

Abstract

This research work proposes to investigate the problem of perception from a philosophical perspective. The focus of this dissertation is visual perception. Here the aim is to try to find out a distinct model of perception that can reconceptualise how human beings visualise the physical world. The central research question of this thesis is how does a human being perceive or know the world in which she lives? Is it at all possible to define or explain the process of the visual experience of the world of an embodied human being? The basic claim of direct perception that perception occurs directly, without being mediated by anything like sense data, sensory information, or representations, is usually considered as naïve. Therefore, traditional theories of perception, which claim perception is indirect, strongly oppose the position of direct perception as a whole. The theory of direct perception argues that since the external world and the objects scattered therein, irrespective of living or non-living, can be seen directly as they are, therefore, it is not necessary to describe the process of perception as 'indirect'. It is meaningless to argue that since the external world and its objects can only be accessed in the form of sense-data or sensory information, which enter a person's visual sense organ and reach the brain and with the active intervention of the brain, perception is processed. The stand of indirect perception holds that there is no active role for a perceiver in the process of perception, though, in fact, perception is caused inside her own body (in the brain). The position of direct perception strongly denies the argument(s) of indirect perception. It claims that following the position of indirect perception it becomes difficult to explain the action of experiencing the visual world. This research work aims to reconceptualise the process of visual perception, through which an organism knows, accepts, adapts, and embodies its surrounding world that is indeed its dwelling place. The research also

aims to explore the fact of one's experience or realisation of the feeling of seeing the world before her from her own point of view, own perspective, following her own desire, will, and intention, in respect of her present state of mind and emotion, being guided by her own experiences, knowledge, sensory feelings and bodily realisations. In short, it is to describe the process of perception from the perspective of the embodied- 'I'.

The central problem of this research is: how someone perceives the world around her and deals with it, lives *in* it, and *lives* it in different manners by going against the tradition. The argument is that perception is not merely a passive process; it is an active one. In the process, the perceiver takes part quite actively following her own interest, need, and situation. Therefore, the process cannot be indirect. As a direct process, perception occurs by the immediate contact between a perceiver and an object of perception. In the process of perception apart from the perceiver's sense organ and the object, some other elements like the environment, in which the perceiver and the object both are placed or situated, locomotion of the perceiver, ambient light, situation, etc., also matter quite importantly.

The second argument is that perception is embodied; it is an embodied process. Hence, naturally, the process demands the complete involvement of the perceiving agent. The phrase 'complete involvement' refers to the involvement of the agent's body, sense organs, motor organs, consciousness, awareness, desire, intention, etc., everything, apart from the brain or central nervous system. In the process, the role of the perceiver is not passive. It is not something that can be imposed on someone. Rather a person perceives an object being conscious and aware, following her own desire for perception. It is undeniable that the matter of perception and the matter of embodiment are intrinsically related to each other. Following the path of information

processing view, it is quite difficult to reach the truth of embodiment. However, the notion of embodiment consists in the notion of direct perception.

Following the context of perception, quite relevantly, the context of behaviour comes. Perception and behaviour are inseparably related. According to some theories, behaviour consists in the act of perceiving (Gibson, 1979). According to some other, perception causes behaviour (Gregory 1970). However, in the both conditions the cases of perception as well as behaviour expect embodied involvement of the perceiver. In this context, the term ‘behaviour’ refers to all those actions or manners that a person does to communicate with her surrounding environment as well as its living-nonliving all kinds of inhabiting objects. The term also refers to those gestures that a person makes for using the objects to fulfil her needs. The act of *use* necessarily expects a user’s bodily involvement. A person grasps, earns, or achieves (*prāpta*) the object of her perception through some bodily gesture or behaviour. For example, if a thirsty person sees a glass full of water then she moves towards the glass, stretches her arm to bring the glass to her mouth, and drinks the water. All the actions she performs for using the object of her need, i.e. water, for quenching her thirst, through her behaviour. The noticeable thing is that the occurrence of the behaviour, its smoothness, accuracy, etc. everything is dependent on the accuracy perception. Through the process of perception, a person knows directly her habitat environment, surrounding arrangements of objects, and gradually cope up with the environment. The actions of perceiving and behaving are situated. The actions may vary in respect to the present moment, place, and situation, which are operated in respect of the perceiver’s perspective.

