

# Chapter One

## *A Problem of Interpretation*

Thomas Reid remarked that we hardly ever attend to the visible appearance of objects, but that our attention is normally drawn to the objects themselves and those features of them which best fit our intentions and interests.<sup>1</sup> For example, I can with a cursory glance take in the lavender bush at the end of my street, some fifty metres away, and note the overall colour of the bush—a dull green at this time of year—and its rough, somewhat square, shape. But it takes more attention, reflection and skill to move beyond this description and to discover the distinctive ways in which these objects can appear to me. I may note, for example, that the lavender bush seems somehow flatter than the garden hedge a mere ten metres from me. With further attention, it may strike me that I differentiate among the branches of the lavender bush only through the pattern of shading across its surface, while when I look to the hedge, each branch stands out distinctly.

Many different trades and professions seek to refine the skills of attention and articulation required in order to discern and express the ways in which things can appear. Over many generations, painters have developed skills for attending to the particular appearances of objects at different distances and in different lights in order better to depict them. Attention to colour and form is as much a concern of designers and producers of decoration as of painters, and it is also a skill useful for those engaged into research on visual cognition. What holds for the visual case is as true, perhaps even more so, for other sense modalities: perfumers and brewers have an obvious interest in treating the appearances of smell and taste as complex and differentiable.

These observations on the difficulties of attending to how objects appear contrast with an assumption common in philosophical discussions of perception and consciousness: that appearances (by which I mean to pick out both the ways things appear to one to be and one's state of mind of being appeared to in such ways) are obvious to one. For it is commonly assumed that one does just know whether things are appearing to one in a certain way or not, and what such appearances in themselves

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1. (Reid 1997 (1785)), Ch. 6, sect. III.

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are (as opposed to their grounds or that in virtue of which things do so appear).

The assumption is so ingrained in the literature that the commonest refrain by which the topic of the character of sensuous experience is introduced is through an appeal to the reader to attend within. In introducing the topic of the qualitative character of consciousness, Ned Block avoids theorising its character by appealing to his readership's wisdom:

...what is it that philosophers have called qualitative states?: As Louis Armstrong said when asked what jazz is, "If you got to ask, you ain't never going to get to know." (Block 1980), p.278.)

And the point in Thomas Nagel denying that we could know what it is like to be a bat, and thereby challenging the explanatory pretensions of physicalists to give a complete account of everything in the natural world, is the background assumption is that we all *do* know what it is like to be human, and exercise the sensory faculties we have.<sup>2</sup>

The assumption is also in play in some theories of empirical knowledge, particularly in relation to traditional foundationalist approaches to sensory knowledge. Both A.J. Ayer and Roderick Chisholm, for example, appeal either to appearances themselves, or to judgements about them as potential foundations for our knowledge of the world around us.<sup>3</sup> This particular style of foundationalism, which appeals to the idea of a sensory given of which one has authoritative and indefeasible knowledge, is not particularly popular now; but few are prepared to challenge the thought that one cannot go wrong when one restricts one's judgements simply to a report of appearances. Rather, it is more common to challenge the idea that such restrictive judgements could act as a basis for the rest of one's body of knowledge. So, it is common to think that thoughts about one's own perceptual states are easy to arrive at, and not particularly susceptible to error.

One might at first think that the actual method of those who have a practical interest in appearances contradicts the assumptions of those who merely theorise about them. But there is no deep problem here. Nothing that the philosophers hold dear in the above assumptions need be challenged by the need for patience, attention and skill in relation to appearances. In the face of these concerns, they could

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2. (Nagel 1979).

3. For the former see (Ayer 1940), and (Ayer 1956), Ch.2; for the latter see (Chisholm 1959), Ch.5 and (Chisholm 1966).

reformulate their claims so as to be quite consistent with the actual practice of those who have an interest in attending to how things appear to them. The philosophers' assumptions about the obviousness of appearance relate properly only to the move from having attended to some object, some feature of it, or how either appears to one, to knowledge of how it is for one when things so appear. The skills that the artist, the perfume-maker, or the psychologist nurture give each a richer hoard of elements of experience to enjoy or scrutinise than the rest of us. In some cases such learning may even lead to a difference in how one experiences the world rather than just a difference in what one knows of how one experiences the world: someone so skilled may be able to make finer discriminations than the rest of us. A theorist can quite consistently accept that such experts have both greater powers of discrimination among objects in the world and better developed powers of attention to aspects of how things appear, while claiming that the reflective move, from attention to the features of objects to knowledge of what it is like for one so to be aware of those features, is the same for all of us. For all of us, a judgement made through reflection on one's conscious state of mind is explained in the same way: for the subject him or herself, given suitable attention within, the ways things are must just be obvious.

