

Introduction

The distinction between appearance and reality is as old as the history of philosophy. Efforts to save the appearances have taken various forms, usually sparked by attempts to devalue appearance in favor of reality or “the really real.” Sometimes, in our history, saving the appearances has been motivated by claims to reduce appearance to reality, or even, it seems, to deny appearances altogether. A less drastic tactic offers to *explain* the appearances in terms of items in reality. To say the appearances are not real does not, of course, get rid of them; their status (however characterized) must be reckoned with. Trying to ignore them is difficult; phenomena and qualia are tenacious. It is even more difficult to attempt to reduce them to items in reality, to their causes. It is salutary to keep in mind a remark by Bradley: “Whatever is rejected as appearance, is, for that very reason, no mere nonentity.”¹

The locution “nothing but” is frequently used when philosophers discuss appearances. The appearances are said to be “nothing but” particles or corpuscles, for example, or structured brain events. Even Thomas Hobbes, who recognized and honored the appearances, employed the “nothing but” locution frequently. That locution did not mean he denied the appearances or reduced them to matter and motion. Hobbes’s materialism is at best an explanatory one, not an ontological one. He was very firm: there *are* appearances (phantasms) *and* reality (matter and motion). Our contemporary materialists are not so clear about what they are affirming or denying. Often, they seem to me to confuse two claims: (a) all phenomena, all seemings or appearings, can be *explained* in terms of or by reference to, e.g., brain events, and (b) there *are* only brain events (and other physical events in the environment). The recent vogue for talking about supervenience may be an attempt to have

¹ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1893), p. 135.

it both ways, somehow to combine (a) and (b). Perhaps the appeals to supervenience are a genuine recognition that phenomena, qualia and mental events are also real, also exist.

To follow claim (a) rigidly may eliminate the need for any causal explanation of appearances, qualia or awareness. Whether supervenience is a causal relation, I am unclear. Most often, it seems to be treated as an explanatory relation: awareness or consciousness arises from, or emerges out of, a specific organization and structure of brain processes. But whatever the relation is, to talk of supervenience would seem to lead to the recognition that what supervenes, what arises from, differs in some ways from that from which it has emerged, or what it supervenes on: the supervenee and the supervened would seem to differ, at least numerically. With perceptual qualia or phenomenal properties, the difference cannot just be numerical. There is a kind difference between seen color or heard sound and the physical and neural events that precede our experience of color or sound. Similarly, being aware of tables, computers, or coffee differs in kind from the physical and neural processes that correlate with such awareness.

Appearances take various forms and they are referred to with different words: “phenomena” and (in recent uses) “qualia” are the two most used besides “appearance.”² Hume’s formulation of the ordinary view about our knowledge of the external world is in terms of “perceptions,” a term for what appears to perceivers. The ordinary view, Hume claims, does not distinguish perceptions from objects: “The very sensations [sense-perceptions] which enter by the eye or ear are with them the true objects.”³ In another passage, Hume uses the term “image”: “The very

² The term “appearance” can be ambiguous; it has been used in a variety of ways in philosophy and literature. Basically, it refers to what contrasts with a reality not directly available to experience and observation. For some account of the appearance–reality distinction in the history of philosophy, see my entry under that title in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*. The entry for “appearance” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is also helpful. The specific use of “appearance” in my study will become clear in what follows. The “qualia” in recent discussions occurs in debates over various forms of materialism. Joseph Levine traces its use to C. I. Lewis: “it refers to qualities such as color patches, tastes, and sounds of phenomenal individuals. In this sense the term means what Berkeley meant by sensible qualities or later philosophers meant by ‘sensa’ or ‘sense-data.’ Since the demise of sense-data theories, the term qualia has come to refer to the qualitative, or phenomenal, character of conscious, sensory states, so mental states, not phenomenal individuals, are the subjects of predication. Another expression for this aspect of mental life is the ‘raw feel’ of experience, or ‘what it is like’ to have certain sensory experiences. Qualia are part of the phenomenon of the subjectivity of consciousness, and they pose one of the most difficult problems for a materialist solution to the MIND–BODY problem.” (*The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Supplement, entry for “Qualia.”)

³ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd edn, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 202.

image, which is present to the senses, is with us the real body.”⁴ The passage from Hume reproduced at the head of this study strikingly runs perceptions and objects together, not just for ordinary people, but for philosophers too, most of the time. We frequently speak of the appearances of objects to perceivers, we describe the way objects appear to us, but Hume is offering a radical proposal: perceptions *are* the objects. From “the appearance of objects to us,” Hume (and Berkeley too) moves to “appearances are the objects themselves.” The appearances have surely been saved with this move, they have been turned into reality! But at least for Hume, the perceptions we have do not exhaust reality. Hume still strives to retain a material world independent of perceivers. He has both appearances and reality, perceptions and objects, two aspects of the real.

My exploration in the distinction between appearance and reality revolves around a series of contrasts or distinctions which can be found throughout the history of philosophy but is particularly invasive in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most of these distinctions have also flourished in the twentieth century, especially in some recent analyses in philosophy of mind and cognitive psychology. Their presence in modern (of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) as well as in twentieth-century philosophy highlights many similarities in the work of philosophers in those periods. Contemporary philosophers and historians of modern philosophy are not always aware (at least, not fully aware) of the issues, concepts and questions they share. The invidious division between “philosophy” and “mere history” has done much to keep the two approaches apart. There is a tendency among the former to show only a superficial interest in the historical traditions behind them; they sometimes show an attitude of condescension towards those traditions. Both so-called historians of philosophy and “pure” philosophers can learn from each other. Contemporary work in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind can illuminate the theories and doctrines of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers. A good, detailed and accurate knowledge and understanding of the latter can benefit and provide balance and some humility for the former. It is useful to remind recent writers that some of their problems and solutions are not new. Value is added to our study of modern philosophy when we discover the anticipations of recent, more sophisticated analyses. The history of philosophy need not be isolated in time, and recent contemporary philosophers should not be ahistorical.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

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Excerpt

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The distinctions or tensions (Kant used some of them in his paralogism) that I have in mind are the following:

- (1) Appearance and reality
- (2) Phenomena and their causes
- (3) Action and body motions
- (4) Person and man
- (5) Two languages – phenomenal and neural

The relation between appearance and reality, when dealing with perception and our knowledge of the external world, is often said to be causal. A question can be raised: “are items in reality the sole cause of phenomena, of sense qualia?” Conceivably, reality need not require perceivers or cognizers, but can we conceive of qualia without perceivers? Some recent writers seem to replace the perceiver with functioning biological bodies, at least with the brain and neural networks. The perceiver gets reduced to an organized body, mind becomes the brain, body motions become actions, man becomes the person. These are steps taken for a variety of reasons, from a conviction that science, especially neurological science, can explain all, to a distrust of perceiver-dependent qualia, or to a disdain of the mental, the immaterial, the nonphysical.

If we look down the above list of distinctions (perhaps we should call them categories), we can see that the left-hand members of the first four identify categories that usually go with perceivers, cognizers and actors, those to whom the phenomenal qualia present themselves. The fifth on the list refers to the language describing what is presented or what appears to perceivers, in contrast to the language for talking about the right-hand members. The first four right-hand items need not involve any reference to perceivers or cognizers or actors. The odd feature is that those philosophers who try to ignore, get along without, or just by-pass any reference to the left-hand items are themselves perceivers and cognizers trying to use the language of reality or neural events only, i.e., non-perceiver related processes. They are, as it were, situated in one domain, that of the left-hand members, but looking through or past that domain into items, often theoretic items, in the domain of the right-hand members. To have a greater interest in neural events than in our experiences of colors, sounds, shapes caused by (at least correlated with) those events, is a perfectly proper undertaking, but to fail to notice that their access to those neural events is mediated by perceived qualia (and some theory) is less understandable and rather odd.

