Perceptual reports vs recognition responses: A reply to Parks

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Parks (1968) objects to the interpretation offered by Haber and Nathanson (1968), especially with respect to the following condition: S responds to a figure seen oscillating behind a narrow slit that it is foreshortened and also reports that he has a percept only of what is visible in the slit at any instance. Parks argues from these two responses that S must actually have a percept of most or all of the figure, a conclusion denied by the authors. This reply goes to some length to reiterate a distinction between knowledge of a stimulus gained from a percept and that gained from recognizing or constructing what the figure must be, based upon memory of previous percepts and past experience. Parks fails to make this distinction in his reply, and thus equates what S says he knows with what S actually sees. Therefore, this experiment still provides little support for any postretinal storage of the type Parks proposes.

Haber and Nathanson (1968) found in their Condition 1 that when an outline drawing of a figure (e.g., a camel) was oscillated behind a 1 mm slit cut in an otherwise opaque material, Ss were able to judge the shape of the figure, and when they drew it, they estimated its length to be shorter than it actually was. The degree of foreshortening was a function of the speed of travel of the figure. However, all Ss denied that they could "see," in the sense of having a percept, a short camel, let alone a long camel. They knew it was a camel, either from prior knowledge, or from recognition. But the only percept any S ever reported in this condition was just of those parts of the figure on view through the very narrow slit (less than 1/30 of the length of the figure). From these reports and responses, we concluded that while Ss were able to judge or misjudge the shape of the figure, they were not doing so from a simultaneous percept of the whole figure, or of even any part except what was seen at any instant through the slit. Apparently what was in the slit was erased by what slid into view next as a figure moved.

Parks' reply apparently fails to appreciate the distinction between perceptual reports of percepts and recognition judgments of what the stimulus must have been. He says: "Such reports (of percepts only of what is visible in the slit), in combination with reports of foreshortening, clearly imply that Ss had, at any instant, a percept of more than was actually available at any instant within the viewing slit." The critical error is to refer to the description of foreshortening as a perceptual report of a percept. Each S said explicitly that he did not see any foreshortening—rather he judged the length of the figure to be thus and so. If he knew the actual length of the figure, then he knew from the slice visible at any instance, and his memory and construction of the prior slices just seen, that the figure so constructed would be shorter than the actual stimulus was. In this sense, S is responding that what he can

recognize from what he sees is different from what he knows the figure really is.

I cannot stress this distinction too strongly. Contemporary psychologists, especially those working in perception, have failed to keep in mind that a perceiver can have knowledge of a stimulus from his percept of it while it is on view, from his more-or-less faithful memory of his percept when it is no longer on view, or from his cognitive solving of the problem: what could the stimulus have been to have given rise to this percept (or memory of this percept)? See Haber (1966), Natsoulas (1967), and Haber and Hershenson (in preparation) for other aspects of this distinction.

In our experiment, each S told us via his description that he had a percept only of what was on view at any instance through the slit, but that he recognized, in the sense of solving a problem, that the figure was a camel of such-and-such length.

Thus, Parks is wrong when he implies that in this condition, Ss had percepts of more than what was visible through the slit. He failed to realize that Ss can know the shape and size of the figure without ever having seen a percept of all or most of it at once.

He is right to say that postretinal storage (of the form implied if whole-figure percepts had been found in this condition) would be firmly established only by measurement of eye positioning and movement during exposure to the apparatus. A prior requirement would appear to be reports of whole figure percepts when the figure is moving behind a fixated, stationary slit. Since I will still argue that the data of Haber and Nathanson do not give any evidence for such reports, this type of postretinal storage seems unlikely. The fact that Parks (1965) found such evidence is still puzzling, as we commented upon.

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