Yet even if the practice of working with appearances need not conflict with philosophical theorising, a genuine tension does seem to arise within philosophical method itself. For disputes among philosophers reveal substantive disagreements about the nature of appearances. For example, some philosophers claim that whenever we see, we have visual sensations, and consequently that there is more to what it is like for us to have visual perceptions of the world, than just the presentation of those visible objects and features in the world around us which we can currently see. In seeming dispute with this first group, others steadfastly insist that our sensory experience of the world is 'diaphanous', by which they mean that there is no more to be introspected of one's sensory experience, but often more narrowly, one's visual experience, than just these very objects and features that make up that part of the world currently presented to one. Likewise, some philosophers claim that we perceive the physical world around us only in virtue of also perceiving non-physical entities. Others repudiate this claim, insisting that perception of the physical environment is direct or immediate. Some claim that perception is intentional, and in a way analogous to belief or judgement, involves the representation of one's environment as being some way or other. Others

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insist that they can make no sense of this, that there is all the difference in the world between feeling and thinking.

These disputes are not all framed explicitly in terms of the way things are experienced to be, or of how things appear or do not appear to us, or even what it is like or not like consciously to apprehend the world. But each of the positions are commonly taken to imply consequences for how things can or must be experienced, and the proponents of these various positions commonly appeal to introspection in support of their claims. So these various disputes stand witness for the existence of disagreement about the nature of appearances.

Now if we take seriously the thought that appearances really are just obvious to one (or obvious given a bit of reflection on the matter), as many philosophers assume, then it should be a puzzle how there could be any such disagreements as listed above. For, if these theories are in disagreement about what our experiences are like, and that matter is something which is obvious to us given a little bit of attention and reflection, then only the slightest amount of thought or reflection on the matter should reveal which party to the dispute is correct. The persistence of these disputes in the face of this, would seem to indicate that at least one of the parties must be entirely confused, or that the character of philosophers' inner lives is far more varied than we previously had reason to suspect. Absenting these unconvincing further explanations, we face a deep conflict between the assumptions articulated by the parties to these debates and the very existence of the debates in the first place.

This is no mere idle puzzle. Nor should we take it as simply a sign that either the conception of appearances in play or the debate about them is something just not in good order. Rather, it reflects something at the heart of the problem of perception, something which is rarely made fully articulate in discussion of it. It has become fairly standard to present the problem of perception as primarily a problem about our knowledge of the world around us, or more precisely our sensorily based knowledge. Discussions of perception are commonly framed as part of an attempt to give an explanation of our knowledge of the common place: my knowledge that there are more than twenty houses on my street; that there are two coffee cups on the table; that there is traffic in the street. What our puzzle indicates, however, is that the more fundamental problem here is one concerning our knowledge of our own minds. What sense can we make of conscious perceptual experience as it reveals itself to us through

introspection? How could we fail to know how it is that things appear to us? Yet can we really know this just through such reflection?

Perceptual awareness of the world around us and of one's own body provides the paradigm example of episodic, or phenomenal consciousness. When one comes to reflect on what it is like so to be conscious, and to be aware of the world, one comes to reflect on such perceptual consciousness. The various debates about the nature of perception, or the objects of perception, or states of perceptual experience, disagree about what is to be said about such perceptual consciousness. At the same time, most of these accounts assume that phenomenal consciousness *per se* is open to immediate reflection such that the defining truths about it should simply be obvious to us. Yet, the very fact that such dispute can be sustained indicates that such an assumption is questionable. And in rejecting this assumption, we will need to mark a distinction between the real nature of appearances—states of being appeared to in a certain way—and how those states seem to us, even if such a distinction may sound paradoxical to some ears. Moreover, as we shall see, we can only properly understand the debate about perceptual consciousness, once we recognise that the various views of it are committed to supposing that appearances may mislead us not only about the world around us, but also about themselves.

This puzzle informs the account offered in this book as a whole. But in the remainder of this chapter in particular, I want to set the puzzle in an historical context and through it come to understand a feature of the debates about perception over the last hundred years or so. For one can easily gain the impression from the slightest acquaintance with writings about these problems that there has been a marked change in the ways in which the problems are formulated, and competing theories are presented. If we go back only as far as debates around the middle of the twentieth century, we find such a striking shift in the terms of the debate and assumptions that are brought to bear that it becomes too difficult to discern what continuity, if any, there is in the debate. This presents us with a significant problem of interpretation: how are we to make intelligible to ourselves the past history of debate?

I shall seek to show that this apparent discontinuity and apparent unintelligibility are simply symptoms of the more general issue we have raised here. How can there be dispute about the nature of perceptual consciousness, if the nature of such consciousness is supposed simply to be obvious to one given the slightest reflection?