Philosophers of perception are faced with somewhat the same situation as those who, from the vantage point of the left-hand domain, con-

struct theories of reality constituted only by members of the right-hand domains. That is, philosophers of perception have tried to look through appearances to the underlying reality. They have not always ignored the appearances, however. The problem for perception has been raised as a question: “what information about reality (e.g., physical objects, matter) can we find in our perceptions, in the appearances to sense?” The history of perception theory is filled with attempts to bridge the two domains: causal theories, representative theories. Related issues sometimes engulf perception theory: mind–body relation (e.g., parallelism, pre-established harmony), substance and quality metaphysic. What I want to do in this study is to nibble at the edges, hover around the periphery of some of these issues, rather than make a full-scale assault on the main problems. A full discussion of those problems in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be found in several of my previous books, *Perceptual Acquaintance* and *Perception and Reality*. In this study, I concentrate my attention on issues directly related to perception: a defense of sense qualia and appearances, and their ontological status; the person as actor or perceiver; the nature of the object of perception; the role of mental contents; the causal or signficatory relation between perceptions and objects. While my attention is clearly focused on these topics in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers, I also have an interest in the issues themselves, in their persistence in different times and places, including our own time. I hope I can clarify some particular aspects of the views advanced by Locke, Berkeley and Hume on perception and reality, while at the same time show their relevance to contemporary concerns.

I first turn my attention to the way in which the five-fold distinctions are at work in some recent writings on perception, action and knowledge. Chapter 1 examines two recent writers, one of whom (Paul Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul*, 1995) tries to ignore or deny phenomenal qualities or redefines them as properties of the brain; the other (Clyde Hardin, *Color for Philosophers*, 1988) who, while defending the status of qualia as experienced phenomena, sometimes employs language which seems to overlook such phenomena. Churchland’s analysis of neural networks in the brain, and his ambivalence on how mental events are related to brain events, raise issues familiar to students of modern philosophy who remember Locke’s suggestion of thinking matter. The question then and now is: if thought is a property of the brain, does that turn thought into neural events? Churchland seems antipathetic to the notion of mental events, so thinking matter for

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him tends to become just matter, active but still matter. The title of his book mentions reason and the soul, but there is little of either in his account. The mind gets lost in Churchland's neural networks. One way in which it gets lost is in his failure to recognize the phenomena of awareness, of sensory qualities, of the appearances to the investigator of neural events and theory. The appearances get absorbed by brain events, the very language of mind gets applied to neural events, thereby seemingly replacing cognitive events such as understanding, recognizing, feeling and perceiving with neural analogs. This linguistic inversion or capture is just the reverse of the language used by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers when writing about cognitive events: they employed physical language and metaphors for descriptions of mental events. Unlike Churchland, these writers did not intend to say psychological events were physical events. Churchland seems to say or at least imply that neural events are psychological events. This difference is of interest in itself; it may also give us a better appreciation of the writings of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers. So in discussing Churchland (and Hardin to some extent), I am still addressing the issues of the earlier centuries. Perhaps my treatment may be useful for those philosophers who may not want to immerse themselves in those prior figures but who have some awareness of some of the similarities between those writers and our contemporary philosophers and psychologists.

