

Ines de Asis: Photographs and two kinds of Skepticism

Abstract:

Most of us trust photographs to show us things, to give us information about the objects and events they show and trust we can learn from this information. Two questions about the epistemic value of photographs motivate this paper: the first question is concerned with providing an analysis of the *kind of information* photographs furnish, while the second is concerned with what the epistemic value of photographs are. I will carry out this investigation with emphasis on the latter question and to do so, I will use the fundamental differences between the skeptical hypotheses faced by perceptual and testimonial knowledge in order to help provide a distinction between photographs and other kinds of pictures, specifically of handmade variety. In this analysis, handmade pictures will be likened with testimony because both share a necessary feature of belief dependence. On the other hand, photographs are not belief-dependent and are thereby not subject to the same skeptical problems as testimonial artifacts. This analysis will show that skepticism about photographic information is akin to skepticism about perception and not otherwise. Since the kind of skeptical hypothesis that photographs are susceptible to differs from that of handmade pictures, we have good reason to consider them different kinds of belief sources, even if they are both kinds of pictures and this helps to distinguish photographs. Most significantly, photographic information can be described as a kind of prosthesis for seeing and the epistemic value of photographs is thus that they furnish experiential knowledge.