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We can make best sense of the different positions here by understanding them in the light of a rather different conception of perceptual consciousness than is currently favoured. Both traditional sense-datum accounts of object-perception and recent theories of perceptual experience as an intentional phenomenon stand opposed to a supposedly crude form of naïve realism about perception. Naïve realism is taken by both traditions to be falsified by considerations about the existence of illusion. The different traditions that have developed show continuity in the centrality of this problem. The striking differences between them can be explained in terms of the different intellectual contexts of debate in early modern times, at the beginning of the century and more recently.

In the first part of this chapter, I lay out this problem of interpretation in more detail. In trying to make sense of the traditional debate, we need to look in more detail at formulations of the argument from illusion, and here Hume's discussion in *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* provides a useful stalking horse; in the sections which follow I argue that the standard explanations of such forms of argument are inadequate to the task of making intelligible the debates of the past. In the final section, I first sketch an alternative way of making sense of the argument from illusion as it has developed in the sense-datum tradition, and then on the back of that propose a different way of seeing the development of the debate.

### 1. A Discontinuity in the Debate

A remarkable shift has taken place in the philosophical discussions of perception over the last hundred years in the English-speaking world. For much of the early part of the last century, and for some time in its latter half, discussion of perception focused on the question of the existence and nature of non-physical and private entities, posited as the immediate objects of perception. Matters changed from the 1950s on. First the terms of the debate about direct or immediate perception were rejected as empty, and the problems it dealt with not to be solved but merely dissolved; but then, when debate about perception eventually arose again as a genuine philosophical issue, there seemed to be a new problem to be addressed with entirely a new vocabulary.

J.L. Austin begins his lectures *Sense & Sensibilia* with the following rather withering assessment of the content of that debate:

The general doctrine... [that] we never see otherwise perceive (or 'sense'), or anyhow never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, *sensa*, sense-perceptions, percepts etc.)... is a typically *scholastic* view, attributable, first, to an obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are over-simplified, not really understood or carefully studied or correctly described; and second to an obsession with a few (and nearly always the same) half-studied 'facts'. ((Austin 1962), pp. 2-3.)

Austin's intention is not just to reject the doctrine that there are sense-data, but rather to dismiss the terms of the whole debate. Yet the problems he seeks to dismiss are ones that had preoccupied such figures as Russell, Moore, Broad, Price, and Ayer.<sup>4</sup> That debate focused on a conflict between so-called *Naïve Realism*, sometimes alleged to be the view of common sense concerning perception and its objects, and a more philosophically and scientifically sophisticated alternative, which was answerable to the discoveries of Enlightenment science, labelled, Representative Realism.<sup>5</sup> While the context of this debate is often the status of the sensible or so-called secondary qualities – whether these really qualify entities in the physical world around us, or merely characterise how we are compelled to experience it – the main focus of this discussion is of how our initially unsophisticated thoughts about what it is to perceive, and what can count as the objects of perception, or at least the immediate objects of perception, cannot be the ordinary objects in the world around us. And the principal grounds for

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4. For example, see (Russell 1912), Ch.1; also *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*; (Moore 1959), (Moore 1957); (Broad 1923), Chs. VII, VIII, (Broad 1925), Ch.IV, (Broad 1965); (Price 1932), (Price 1940). For Ayer's construal of the debate see (Ayer 1940), Chs. 1-2 and (Ayer 1973), Ch.V. It is common to take Ayer as representative of the whole tradition (as indeed Austin does), but in fact Ayer's work involves a substantial revision of key assumptions common to Moore, Russell, Broad and Price. (For more on this see my 'Austin and the Sense- Datum Tradition' (forthcoming).) Although the debate about sense-data predominantly took place in Britain, there are similarities with it in some US debate: cf. (Lewis 1929), and Roderick Firth's discussion of the whole debate in (Firth 1965).

5. One should also include idealism and later phenomenism as among the parties to this dispute—typically defenders of such a bold metaphysical view of the nature of empirical reality saw themselves as holding on to the claims of common sense while paying due respect to the arguments of indirect realism. The arguments which will most concern us here in relation to perception also had a central place in the phenomenological tradition, particularly in some works of Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. The problematic status here of realism is something we will return to below.

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this assessment focus on questions about the existence of perceptual illusions of one form or another.

The debate between Naïve Realism and Representative Realism can be traced back at least as far as Hume, though its main tropes are already present in Berkeley.<sup>6</sup> The argument from illusion, or the closely related argument from conflicting appearances (which avoids denigrating any appearance as illusory or privileging any as veridical) is more ancient: traces of it are found in the earliest fragments we have of Greek philosophy, and it plays a central role in Plato's *Theaetetus*.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Austin took his task to show us how we could:

... rid ourselves of such illusions as 'the argument from illusion'— an 'argument' which those (e.g. Berkeley, Hume, Russell, Ayer) who have been most adept at working it, most fully masters of a certain special, happy style of blinkering philosophical English, have all themselves felt somehow to be spurious. (*Op. cit.* p. 4.)