Chapter 2 focuses on that important issue in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writings, the relation between physical processes in the environment and the brain *and* processes of thinking, perceiving, seeing, etc. In particular, the question of our knowledge of so-called external objects was fundamental in much of those writings. I have made some suggestions about a gradual recognition from Descartes to Kant of two kinds or two different relations here: a physical causal relation between physical objects and brain events, and another, perhaps cognitive or semantic relation between brain events and mind (or the perceiver). One recent philosopher, Frank Jackson, writing on the subject of mental causation, strongly rejects the notion of two different relations. His argument is another by-pass of mental processes, this time it is believing or belief that turns out on Jackson's account be a brain state. The causation of action for Jackson seems to be only physical; ordinary beliefs and intentions do not seem to play any role. There are other recent writers (E. J. Lowe, Howard Robinson, Grant Gillet, David Chalmers) who have made some suggestions about the second kind of relation. I select just a few of these writings for some brief discussion, again as a way of

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showing similarities between old and new, but also as a means of showing the importance of a cognitive, semantic, meaning or informational relation between brain and mind or the perceiver. A side issue concerns the move from talk of the being of objects *in* the mind to the *being known* of objects. The language of presence to the mind has a way of appearing even in very recent writings. I do not track this issue in this study, but since it is relevant to the question of how physicality relates to mentality, I have a few words about it in chapter 1.

The first two chapters call attention to the way in which appearances (especially qualitative appearances) tend to get overlooked in the hands of some of our contemporary materialists, those appearances that we might characterize as cognitive appearances or what appears to a perceiver. And chapter 2 explores the relation between physical events and perceptual appearances. Chapter 3 focuses attention on the third and fourth items on my list, actions and body motion *and* the person and man, as these are developed by Locke and Kant. E. J. Lowe's interpretation of Locke comes in for some comment. The suggestion I make in that chapter is that actions as opposed to motions, and person as opposed to man, provide a way in which we can conceive and assign to phenomena (appearances, qualia) an ontological status similar to that which Locke and Kant assigned to actions and persons. This chapter is in a way a bridge between the first two and the final four chapters.

Chapters 4 and 5 explore the commitment of Locke and Berkeley to an ontology of appearance, of empirical objects; chapter 4 provides an inventory of Locke's use of the phrase "the things themselves," and some discussion of word-signs and idea-signs; and chapter 5 provides an inventory of Berkeley's extended use of the term "notion" along with his redefinition of "ideas" as the things themselves. I show in that chapter, by an examination of the occurrences of the terms "notion" and "notions" in Berkeley's writings, that he uses those terms in a variety of ways, not (as is usually thought) only for referring to spirits, God and relations. My conclusion there is that it is not "notions" that is the technical and radical term in Berkeley's thought, but the redefinition of the term "idea." My methodology in these chapters is to present the reader with the data, using a detailed inventory of key terms, rather than summarizing those data. I think it important to present the relevant passages in this way and then draw my conclusions. In a way, the inventories speak for themselves.

Chapter 6 examines Hume's use of the term "appearance" and the related term "perceptions," showing the range of items that are said to

appear to the mind. While detailing the many passages in his *Treatise* and the two *Enquiries* that have physical objects appearing to us, I call attention to some striking similarities of language between Descartes's notion of objective reality and Hume's talk of the *being* of objects in the mind. I end that chapter by arguing that Hume's world is not limited to what appears to us, even though his requirements for meaning restrict our ideas and our vocabulary to perceptions. Chapter 7 then proceeds to analyze the many passages in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* which speak of the world of external objects, a world of real causes and powers. There is a vigorous on-going debate on this topic, highlighted by Kenneth Winkler's article, "The New Hume" (*The Philosophical Review*, 1991). I do not want to consider the pros and cons of this debate presented by those who have been engaged in this discussion, although I do have some comments on Winkler's article. I try to let Hume speak for himself. The Conclusion attempts to sketch an outline of a realism of appearances. Some attention is paid to John McDowell's Kantian analysis in his *Mind and World*.

Mind, matter and sense qualia

Whether or not mental states turn out to be physical states of the brain is a matter of whether or not cognitive neuroscience eventually succeeds in discovering systematic neural analogs for all of the intrinsic and causal properties of mental states.

