

1

The Inconsistent Triad

Suppose that we identify physical objects, in the first instance, by extension, as things like stones, tables, trees, people and other animals: the persisting macroscopic constituents of the world that we live in. Of course, there is a substantive question of what it is to be like such things in the way relevant to categorization as a physical object. So this can hardly be the final word on the matter. Still, it is equally clear that this gives us all a perfectly respectable initial conception of what we are talking about; and it is an entirely adequate starting point for what follows.

It is without doubt our commonsense starting point that

(I) Physical objects are mind-independent.

Explication of the mind-independence involved here is a substantive matter in its own right, and the subject of extended discussion in what follows.¹ Still, the core idea is that entities of a given kind are mind-independent if and only if they are constituents of the world 'as it is in itself', rather than being in any way dependent in their nature upon the way things do or might appear to anyone in experience of or thought about

¹ See especially chs. 3 and 7 where I offer and defend criteria for mind-dependence and mind-independence derived from reflection upon a familiar model of the distinction between the primary and secondary qualities.

the world: the nature of such things is entirely independent of their appearance.²

Entities are mind-dependent if and only if they are not mind-independent. Thus, their nature is to some extent dependent upon their appearance. I mean by the nature of the entities of a given kind the most fundamental answer to the question what such things are. This is also of course a contentious notion. I take it for granted here without argument at this stage and without committing myself to any specific philosophical elaboration. The justification I offer for doing so rests on the merits of what follows within this framework.³

The commonsense starting point expressed by (I), then, is simply the conviction that the natures of such things as stones, tables, trees, people and other animals themselves are independent of the ways in which such physical objects do or may appear in anyone's experience of or thought about the world. I call the thesis that the objects of a given domain are mind-independent in this sense, realism about that domain. (I) is therefore an expression of realism about physical objects, which I call physical realism, for short.

² The formulation is awkward here. My own view is that the ways that mind-independent physical objects look and otherwise perceptually appear just is a matter of certain of the ways that those very things are. Still, their being those ways is not itself a matter of their appearing any way to anyone. This latter is the sense in which I claim that mind-independence is independence in nature from any appearance. See chs. 3, 5 and 7 below for further development of these issues.

³ For a helpful and sympathetic historically informed elucidation of this notion of an object's nature, see Wiggins (1995). For a highly influential further development of his own position, see Wiggins (2001). Charles (2000) elaborates the Aristotelian source of these ideas with great force and illumination. Strawson (1959) contains important motivation for the modern relevance of the notion. Ayers (1993, vol. II, esp. parts I & III) offers an alternative development to Wiggins that focuses more directly on the idea of the nature of physical objects in general as causally integrated enduring and spatially extended material unities. Although I intend to remain neutral on this here, I am myself more persuaded by Ayers' position. See also Campbell (2002b, esp. ch. 4).

The Inconsistent Triad

Something else that we take for granted is that physical objects are the very things that are presented to us in perception. It is extremely difficult to make this very natural idea precise. Indeed, a great deal of what follows effectively concerns various fundamental controversies concerning the notion of perceptual presentation. Still, I reserve the term throughout to express the utterly uncontested sense in which we see and otherwise consciously perceive physical objects: they are in this sense elements of perceptual consciousness. This claim that physical objects are presented to us in perception is intended as prior, and uncommitted, to any specific controversial theoretical elucidation of what such perceptual presentation consists in.

Thus, it seems to me to be a fundamental commitment of commonsense in the area that physical objects are both presented to us in perceptual experience and have a nature that is entirely independent of how they do or might appear to anyone. That is, the very objects that are presented to us in perceptual experience are mind-independent. I call this thesis empirical realism. It is realism about the domain of objects that are presented to us in perception.

Now, according to the early modern empiricists, especially for my purposes Locke (1975) and Berkeley (1975a, 1975b), the nature of conscious experience in general is to be elucidated by reference to certain entities that are set before the mind in such experience. Thus, the most fundamental characterization of a specific perceptual experience is to be given by citing, and/or describing, specific such entities: the experience in question is one of encountering just those things. The notion of a most fundamental characterization of the nature of perceptual experience in general and of specific perceptual experiences in particular here is clearly crucial. Although a good

The Inconsistent Triad

deal of what follows is intended directly or indirectly to elaborate that very notion, it is sufficient for the moment to regard this as the most fruitful and comprehensive characterization of perceptual experience for the purposes of our overall theoretical understanding of such experience in the philosophy of mind, metaphysics and epistemology of perception. I call those entities, if any, which provide the most fundamental characterization of the nature of perceptual experience in this way its direct objects. These identify any given perceptual experience as the specific modification of the subject's conscious mental life that it is.