If one contrasts the writings of Russell or Ayer with recent discussions of perception, one might think that, simply as a matter of intellectual history, Austin has been remarkably successful in his crusade.<sup>8</sup> Where the argument from illusion could once have been seen as the arch under which all debate about perception would take place, no such structure has replaced it in recent discussion. Indeed, the argument itself is often now used as an example for first-year students of how not to construct philosophical positions.

Austin himself was sceptical of offering any illuminating philosophical account of perception. (Although this is not to say that Austin's lectures lack positive claims about perception and the connection between perception and knowledge – this would be to ignore the all-important tenth chapter of the lectures.) And theorising in terms of the objects of perception, and the role of non-physical entities in perception as

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6. Berkeley is also the source of idealism, and Hume in the *Treatise* has been taken, by Herbert Price and Norman Kemp Smith in particular, as inspiration for phenomenalism.

7. See, for example, the discussion in (Burnyeat 1979).

8. In (Putnam 1994), Putnam laments that Austin's effect was at best cosmetic, ruling out any appeal to terms such as 'sense-data' or 'impressions' but not a general appeal to such intermediaries—and that the force of his criticisms were thereby neglected. I am inclined to agree with Putnam that Austin's criticisms had at best a superficial consequence for the debate and that the principal explanation of the shift in debate lies elsewhere (for which see below). For more on Austin's arguments and their significance see my XXX and YYY.



intermediaries of perceptual awareness of the world certainly declined. But philosophical theorising about such issues did not entirely go away. Together with the rise of an interest in naturalistic and physicalist theories of the mind, perception was discussed – by D.M Armstrong and George Pitcher most notably – in terms of the acquisition of belief. At the same time G.E.M. Anscombe emphasised the intentionality of perception, and this was echoed in turn by John Searle in his account of the intentionality of mind. If we think of belief as a paradigm of intentionality, then all of these approaches indicate the acceptance of what one might call an *Intentional Theory of Perception*.<sup>9</sup> The core of which is well summed up in Tyler Burge's declaration to start out with the idea that perception is representational:

I begin with the premiss that our perceptual experience represents or is about objects, properties, and relations that are *objective*. That is to say, their nature (or essential character) is independent of any one person's actions, dispositions, or mental phenomena. An obvious consequence of this is that individuals are capable of having perceptual representations that are misperceptions or hallucinations<sup>10</sup>

For proponents of such views, the idea that one's experience might be veridical or illusory, correct or incorrect, is just built into the conception of experience as intentional. That is, it is claimed that it is part of our conception of such experience that it is directed on to the world in such a way that its being so is no guarantee that the world is as it is experienced. So the argument from illusion can present no special problem about sense perception. At best, it can only point us to the intentionality of this state of mind. Such writers often present the view they defend as one which their readers can see as being obviously good sense or correct, and hence they imply that the traditional problem is no problem at all: it has simply been dissolved as a 'pseudo-problem'.

However, one might think that Austin and the others critical of the direct perception debate have been just too successful in their critiques. For in convincing us that there is no real problem of perception concerning the direct objects of perception

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9. C.f. (Armstrong 1968), Ch.10; (Anscombe 1962); (Searle 1983), Ch.2; (Peacocke 1990), and (Peacocke 1992), Ch. 3. One can also add to the list: Fred Dretske, (Dretske 1981), Ch. 6; (Dretske 1995); Gilbert Harman, (Harman 1990); Ruth Millikan, (Millikan 1991); and Sydney Shoemaker, (Shoemaker 1991); and Michael Tye, (Tye 1992), (Tye 1995).

10. Burge 1986), p.125.

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and the status of sense-data, they have left us with a rather different, and in the end potentially more intractable, problem. If the assumptions which fuelled centuries of debate are themselves so obviously inadequate, one may wonder why the debate itself should have survived. As Burnyeat puts the point:

What emerges... is a typical philosophical problem. I do not mean the problem of deciding what does follow from the premiss that appearances conflict. For the answer to that question, I believe, is that nothing follows: nothing of any epistemological significance at all. The problem rather is to discover why so many conflicting conclusions have been thought to follow. Why have some philosophers been so impressed, while others like Austin, remain unimpressed, by the familiar fact that appearances conflict? What assumptions, spoken or unspoken, are at work to make the familiar fact seem problematic? (*Op. cit.* p.73.)

The shift of perspective on these issues has been so remarkable that we are in danger of finding the past debate simply unintelligible. What was once taken as a compelling argument is now taken as patently fallacious; what was once seen as the central problem is now seen as no problem at all. One might be Whiggish about such things, of course, and simply take this to be evidence of progress within philosophy. But even the mildest scepticism about the powers of human reason should lead one to wonder at how recent and sudden the shift has been. Is it not more reasonable to think that the seeming unintelligibility of past debate may rather be a symptom of something else? That is indeed what I shall argue to be the case. The shift reflects our initial puzzle, namely that we have here a debate about the nature of appearance. The gulf between earlier debates and current ones seems so unbridgeable because on either side we have different assumptions about what is obvious about the nature of perceptual appearance. Making good that claim and making sense of how that can be will in turn unearth a deep continuity between the traditional debate and more recent concerns.