The notion of the perceptual process involves the state of the intentionality of a perceiver. In the process, a person as an embodied being desires something and intentionally efforts to fulfil the desire. One thing to mention here is that the adjective ‘embodied’ refers to a mode of a person’s

appearance because of which she feels or realises that her ‘I-hood’ is separated neither from her consciousness, mental states, emotions, etc. nor from her body. Due to the realisation of the ‘I’-hood, a human being owns the sense that she is different from other human beings, humanoid, or some replicated model. In the state, she can embody her human-hood that makes her aware of her independence and individuality among the mass of other human beings or other living beings from different species. In the context, it can be said that as an embodied being the perceiver perceives something through embodying the present situation, place, etc. objective factors, and her own subjective factors like pain, pleasure, etc. Therefore, instead of seeing an object merely as a piece of matter, she perceives it as a means that may serve her need. For that, along with the objective features of the object like colour, shape, etc. a person can perceive directly its use(s) or need-fulfilling-abilities (in short affordances) too.

In this context, the matter of graspability (*prāpyakāritā*) is mentionable. It is a part and parcel of the perceptual process. Perception cannot be meaningless or purposeless. Every perception has its object, which the perceiver desires to grasp or shun. Through perception, a person sees the object directly as it is and grasps it in the same way, too. To see and/or grasp objects of perception directly, the perceiver has to get involved with the environment and its ambience not just as the agent of perceptual action, but also as the owner of the act of perceiving, including perceptual experiences and its related behaviours. The point is, the role of the perceiving agent is not passive as a zombie, robot, or a slave but as a free individual authority or owner of the action of perceiving, moving, and grasping the perceived object. The perception occurs in respect of the body of a perceiver. Her body movements, postures, shapes, etc. provide the perceiver with some perspective(s). How to perceive an object, which part of it is supposed to be perceived, and how to use it for fulfilling some purpose(s) – these matters are related to the perceiver’s desire, mood,

state of mind, intention, the intensity of the need, etc. and of course on the ability of her body. For example, in some social gathering or party, an adult person with short height usually chooses something, for sitting, of relatively low height, which is compatible with his/her body structure, including height and weight. Instead of a chair, couch, or barstool that person may sit in a low-rise centre table, a step at the bottom of a staircase, etc., some unusual place to sit in. The noticeable thing is the person is not unaware of the real purpose of the table, despite she uses it for some other purpose that does not go with the typical concept of a table. The reason behind this kind of behaviour of the person is she is quite aware of her own body's height, which is short. At that present moment and position, she perceives directly that her own body's height and the height of the barstool, etc. are not compatible, for sitting-in. Moreover, if she tries to climb the barstool to sit-in it, the people in the party may laugh at her. Therefore, to avoid that embarrassing and awkward situation she chooses to use the centre table to fulfil her need or purpose. In that situation, she considers that centre table as a suitable sit-in-able object in respect to her body's height and structure, i.e. the body-perspective. Another reason is there behind that kind of behaviour of that person. He directly sees and embodies that centre table, at that present moment and situation, as affording her sit-in-ability in respect of the present situation and environment.

The environment, irrespective of the presence of its inhabitants, has a special kind of character that affords some abilities or features of its objects, surfaces, structures, etc. quite openly. Inhabitants of that environment are supposed to perceive those features by their own and use them as they want to. Those features or abilities are purely objective and stay there in the environment. However, from the subjective aspect, perception and interpretation of the features depend on some factors like the species-culture, social and geographical culture, orientation, etc.

that is why a human being sits in the chair, whereas a cat uses the chair as a sleeping place. Again, chairs are used in European culture for sitting purposes, whereas in the classic Chinese culture there is no use of a chair, instead, they sit on the floor and so on. These abilities remain there in the environment. Organisms following their mental and bodily orientations, cultural practices, mood, need, present situation, etc., opt or *pick up* the ability (or abilities) and use the object of perception accordingly. According to the supporters of the direct perceptual process, these features are objective, real, independent of the perceiver. Perception of these characters also happens directly. Gibson has talked about this essential and real characteristic or aspect of the environment by coining the term 'affordance'. According to him, affordances remain there in the objects as well as in the environment naturally.

Perception of affordances or objective abilities occurs directly. Someone perceives affordances from the very structure or pattern of the object of perception. The process of the perception of affordances involves a person's embodied presence, faculty of experience. If the object of perception is some living being then along with the former two factors the process includes another factor called intersubjectivity. Without direct interaction between the perceiver and environment perception of object, distance, speed, shift, change, etc. are difficult to explain. Since perception is a complete process that involves the activity of the perceiver's whole body. Therefore, it is obvious that apart from the visual sense organ, remaining sense organs also, more or less, become activated and involved in the same action of perception. In real situations, a case of visual perception is supported by the other perceptual systems, too. Since among the activities of all the systems, the visual system works more strongly or effectively that is why the earned perceptual experience or cognition is known by the name of the visual sense organ.