So the early modern empiricist picture is this. In conscious experience, a person is related to certain entities. They are set before her mind, and their being so constitutes her being in just that conscious mental condition. The basic phenomena of consciousness are therefore relational: S is conscious of e. The identity and nature of such entities serves to characterize what it is for the subject to be so conscious. Given this general approach, the entities to which a person is related in this way in perceptual experience are its direct objects. Hence what it is for a person to have a given perceptual experience is canonically to be elucidated by citing, and/or describing, such direct objects. Throughout my discussion, I use the notion of a direct object of perception in precisely this way, as an object, if any, that plays this early modern empiricist role in the fundamental characterization of perceptual experience. I also use the term 'acquaintance', and its cognates, for the relation in which a person stands to the direct objects of her experience according to the early modern approach. The core idea, then, is that the most fundamental nature of perceptual experience is acquaintance with direct objects.

The Inconsistent Triad

I am absolutely not committing myself at this stage to this early modern empiricist approach to the nature of perceptual experience, other than as part of the framework for setting up the problem that I wish to discuss. An important and influential response to that problem is precisely to reject the early modern framework involved in posing it as I do. I discuss this response at length in ch. 4 below. Still, I do myself believe that the best solution to my problem retains the core commitment of the early modern empiricists to the idea that perceptual experience is most fundamentally to be characterized as conscious acquaintance with certain direct objects. I elaborate and defend my own development of this approach in chs. 5-7. It is worth baldly stating right from the start, though, what strikes me as its intuitive basis.

Consider the case of vision.⁴ An account of the nature of our perceptual experience is an account of the ways things are for us visually speaking, that is, an account of the ways things look. The early modern empiricist insight, as I see it, is to take this way of putting the problem at face value in starting to give a solution. Very crudely, the ways things look are the ways things look. Very slightly less crudely, the ways things look to us in vision are the ways certain specific things look that are presented to us in vision, given the circumstances of their particular presentation that provides the most fundamental characterization of the nature of the visual experience in question. So the intuitive starting point is to take seriously what might at first sight appear to be a dummy variable, ‘things’, in the question ‘how do things look?’ In vision, there are certain specific things before us, and the way things are for us visually speaking is a matter of the way that those specific things look, given the relevant features of our

⁴ I concentrate throughout on the case of vision. I believe that much of what I say applies equally to the other modalities, and occasionally indicate how these may be accommodated within the general framework here, although any such generalization clearly raises many substantive issues that I do not address explicitly in this book.

particular perspective upon them. The most philosophically illuminating framework for understanding the nature of visual perceptual experience is therefore to regard this most fundamentally as a matter of our acquaintance with certain specific direct objects whose nature in turn determines the way that things look to us given the relevant circumstances of our acquaintance with them. This is certainly not intended as an argument for a precisely determinate philosophical position, and opponents of the early modern empiricist approach may no doubt go along with some or all of this intuitive line of thought. I simply offer it as an articulation of what certainly strikes me as a natural inclination to characterize perceptual experience as our acquaintance with certain specific direct objects. I hope that further justification for my strategic choice to set up the problem to be addressed throughout the book on the basis of my introduction of the early modern empiricist approach will be derived from the philosophical illumination offered by the taxonomy of views induced by this formulation of the problem.

Before proceeding to that, though, it may be helpful to make explicit a couple of points about the relation between the early modern empiricist notion of a direct object of perception and other notions sometimes put in similar terms. First, the conception of a direct object adopted here is perfectly compatible with two other approaches to delineating ‘direct objects’ of perception: (a) as those objects about which the perception in question places a person in a position to acquire non-inferential knowledge; and (b) as those objects to which the perception in question places a person in a position to make demonstrative reference.⁵ Second, a very popular

⁵ For (a), see Snowdon (1992), Huemer (2001), McDowell (2008b) and Wright (2008). For (b) see Snowdon (1992). My own view is that it is precisely the fact that certain entities are the direct objects of perception in the technical sense that I derive

contemporary approach to the nature of our perceptual relation with the physical world has absolutely no role for direct objects of perception in the technical sense invoked here, although it does insist on another *prima facie* legitimate sense in which we nevertheless do in appropriate circumstances perceive the mind-independent physical objects around us ‘directly’, without problematic metaphysical or epistemological mediation. I turn directly to views along these lines that reject the very existence of direct objects as I understand them here in ch. 4 below.