To justify this claim, we need to look first at a concrete example of a form of argument which no longer looks remotely compelling to us. Our task here is to understand how anyone might have been moved to put forward just such an argument, rather than simply to criticise the arguments proposed. I shall first present an argument drawn from Hume, note certain puzzles concerning it and then consider two strategies of explaining why Hume should have put it forward as he did.

## 2. The Argument from Illusion

Although even a cursory reading of past discussions of sense-data and perception reveal the importance of the so-called 'argument from illusion', it is in fact difficult to find an explicit statement of the argument as an argument. This has led some philosophers to suggest that strictly there is no such argument, but rather a set of considerations or concerns which place a duty of explanation on any theory of perception or thought.<sup>11</sup>

But this claim goes too far if it is taken to say that there are no examples of a concern with appearance and reality which put forward an argument. For we can find such in the work of, for instance, Hume, Russell and Ayer.<sup>12</sup> In each case, an example of conflicting appearances or illusion is offered and it is claimed on the basis of a series of steps that this shows that we do not directly or immediately apprehend physical objects in sense perception. However, when we look at what is presented as this supposed argument, it is often difficult to determine what its exact form is, or to identify the premisses or mode of reasoning involved. It is this problem which indicates the real difficulty in interpreting past debate.

Given that the reasoning in question is supposed to lead us to an avowedly surprising conclusion, we should expect each step of the argument to be clear and obvious, and the mode of reasoning to be unquestionable. For otherwise, when faced with an unpalatable conclusion, we are as liable to reject one of the premisses, or the mode of reasoning used to arrive at the conclusion, as to submit to the conclusion. Where the argument is inexplicit, its suasive force becomes hidden and it is rendered more obscure why someone should have thought there was a genuine argument or justification for the claim. So the need to explain what is really involved in this kind of

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11. Cf. Dummett, 'We commonly employ a distinction between how things appear and how they really are; and it is therefore natural to push this distinction to its limit. This seems to me the best way in which to view the so-called "argument from illusion". If this is regarded as an argument, properly so called, with premisses and a conclusion, it is difficult to make out what are the premisses and what the conclusion. Rather, it is a starting-point.' (Dummett 1979), p.2???

12. Hume 1975), sec. XII; (Russell 1912), Ch.1; (Ayer 1940), Ch.1. This point is pressed home forcefully in (Snowdon 1992). Snowdon's discussion forcefully presses the need to provide a proper interpretation of the debate about the direct objects of perception, and the discussion here is indebted to it, although the strategy of interpretation diverges.

reasoning becomes more pressing.

This is well illustrated by Hume's use of the argument in his first *Enquiry*. The argument is presented in the context of Hume's scepticism with regard to the senses, a form of scepticism he considers to be more profound than either ancient scepticism or that deriving from Descartes. His argument has two parts: in the first he outlines what he takes to be the view of the common man concerning the objects of perception and our relation to them, beliefs which we all hold as a matter of our nature:

...when men follow this blind and powerful instinct of nature, they always suppose the very images, presented by the senses, to be the external objects, and never entertain any suspicion, that the one are nothing but representations of the other. This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist independent of our perception, and to be something external to our mind, which perceives it. (*Op. cit.* pp.151-2.)

This view he takes to be destroyed by 'the slightest philosophy'. In its place, one is compelled by reason to adopt a 'philosophical' theory of perception and its objects which admits a distinction between the external, mind-independent objects of perception, and the mind-dependent images or impressions which are present to the mind and which represent those external objects. This latter view is not a natural one, but recommended solely by reason in the face of the evident inconsistency of our common sense beliefs. Hume's slightest philosophy is a form of the argument from illusion, and he uses it against the view he takes to be that of common sense. At the same time, he employs sceptical reasoning against the philosophical view, familiar from Berkeley's attack on his predecessors. It is the combination of these two criticisms that Hume takes to establish scepticism with regard to the senses.<sup>13</sup>

The form of Hume's challenge is first to find an error in our common sense beliefs concerning perception, and then to show that there is no reason to accept any positive philosophical account which can be put in its place. Hume's characterisation of the views of the vulgar can be seen as the origin of Naïve or Direct Realism, in the sense

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13. Compare this with the discussion of the *Treatise* I.IV.ii 'Scepticism with regard to the senses'. Throughout the *Treatise*, Hume is happy to assume that his readership endorses the philosophical view; for the discussion of the senses in part IV of Book One, Hume quickly demonstrates the alleged falsity of the vulgar view through a series of cursory experiments – the sceptical force of this is emphasised only against the philosophical view in the closing two paragraphs of the section.