Paul Churchland, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul* (1995), p. 206

Whatever explanation of cognition will in the end prove satisfactory, we can at least suppose that only one kind of existence – the real kind – will be involved. Ockham did not share the faith of many today that the mind is wholly physical. But if the mind must be explained in terms of the nonphysical, at least it need not be explained in terms of the nonreal.

Robert Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages* (1997), p. 85

Traditionally, especially within the period of Modern Philosophy (e.g., from Descartes to Kant), when philosophers turned their attention to perception and our knowledge of the external world, a standard set of issues, problems, principles and concepts were invoked, assumed and occasionally modified. A recent statement of the representative theory of perception characterized that theory as holding to two claims: mental operations of the mind arise “from causal impingement by the world” and the mind has “mental states and events which represent the world.”¹

¹ Grant Gillett, *Representation, Meaning and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). He calls this the empiricist representational theory. Another recent more detailed account of this theory (also referred to as “the causal theory” or “indirect realist theory”) is given by Robert Oakes, who says that “awareness of (the surface of) external objects – of those objects that are before our sense-organs – can take place only by virtue of awareness of entities which constitute their effects upon our sensory apparatus. Entities of this latter sort are not, of course, before our sense-organs, but, to the contrary, are interior to consciousness. Moreover, it is clear that these phenomenal ‘qualia’ or private objects of awareness are such that their *esse* just consists in our awareness of them” (“Representational Sensing: What’s the Problem?”, in *New Representationalisms: Essays in the Philosophy of Perception*, ed. Edmond Wright (Aldershot: Arebury, 1993), p. 70). The term “qualia,” as used by Oakes and others, replaces the older “idea.” In treating qualia as private objects internal to consciousness, Oakes is able to state the representative theory in its usual, traditional form.

Analyses of the representative relation varied and questions were raised about the causal relation. Some writers became uneasy with the notion that mental contents (ideas) could be caused by physical (brain) events. That uneasiness was not due entirely to the acceptance of an ontology in which physical events are assigned to one kind of category or substance, and mental events to another kind of category or substance. There are passages in Descartes, Glanvill, Cudworth and, later, Kant that indicate a two-fold relation between perceiver and the world: a physical causal relation from objects to brain, and a signficatory or semantic relation between brain and mind.²

It was generally recognized that the way the world appears to us, the world *as known*, differs qualitatively from the world itself, the world *that is known*. The usual vocabulary for talking about, even for describing, the world as known was the language of ideas. Hobbes used the term “appearance” rather than “idea.” Kant talked of “representations,” but he also employed the term “phenomena” when referring to the world as known. “Appearance” and “phenomena” avoid the idealistic and mentalistic implication of “idea,” which, it is thought, makes the world a set of mental ideas; but a case can be made for saying that the term “idea” did not have idealistic implications for most of the writers (even Berkeley) who employed it.³ Descartes’s use of the term “idea” was a modification of scholastic “intelligible species”; his use was reinforced by other French writers such as Malebranche and Arnauld, and in Britain by Locke’s heavy employment of the term. The vocabulary of ideas was also a way of adhering to two common principles: “no cognition at a distance” and “what is known must be present to the mind.”

Those principles played an influential role in the history of perception theory, even appearing in our own time. Malebranche used those principles to defend his account of ideas as special entities present to the mind. Physical objects, he argued, cannot be present to the immaterial, nonphysical mind. Arnauld lectured Malebranche on the concept of

Footnote 1 (*cont.*)

I have argued that the term “idea” in the writings of Locke does not always fit this internalist interpretation. With Berkeley, “idea” comes out of the closet of the mind, as it does also for Hume. My use of the term “qualia” in this study tries to make it refer to external qualities, qualities that are sensory appearances to perceivers.

² I have presented and analyzed this second interactive relation in *Perception and Reality: A History from Descartes to Kant* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), ch. 8 (1996). See also *Perceptual Acquaintance From Descartes to Reid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), ch. 11. See also chapter 2 below. ³ See my *Perception and Reality*, ch. 6.