects or hallucinatory objects, all putative illusions are assimilated either to unusual cases of veridical perception or to hallucinations. One deflationary strategy is to recognize that some purported illusions are tacit judgements; consequently, they do not involve direct acquaintance with the reported sensible quality instance. Strategies that assimilate illusions to unusual veridical cases include indeterminate perception (we are directly acquainted with instances of determinable qualities that characterize objects), color relativity (physical objects exemplify multiple color properties), and shape relativity (physical objects exemplify relational shape properties or we are acquainted with the shapes of parts of the facing surface rather than the whole facing surface). Strategies that assimilate illusions to hallucinatory cases include cases of visually smoothed edges. Many of the responses are suggestive: while in many cases I do not provide a single response that I regard as decisive, I tentatively offer several avenues of response that may vindicate direct realism.

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## Research Interests

My current research includes the intersection of issues in epistemology and philosophy of perception. In addition to developing further the details of the real appearances theory, I want to reinforce the responses to the arguments from hallucination, causation, and illusion sketched in the dissertation. My view eschews the idea that perceptual experience is an intentional state (analogous to beliefs, fears, and desires, all of which are arguably about some state of affairs); however, this is the predominant view about perceptual experience, so I need to substantiate more this unorthodox position.

In addition, while the dissertation focuses on perceptual direct realism, my interest in this topic is motivated by the epistemological questions concerning the possibility of having justification for propositions describing physical objects that does not depend on the justification that we have for propositions describing our experiences. Some suppose that our beliefs about physical objects is non-inferential in this way, but this view seems false. On the foundationalist theory with which I am sympathetic, noninferential justification requires direct acquaintance with facts that these physical objects partially constitute. Unfortunately, even if in perception we are directly acquainted with sensible quality instances that characterize physical objects, we are not directly acquainted with whole physical objects or with facts concerning physical objects. Consequently, we cannot have non-inferential justification for external world propositions. However, quite a few philosophers regard noninferential justification for external world propositions relatively unproblematic. Perceptual experience by itself is supposed to justify or make reasonable propositions about the external world. Sometimes this claim is said to be supported by or to support a specific theory about the metaphysical structure of perceptual experience. However, these philosophers offer strikingly different developments of this epistemological claim (as well as its connection to the nature of perceptual experience) that do not agree in their fundamental details, so evaluation of their proposals requires attending to the distinctive components of each development.

I would like to develop a foundationalist theory that makes direct awareness of facts about object-characterizing sensible quality instances the basis of our justification for external world propositions. Several components of the view need attention. One component concerns the precise nature of the epistemic support relation that obtains between propositions describing the sensible quality instances and propositions describing external physical objects. A second aspect of the view that needs development is the role of concepts in noninferential justification and, more generally, the connection between experiences and the beliefs they justify.

More broadly, my interests in epistemology include skepticism and the responses to it, debates between foundationalism and coherentism, debates between epistemic internalism and externalism, naturalized epistemology, the epistemic basing relation. In the near future, I would like to investigate the role of ethical and testimonial (and broader social) considerations in belief formation. In moral philosophy, I am interested in thinking more about the nature of intrinsic value and our knowledge of it. I am interested in exploring to what extent (if at all) conclusions concerning the metaphysics and epistemology of perceptual knowledge are applicable to knowledge of intrinsic value. Moral intuitionism is getting some attention recently and I would like to see how these refurbished versions compare with classical intuitionism. More broadly, I am interested in questions about metaethical objectivism and subjectivism, the debates between consequentialist and non-consequentialist theories of right action and between competing accounts of happiness. In addition, I would like to investigate the early modern debate in moral philosophy between the sentimentalists and the rationalists.

## References

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