discussed in the twentieth century debates about sense-data; while the ‘philosophical theory’ is the origin in such discussions of Representative or Indirect Realism. Hume’s sceptical challenge presents us with the origin of the assumption that Representative Realism faces a particular sceptical challenge involving ‘a veil of ideas’. The argument from illusion, as Hume uses it, is an attempt to show that our common sense views of perception, as Hume conceives of them, are evidently false. However, when one comes to the swiftly developed argument intended to show this, one finds that the epithet ‘slightest philosophy’ may be thought appropriate for more than one reason:

...the slightest philosophy... teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: it was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we consider, when we say, *this house* and *that tree*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent. (*Op. cit.* pp.151-2.)

Clearly there are problems here both with the example Hume uses, and with how Hume uses the example in order to extract his conclusion.

From what he says it is clear that Hume wishes to treat the viewing of the table as an example of illusory perception, one in which the table appears to be changing in size when commonsensically we would judge it to be stable in size. But although he treats it as fairly evident that this is a case of illusion, as Reid was ready to point out, that assumption actually falsifies the character of our experience.<sup>14</sup> While Hume is right to think that there is an alteration in how one sees the table, and indeed in how the table looks, it is not obvious that this alteration is in any way illusory. The alteration in the look of the table is now commonly called its apparent size, and it is a well-documented fact that the apparent size of objects alters relative to one’s viewing position. But it is also as commonly documented that they appear to have a constant size when one moves away from them: so that in such experience we both have the size the table appears to have, and its apparent size, the former remains constant, the latter alters. We

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14. (Reid 1983), Essay Two, Ch. 14, pp.175-80.

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have been given no reason to suppose that it is the latter feature which is the appearance of the size of the table rather than the former. And hence, we have not yet been given reason to suppose that this counts genuinely as an illusory aspect of the experience.

There is much to be said about the relation between apparent size and the size that something can appear to have, and different emphases will be given depending on whether one has a treatise for painters interested in perspective, or works on the psychology of shape and size perception. The question of most concern to us is why Hume should so readily be prepared to take the example as one of obvious illusion or conflicting appearance, when it is not at all evident that it is such an illusion. In part, the answer may simply reside in the context in which he wrote. One can find other authors, both philosophers and non-philosophers, who are prepared to describe the case in just this way. For the examples of visual perception of size and shape were often taken to be the locus of an issue concerning the relation between retinal stimulation, the occurrence of visual sensation and the role of judgement in discerning either the shape or size of an object.<sup>15</sup> Hume's anticipated reader might be expected already to have a theoretically sensitive attitude towards what he or she could introspect. And that thought should already raise the suspicion that we should not suppose that Hume's argument simply relies on some evident, or supposedly evident, truths concerning perception from which he will go on to draw surprising conclusions. Moreover at this point we can extract nothing further from his text which might explain why he could expect us to accept his description of the situation. This should make us suspicious of treating the passage at face value as presenting a genuine piece of straight forward reasoning.

Nevertheless, while this failing in Hume's reasoning is worthy of comment, it is not the most serious problem with the argument. For there are genuine illusions which parallel Hume's example. Viewing with one eye through an aperture into an Ames room can lead to distorted judgements of size: with the table positioned in one corner of the room, it may appear much, much larger than it really is; while, when placed in the other corner, it may seem much, much smaller. In this case we have an example in

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15. See for example, Descartes's *Optics*, (Malebranche 1992), (Locke 1975), Berkeley, *A New Theory of Vision*; for a review of seventeenth and eighteenth century theories see (Morgan 1977).

which the table will seem to have a size other than it has, in addition to having an apparent size. Even though Hume's own example may not be convincing, we can easily substitute a case of visual illusion which will provide the needed premisses. For the moment we can bracket the puzzle of why Hume should be confident in his choice of example, and instead see how his argument is intended to develop from a similar case of undisputed illusion.<sup>16</sup>

Having described the case in terms of illusion, Hume immediately draws his conclusion, 'it was, therefore, nothing but [the table's] image, which was present to the mind.' This conclusion includes both a positive and a negative claim. The positive claim is that an image of the table, whatever that is to amount to, is present to the observer's mind. The negative claim is that the table itself is not present to the mind. Although we have the appearance here of argument, an indicated premiss concerning a case of illusion, and a conclusion drawn as such, in fact we lack the argument proper itself. No additional reasons are offered to support the conclusions drawn, apart from the supposition that how the table looks is not how it is.

