***Sense-Data: A Metaphilosophical Case Study***

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According to sense-data theorists, all cases of perception involve an awareness of a non-physical object (sense-datum), which has those sensible properties (color, shape, perhaps depth) that it appears to have. This is so because whenever it appears to someone that there is an object which has a perceptible property P, there really does exist an object which has that property, even though the subject might be mistaken or confused about the nature of that object. Furthermore, the basic metaphysical structure of the good cases (veridical perceptions) is identical to those of bad cases (illusions, hallucinations), which means that the explanation of the way things seem to the subject has to be identical in both types of cases (Jackson 1977, Robinson 1994).

I will anaylze the aforementioned claims, and arguments used to strengthen them, and claim that they are far from persuasive. Specifically, I will argue that some form of adverbialism or qualia theory provide satisfactory explanations of the metaphysical structure of experience (Tye 1975, Tye 1984, Papineau 2014) and that sense-data are problematic with regard to their non-physical nature, their relation towards objective physical space and the issues of indeterminacy. Finally, I will comment on the metaphilosophical aspects of the debate about sense-data, and examine the question of whether the debate is essentially philosophical or scientific in nature.

References:

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