In any case, the early modern empiricist apparatus set out above strongly suggests the following reading of the uncontroversial claim that physical objects are the very things that are presented to us in perception.

(II) Physical objects are the direct objects of perception.

Here again, in order to remain as accommodating as possible at this stage, three immediate qualifications are in order, along with a comment about how (II) interacts with explicitly factive perceptual notions.

First, the following picture is consistent with (II) as I understand it. In the most basic cases of perception, the direct objects of the experience involved are physical objects;

here from the early modern empiricists that they may be ‘direct objects’ in senses (a) and (b). See ch. 6 for more on the epistemological consequences of my own approach in connection with (a). See Campbell (2002b) for a detailed discussion of the role of a relational conception of perceptual acquaintance in grounding demonstrative thought along the lines suggested by (b). See Brewer (1999) for the idea that the epistemological and thought-theoretic roles of perceptual experience are themselves fundamentally related, which is also of course a prominent early modern empiricist theme: perceptual experience is essential for both our grasp of the most basic empirical concepts and our acquisition of the most basic empirical knowledge.

in many cases in which a person perceives an event she does so in virtue of the fact that the physical object whose change is the event in question is the direct object of her experience; still there may be occasions in which we have to invoke a physical event itself as the direct object of the experience in the absence of any obvious candidate object. This may be most common in senses other than vision and touch: for example, when a person hears a clap of thunder. Second, as will be evident in ch. 2 below, in two *prima facie* quite different contexts, it is intended to be consistent with (II) that the direct objects of perception strictly speaking may be merely spatial and/or temporal parts of extended and persisting physical objects. Similarly, third, there may be other direct objects that are not themselves physical objects; for example, they may be collections of physical objects, or otherwise related to physical objects, such as their shadows. Thus, although physical objects may be fundamental amongst the direct objects of perception, (II) is intended to allow for the extension of the notion to include certain other categories of direct object.⁶

Those sympathetic with the broad spirit of (II) may also be concerned about its interaction with various explicitly factive perceptual notions. It is undeniable that we often perceive that p: I may see that the coin is circular, for example. This is certainly compatible with (II), not because the fact that the coin is circular is a candidate direct object of perception in my sense, though. For it is a crucial component of the early modern framework, only in the context of which my technical notion of a direct object of perception makes sense, that these are objects, or things, as opposed to facts,

⁶ See ch. 4 and below, though, for opposition to the idea that perception may be construed most fundamentally at least as a relation to worldly facts.

propositions or contents.⁷ According to my own development of the position, factive perceptions are intelligible only in terms of more basic perceptual acquaintance-relations between subjects and physical direct objects of this kind. Normally these will be the object constituents of the facts in question, such as the circular coin itself in the example given above; but they may not be, as, for example, when I see that Anna is not at the party. As I have already indicated, there is a quite different approach that has widespread support today according to which the most fundamental perceptual states are to be characterized in terms of relata on the fact/proposition/content side of this distinction. Even the variant of this position according to which the most basic such relata are facts about how things are in the mind-independent physical world strictly speaking denies (II). Views of this general kind are the topic of ch. 4 below.

With all the early modern apparatus in place, the conjunction of (I) and (II) offers itself as a highly natural regimentation of the empirical realist conviction that physical objects are both presented in perception and yet in themselves entirely independent of it.

Things break down for this general approach, though, when it is pointed out that the early modern empiricists themselves explicitly endorse the following further claim, which is evidently inconsistent with the conjunction of (I) and (II), when, as I intend throughout, objects are classified as mind-dependent if and only if they are not mind-independent.

⁷ Once again, the distinction here is controversial. A locus classicus is Wittgenstein (1974, § 1, esp. § 1.1). See also Russell (1917), Frege (1993), Evans (1982, ch. 1) and Steward (1997, ch. 1). For its application in the philosophy of perception, see Dretske (1969), Cassam (2007, esp. chs. 3 & 4) and Campbell (2002b, 2009).

(III) The direct objects of perception are mind-dependent.

Even worse, the early modern empiricists not only accept (III), but they also offer powerful arguments for it. I focus in what follows in particular on the argument from illusion and the argument from hallucination.⁸

Very crudely, the first proceeds as follows. In cases of illusion, the direct object of perception has a property that no candidate mind-independent object has, and must therefore be mind-dependent; then, since every perceptual experience is subjectively indistinguishable from one in a possible case of illusion, the same goes across the board. The direct objects of any perception are bound to be mind-dependent.