This failing is what is liable to prompt the charge that, strictly speaking, there is no *argument* from illusion. An author may indicate an example of illusion as relevant to the claims he or she wishes to make about the nature of perception, but he or she offers no explicit means for us to move reasonably to that claim from the observations with which he or she starts. Of course, that is not to say that we cannot interpret the implicit argument lying behind what is given explicitly as reasoning. It is common to think that in such a case there has been a move from a claim about how to the perceiver things appear to be, to a claim about how things are in so appearing. Commonly, such a move is interpreted as either involving a piece of fallacious reasoning, or as relying on some further assumption which is less than obvious. The argument is then treated as simply fallacious or question begging.

If we are simply to ask whether we should accept as a piece of persuasive reasoning Hume's argument or some such similar arguments to be found in Russell, or Ayer, or Price, then such criticisms seem apt. The arguments do not seem to be good arguments

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16. We should note that the discussion of these matters in the *Treatise* is no more satisfactory: in addition to a contracted allusion to the same concerns as in the *Enquiry*, Hume mentions the variability of appearance in relation to illness and spends most space on the possibility of bringing about seeing double.

to us now, nor ought they to be treated as good. On the other hand, as a matter of intellectual history, the argument poses us the deep problem that Burnyeat notes. Given that the argument seems so patently inadequate to us, the question becomes one of understanding why anyone should have put it forward as a good one. With this question of interpretation in mind, neither of the common accounts of the argument is at all satisfactory. For neither is adequate to explain why what is obvious to us should not be obvious to past thinkers, nor why what they thought should be obvious is so obscure to us now.

### 3. The Intentional Fallacy

The idea that there is a fallacy of reasoning in the argument is commonly found in association with expositions of the approach to perception I labelled, intentional theories of perception, although the complaint is itself strictly independent of a commitment to the intentional theory. The objection does suggest itself, however, once one thinks both of the nature of certain intentional states such as belief and judgement, and what our attributions of such states must be like. It is part of our conception of judgement and belief, at least from around the age of four onwards, that these things can be mistaken as well as correct. Few would deny that a theory of judgement needs to accommodate this possibility of error or mistake.<sup>17</sup> And likewise, when we talk about or attribute such states to a subject, we should be able to do so in circumstances which properly acknowledge the mistakes involved (even if an agent need not be in a position rationally to self-ascribe the error, as Moore famously highlights). So, we can readily imagine a situation in which a subject is mistaken whether there are sweets or candies in a tube. And this circumstance we should be able to describe this state of affairs without our so describing the world itself thereby being inconsistent. We should be able to say that although the child believes that there are sweets in the tube, in fact there are only pencils.

Given that we accept that judgements and beliefs can be true or false, and that this

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17. 'Few' should be used advisedly here—among exceptions we might include Parmenides who seems to have denied that false thought is possible and one can find in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* a concern with challenges to the claim that one's sayings or thoughts can really be false. For an illuminating discussion of these matters see (Denyer 1991).



fact about the world is expressible and commonly articulated in our talk about beliefs, we would not accept the move from:

(B<sub>1</sub>) Mary believes that there are sweets in the tube

to

(B<sub>2</sub>) There are sweets Mary believes to be in the tube

at least where (B<sub>2</sub>) is construed as committing the speaker to the existence of some sweets about which Mary has a belief.

There is some inclination to construe someone's inclination to accept a claim of the form of (B<sub>2</sub>) on the basis of (B<sub>1</sub>) as a mistake of reasoning, as failing to see that the apparent existential commitment in the use of the sentence 'there are sweets in the tube' is removed through its falling within the scope of the psychological verb. In this, the illegitimate move would seem to echo some other such controversial shifts. We are familiar with the fact that the surface form 'Every child met an elf' is ambiguous in English between a reading  $\forall x\exists y [Cx \rightarrow [Mxy \wedge Ey]]$  and  $\exists x\forall y [Ex \wedge [Cy \rightarrow [Myx]]]$ , and that it would be fallacious to accept the latter claim on the basis of the former. Likewise one would be wary on the basis of

(P<sub>1</sub>) It is probable that there are fifteen people in room 101

of having also to grant the truth of

(P<sub>2</sub>) There are fifteen people of whom it is probable that they are in room 101

And it is long been a matter of controversy whether one can move from

(M<sub>1</sub>) It is possible that there is a talking donkey

to

(M<sub>2</sub>) There is something such that it is possibly a talking donkey.

(Timothy Williamson has recently argued that we should accept the Reverse Barcan Formula as correct and hence the move from (M<sub>1</sub>) to (M<sub>2</sub>) as truth preserving. He would not accept, however, the move to (M<sub>2</sub>') There is a donkey which is such that it could possibly talk. So note that in the relevant cases there is both a seeming shift in ontological commitment from first sentence to second and whether the characterising aspect can be asserted outside the context of belief, probability or modality.)

