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Things, Perceptual Objectivity, and Manipulation: Some Experimental Findings*

Paul Tibbetts

Mead's theory of the act was central to his entire philosophical endeavor; a thorough grasp of the concepts of the act and action is therefore a prerequisite to understanding the thought of this leading pragmatist. In the first half of this paper, Mead's theory of the act is analyzed in terms of its interlocking stages, with emphasis given to the perceptual, manipulatory, and consummatory levels within the act. The extent to which these levels condition and limit one another is then detailed. Mead's analysis of perceptual objectivity and physical reality in terms of manipulatory activity is then discussed, along with the theory of reality which his conception of the act entails. In the second half of the paper, a number of experimental studies of human perceptual behavior are then discussed. These studies are organized in terms of the importance of the tactual features of objects; the effect of movement on visual experience; and the relation between sensory deprivation, immobility, and hallucinatory experience. The extent to which these empirical studies confirm Mead's theory as to the role of tactual and manipulatory activity in experience is then suggested in some detail.

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