This line of argument may be made precise in a number of importantly different ways. I think that Paul Snowdon is right to distinguish two phases in each of them. The first is intended to establish that the direct object of an illusion is mind-dependent. The second is supposed to generalize this result to all perceptual experience, including that involved in veridical perception (1992).⁹

⁸ My purpose here is simply to illustrate the way in which these arguments put pressure on the natural regimentation of empirical realism as the conjunction of (I) and (II), in the context of the early modern approach to conscious perception as a relation to certain direct objects of experience that provide the most fundamental characterization of the nature of conscious condition in question. I illustrate the historical options by appeal to Locke (1975) and Berkeley (1975a, 1975b). Ch. 4 provides an extended discussion of what I regard as the orthodox modern response to these problems and arguments. Chs. 5-7 set out and defend my own quite different solution to them, which is significantly more in keeping with the insights of early modern empiricism.

⁹ See also Smith (2002, esp. chs. 1 & 7) for a similar two-part decomposition of the argument from illusion, and also of the argument from hallucination as indicated below.

There are serious problems with any version of phase two that I know. It is sufficient for my purposes here in connection with the argument from illusion, though, to elaborate phase one as follows.

A visual illusion may be characterized as a perceptual experience in which a physical object, o, looks F, although o is not actually F.¹⁰ According to the early modern empiricist approach, the way to account quite generally for the fact that something looks F in an experience is to construe that experience as the subject's acquaintance with a direct object that provides the most fundamental characterization of that very conscious condition and that must therefore, presumably, itself be F. In cases of illusion, then, any such direct object is bound to be distinct from the physical object, o, which is not F, although it looks to be so. For one is F and the other is not. The occurrence and nature of such an illusion is manifestly independent of the accidental additional presence of any mind-independent object in the vicinity that happens to be F. So its direct object must be mind-dependent.¹¹

¹⁰ Although this provisional characterization is perfectly adequate for present purposes, there are visual illusions that do not meet it. See Johnston (2006) and ch. 6 below. There may also be cases that do not obviously qualify as illusions in which this condition is met. For example, a perfect wax model may look like the Prime Minister; but it is not clear that this constitutes a visual illusion. Although they certainly raise interesting issues, I ignore these cases unless otherwise indicated throughout.

¹¹ Recall that entities are mind-dependent just if their nature is in some way a matter of how they do or might appear. The first phase of the argument from illusion as set out here assumes with Locke and Berkeley that any case of something looking F in an experience is one of acquaintance with a direct object that is F. Such direct objects are therefore in this way constituted by their appearance and hence mind-dependent. See ch. 5 below for a detailed account of how the early modern empiricist insight that perceptual experience is most fundamentally a matter of acquaintance with certain direct objects may be combined with an account of illusion that explicitly rejects this assumption and is therefore compatible with the natural construal of empirical realism as the simple conjunction of (I) and (II) along with the rejection of (III).

On Locke's materialist view, the direct object of an illusion is a mind-dependent entity, which is E, which nevertheless sufficiently resembles a non-E, mind-independent object, o, which is also appropriately causally responsible for its production, for the latter to be the physical object that illusorily looks E.¹² Veridical perception of o as G, say, is likewise to be construed as acquaintance with a mind-dependent direct object, which is G. This resembles mind-independent o, which is also G,¹³ and which is causally responsible for its production. Thus, in either case, a mind-independent physical object, o, is presented in perception, in virtue of the fact that the subject has a conscious experience with a mind-dependent direct object that sufficiently resembles o, which is in turn appropriately causally responsible for its production.

On the most straightforward and philosophically defensible version of Berkeley's mentalism, on the other hand, the direct object of an illusion is a mind-dependent entity, which is a part of an equally mind-dependent composite physical object o. o is not E, very roughly, because most of its parts are not E, and it does not behave, in

¹² Things are of course more complicated in case of secondary qualities, according to Locke. For, in one sense, all secondary quality perception is illusory: nothing in the mind-independent physical world is ever red, in the basic sense in which the mind-dependent direct objects of perception are sometimes red. Still, in having such a mind-dependent red entity before the mind, a physical object may look RED, that is, either disposed to produce red direct objects of perception in normal observers in normal conditions, or microscopically constituted in whichever way actually grounds that disposition. Mind-independent physical objects are sometimes RED. So some, but not all, such perceptions may then be illusory in a derived sense. In such cases, a physical object, o, looks RED, although o is not actually RED. For the direct object of experience is a mind-dependent red entity that nevertheless sufficiently resembles o and is appropriately caused by that very mind-independent object. None of these details are relevant for present purposes, although they effectively come to the fore in ch. 3.

