Some “Truisms” about Perception

1. Vision, audition, touch, smell, and taste are the five senses.
2. The eyes, ears, skin, nose, and tongue are the five sense organs.
3. Each sense gathers information about the world from a different medium—vision uses light waves, audition uses sound waves, touch uses mechanical pressure, and so on.
4. Each sense can detect some feature of the world that no other sense can detect. Only vision detects color, only audition detects sound, only touch detects pressure, and so on.
5. What you sense depends mostly on what happens to your sense organs. More specifically, what you see depends mostly on what happens to your eyes (whether you see a face as dark or light, for example, depends on how light waves strike your eyes); what you hear depends mostly on what happens to your ears (whether you hear a violin as screechy or clear, for example, depends on how pressure waves strike your ears); and so on.
6. Sense experiences come in distinct, readily identifiable kinds, with one kind of sense experience for each kind of sense. So, when you encounter a cello, you can tell quite easily whether you are seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or smelling the cello—no one confuses the color of a cello with its sound!
7. We perceive the world through our senses.
8. We know about the world through perception.
From “Truisms” to a Metaphor

Desirable Consequence

This metaphor promises to explain how the senses provide us with *unbiased* information about the world. This is important because we might think that the senses can provide a foundation for our *knowledge* of the world only if they provide us with unbiased information. To see the point, imagine someone who always sees what she expects to see? Does her seeing something give her reason to believe it’s there?

Results from the Cognitive Sciences


Seeking a Better Metaphor

Do these results undermine the “Camera Metaphor”? What metaphor would be better? On your preferred metaphor, can the senses provide a foundation for our knowledge of the world? How might this reorientation, this change in metaphor, influence how you think about your relation to your environment and to other people?