

Adverbialism

1.

Against the Sense Datum View

The adverbialist rejects the Phenomenal Principle, that if there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that quality.

According to the adverbialist, statements that appear to commit us to the existence of sense data can be reinterpreted so as to avoid those commitments. In doing so, the adverbialism rejects the act/object model of perceptual experience—the model on which sensory experience involves a particular act of sensing directed at an existent object (e.g., a sense datum).

2.

Adverbial Translations

Consider the following sentences in which objects are adjectivally modified:

- (1) Lucy had a heavy bag.
- (2) John wore a broad hat.

If these sentences are true, we are committed to the existence of certain objects—bags and hats, for example.

These sentences have a similar surface structure to the following two sentences:

- (3) Dave gave an energetic performance.
- (4) John wore a broad smile.

If these sentences are true, are we committed to the existence of things like performances and smiles? No. For we can provide translations of (3) and (4) that do not appeal to entities like performances and smiles:

- (3_{trans}) Dave performed energetically.
- (4_{trans}) John smiled broadly.

These are adverbial translations of (3) and (4) because they involve translating the *subject: verb: adjective: noun* construction of (3) and (4) into a *subject: verb: adverb* construction. (3_{trans}) and (4_{trans}) make sense and arguably mean the same as (3) and (4), respectively.

Can we do the same with (1) and (2)? It would seem not:

- (1_{trans}) Lucy bagged heavily.
- (2_{trans}) John hatted broadly.

These do not make sense and, as a result, could not mean the same as (1) and (2)—which do make sense.

So, what does this show us, then? How can we use it to better understand perception? As Fish tells us, the idea is that, where we can perform these translations, we *really are* committed to the existence of those objects referred to in true versions of those sentences. If we can perform them, we are not so committed.

So, let's look at two sentences that supposedly make reference to a special kind of mental object. If we can provide adverbial translations of those sentences, the story goes, we are not committed to the existence of mental objects (sense data, as we have been calling them).

- (5) Paul had a pink sense datum.
- (6) Julie had a rectangular afterimage.

When we attempt translation, we get the following:

- (5_{trans}) Paul sensed pinkly.
- (6_{trans}) Julie afterimaged (sensed) triangularly.

Adverbialists claim that (5_{trans}) and (6_{trans}) make sense and mean the same as (5) and (6). Given this, we are not committed to mental objects but only to mental events (sensings) performed in certain ways.

3.

Adverbialism and Our Principles

According to adverbialism, visual experiences are not mental events directed upon sense data. They are, rather, episodes of sensing in a particular way. Just as I might walk slowly or quickly, I might sense redly or greenly.

Consider the experience of looking at a ripe tomato. According to the adverbialist, I don't see a red mental entity (sense datum); rather, I sense a material entity in a particular way—namely, redly.

But suppose I am suffering an illusion as of a ripe tomato (the object before me is really a cleverly lit albino tomato) or I am hallucinating a ripe tomato before me. What does the adverbialist say about this? In each of these cases, the adverbialist holds that you sense redly. So, there is something in common between the veridical, illusory and hallucinatory 'ripe tomato cases'. The adverbialist, then, accepts the **Common Factor Principle**.

But what it is like in each of these cases is not a matter of the object that sensed (as there isn't even an object in the hallucinatory case. So, the adverbialist denies the **Phenomenal Principle**. What is like to have the experience in all of our ripe tomato cases is not a matter of *what* we sense but rather *how* we sense. In each case, we are simply in a distinctive kind of experiential state. We can sum this up in the case of visual experience as follows:

A subject S has a visual experience as of a property F, iff S senses F-ly

What about the **Representational Principle**?