¹³ Modulo the point in n. 12 above concerning secondary qualities.

general, in ways characteristic of F's: in particular we cannot use it as we can paradigm F's. Nevertheless, it looks E, on this occasion, because a part of it that is F is the direct object of the relevant illusory experience.¹⁴ Veridical perception of o as G, say, is likewise to be construed as acquaintance with a mind-dependent direct object, which is G. This is again part of an equally mind-dependent composite physical object, o, which is itself G, roughly, because most of its relevant parts are G. Thus, in either case, a mind-dependent physical object, o, is presented in perception, in virtue of the fact that the subject has a conscious experience with a mind-dependent direct object that is part of o.

Hallucination presents related problems for any attempt to maintain empirical realism as the conjunction of (I) and (II) above within the early modern empiricist framework.

The structure of the argument from hallucination is similar to that of the argument from illusion. In cases of hallucination, there is no plausible candidate mind-independent direct object of perception, so this must be a mind-dependent thing.

Then, since every perceptual experience is subjectively indistinguishable from one in a possible case of hallucination, the same goes across the board. The direct objects of any perception are bound to be mind-dependent.

Again there are two phases to the argument. The first is intended to establish that hallucinatory experience must be construed as a relation to a mind-dependent direct object. The second is supposed to generalize this result to all perceptual experience,

¹⁴ See Stoneham (2002) for a compelling presentation of this account of Berkeley. Note, as with Locke's account of the secondary qualities, predicates apply to persisting physical objects, according to Berkeley, in a way which is derivative of their more basic application to our fleeting ideas, which are, according to this version of his view, their temporal, and 'personal', parts. A number of issues arising here receive more extended treatment in ch. 2.

The Inconsistent Triad

including that in veridical perception. My current concern is simply to illustrate Locke's and Berkeley's contrasting implementations of the first phase of the argument.

Thus, according to Locke's materialism, hallucination consists in acquaintance with a mind-dependent direct object of experience that is, either not appropriately caused by any mind-independent physical object, or insufficiently resembles any mind-independent physical cause it may have to qualify as its perceptual presentation. According to Berkeley's mentalism, on the other hand, hallucination consists in acquaintance with a mind-dependent direct object of experience, which fails to qualify as a part of any composite mind-dependent physical object because it is not appropriately related to a suitable series of distinct such object-parts.

Locke and Berkeley both endorse (III) above, then, which is evidently inconsistent with the conjunction of (I) and (II). They both also acknowledge that physical objects are presented to us in perceptual experience. Locke accepts (I) and therefore denies (II). Nevertheless, he hopes to rescue empirical realism by offering an alternative construal of the way in which physical objects are presented in perception to their actually being the direct objects that provide the most fundamental characterization of the nature of perceptual experience itself. This crucially depends upon a notion of resemblance between the mind-dependent such direct objects and mind-independent physical objects themselves. Berkeley argues that any such proposed resemblance is fatally flawed. So he reverts to a more natural conception of perceptual presentation, on which a physical object is presented in perception when one of its parts is the

direct object of the experience in question. Given his endorsement of (III), he therefore derives his anti-realist rejection of (I): physical objects are mind-dependent.

My discussion throughout the book is organized around the Inconsistent Triad.

- (I) Physical objects are mind-independent.
- (II) Physical objects are the direct objects of perception.
- (III) The direct objects of perception are mind-dependent.

Chs. 2 and 3 elaborate Berkeley's and Locke's accounts in turn. Their main concern is to derive general lessons for my own resolution of the inconsistency between (I), (II) and (III) above. I reject (III). This is the response of most philosophers today. What I hope to demonstrate, though, is that there are two quite different ways in which (III) may be denied. My contention is that the standard approach amongst philosophers today involves a denial of (III) that shares with Locke's rejection of (II) closely related problems to those that motivate Berkeley's rejection of (I). Berkeley has compelling arguments that Locke's attempted defence of empirical realism succeeds in sustaining realism for physical objects, at best, only at the cost of distinguishing these from anything genuinely presented to us in perception. Given their shared commitment to (III), the only possible attitude towards the physical objects that really are presented in perception, according to Berkeley, is therefore to regard these as mind-dependent. I argue that something very similar goes wrong with the orthodox denial of (III) today. Perhaps this succeeds in delineating a domain of mind-independent objects; and these may be called 'physical objects' if proponents of the position so choose. Still, they are absolutely not the objects that are in any satisfactory

sense actually presented to us in perception. The resultant physical realism is no defence of empirical realism at all.

In contrast, I insist that the idea that physical objects are genuinely presented to us in perception plays an ineliminable role in identifying the domain of objects whose status as mind-independent is of fundamental philosophical concern in debates over realism with respect to the familiar physical world of stones, tables, trees, people and other animals. My central thesis is that defence of a genuinely empirical realism concerning this world that we all know and love depends upon a denial of (III) that ironically shares a good deal more with early modern empiricism than is normally even countenanced by current philosophical orthodoxy.

Ch. 4. outlines the standard approach taken towards these issues today. This involves a wholesale rejection of the early modern notion of direct objects of perception.

Instead of regarding perceptual experience as acquaintance with particular entities whose identity and nature characterize the experience in question as the specific conscious occurrence that it is, current orthodoxy approaches the understanding of perceptual experience in terms of its representational content: the way it represents things as being in the world around the subject. Thus, (III) is effectively denied by insisting that there are no direct objects of perception in the early modern empiricist sense. This revision is intended to provide a sense in which physical objects are nevertheless presented to us in perception that avoids the deeply unattractive choice instantiated by Locke and Berkeley between a realism that changes the subject altogether away from the familiar world of objects that really are presented to us in experience, on the one hand, and an explicit endorsement of the mind-dependent

status of the stones, tables, trees, people and other animals that we genuinely do perceive, on the other. I argue at length that this attempt is a failure. The initial assimilation of perception to thought involved in the contemporary move towards a characterization of our fundamental perceptual relation with the world in terms of representational content excludes any proper recognition of the status of perceptual experience as the conscious presentation to a person of a world of physical objects.

Ch. 5 sets out my own elaboration of the early modern empiricist insight that perceptual experience is most fundamentally to be construed in terms of a relation of acquaintance with certain direct objects, whose identity and nature provide the most basic elucidation of what it is to be in the relevant conscious experiential condition. I explain in detail how the dependence of a person's perceptual experience of a given object upon the her point of view and other circumstances of perception, and also the possibility of illusion and hallucination, all entirely fail to establish that such direct objects of perception are absolutely bound to be mind-dependent things. The idea that persisting mind-independent physical objects themselves are the direct objects of perceptual experience is perfectly compatible with the existence of such phenomena. I go on to provide a detailed account of how to make sense of the many and varied ways that such mind-independent physical objects look in visual perception on this basis.

The focus of ch. 6 is epistemological. The position advanced in ch. 5 has certain features that may provoke concerns under the head of the Myth of the Given. I set out Sellars' own (1997) formulation of the objection. Then I give an extended sketch of how the positive epistemology of empirical knowledge might proceed in the context

of my own position illustrating at various points how further objections motivated at least in part by Sellars' discussion may be handled. I also provide a brief comparison between this account and my own earlier views (Brewer, 1999).

In ch. 7 I complete the defence of my own positive position by explaining in detail how the mind-independence of the direct objects of perception that I insist upon shows up from the subject's own perspective. Our account as theorists of the direct objects of perception is responsible at least in part to how things are from the subject's own perspective. I explain the role in bringing their mind-independence to light for the subject of certain commonsense explanations of the actual and counterfactual order and nature of experience of physical objects on the basis of the perceptible natures of the particular objects perceived.

Thus, I reject (III) outright: there are direct objects of perception; but these are the familiar persisting mind-independent physical objects that we all know and love. Empirical realism is indeed sustained as the perfectly natural simple conjunction of (I) and (II).

Put slightly differently, a key message of the book is that the early modern empiricists were absolutely right to focus their attention on a fundamental tension inherent in the empirical realist conception of physical objects as both the very things that are subjectively presented to us in perception and yet also entirely independent in themselves of any thought or experience of them. This tension is not to be avoided by today's alternative construal of the fundamental nature of perceptual experience in terms of some kind of representational content. What is required instead is a radical

The Inconsistent Triad

reconfiguration of the early modern empiricist conception of perception as a direct acquaintance-relation with its objects that is nevertheless entirely in line with our pre-philosophical common sense expressed in the conjunction of (I) and (II). This is what I offer here.