Superficially, one might construe these cases as all involving the same kind of

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problem and hence the allegedly illegitimate move as being of the same form. In each case one would have a sentence roughly of the form,  $O$  [something is  $F$ ] to Something [ $F$ ] is such that  $O$  it is  $F$ . No such inference is valid where the context created by  $O$  is not factive, i.e. where the truth of  $Op$  does not require the truth of  $p$ . Whether one does want to diagnose all of these cases in the same way, and in this particular way, is a delicate question in the end, and one which takes us away from our main concerns. For what follows we will assume that we can talk of a relevant semantic context here in which a phrase or clause is embedded.

And now it is tempting to interpret Hume in the passages we quoted as falling prey to this kind of fallacy. For it seems that in those brief sentences, Hume asks his reader to move from: Whether all such inferences are invalid, the seeming form of inference here is clearly controversial. No one writing now should be foolhardy enough to suppose their readers happy to assent to the latter of the two forms on the basis of the former. So to rely implicitly on such a move in an argument, where one hasn't established the factiveness of the relevant context, is thereby to argue in a mistaken form.

(A<sub>1</sub>) It appears to David as if there is a small rhomboid before him.

to

(A<sub>2</sub>) There is a small rhomboid which appears to David to be before him.

(A<sub>2</sub>) is not yet the conclusion that Hume wishes to arrive at: that an image, impression or some other mind-dependent entity is present to the mind. But we can see how ancillary reasoning might make one accept that further claim, once one has arrived at (A<sub>2</sub>). *Ex hypothesi*, the table in the room is not a small rhomboid, and furthermore the case can be set up so that there is no other public object which is an appropriate candidate to be apparent to David. If some small rhomboid is apparent to him, it is something other than a public object. The suggestion that it is an image which must be present to him, may then be taken as the best explanation of why (A<sub>2</sub>) should be true in this case.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever one thinks of the latter move, it is fairly evident that the move from (A<sub>1</sub>) to (A<sub>2</sub>) is suspect. Moreover, the mistake can look temptingly like that in the move from (B<sub>1</sub>) to (B<sub>2</sub>) if one thinks of perceptual states as intentional states. For then, it is plausible to think of reports of how things appear to a subject as indicating how things

are represented to the subject as being. As with belief, one would anticipate a report of the content of such a representational state not to exploit a factive context, and consequently that the move from (A<sub>1</sub>) to (A<sub>2</sub>) should be fallacious.

Whether this is the precise form that the diagnosis takes, philosophers who have wished to press the claim that perception is an intentional or representational phenomenon have also been inclined to diagnose a misconception in the sense-datum tradition concerning intentionality. So, for example, Miss Anscombe suggests that the whole dispute that Austin and his followers had with the sense-datum tradition turned on both misconceiving the way in which ascriptions of seeing reflect the intentionality of the psychological state:

...both [sides of the debate] misunderstand verbs of perception, because these verbs are intentional or essentially have an intentional aspect. The first position misconstrues intentional objects as material objects of sensation; the other allows only *material* objects of sensation...<sup>19</sup>

Anscombe's complaint here is distinct from the diagnosis offered above. She focuses on seemingly relational constructions '*S* sees *o*' and questions whether such ascriptions must have ontological commitment with respect to the right hand position (this is the import of her talk of intentional versus material objects), rather than appealing to contexts with sentential complements which may lack factiveness. But the underlying thought is the same: we have means of ascribing intentional states of mind where we characterise a subject's psychological state by seeming reference to some object that the mind is directed at, or which the subject represents, but at the same time we avoid ourselves any commitment to the existence of that object. Hume and the sense-datum theorists seem, from this perspective, to have missed the shift that we take, and hence the significance of the difference between (A<sub>1</sub>) and (A<sub>2</sub>).

A more idiosyncratic line is taken by John Searle when defending the intentionality of perception, when he suggests that sense-datum theorists confuse psychological

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18. Hume assumes that ideas are mind-dependent, but that this is to be established by experiment. The early sense-datum theorists thought it important that the objects of awareness are all mind-independent, even if not physical or public – for otherwise such objects could not be the object of knowledge. We shall return below to the question of mind-dependence.

19. Anscombe 1962), p.11 in reprint *Collected Papers*, vol.2 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

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states with the objects of perception.<sup>20</sup> But the theme that sense-datum theorists are confused about the intentionality of perception or perceptual experience pervades the defence of intentional approaches to perception in recent accounts, as in those of Gilbert Harman, Michael Tye and Ruth Millikan.<sup>21</sup>

I do not want here to criticise either the various accounts of perception that these authors wish to promote in their criticisms of the argument from illusion or the sense-datum theory of perception. Nor do I want to promote Hume's argument, or any variants of it. However, it should be fairly clear that these criticisms of the argument, if aimed partly at understanding past uses of the argument from illusion as well as simply repudiating it, are plainly inadequate. For the errors of reasoning that these authors impute to past proponents of the argument are very obvious ones. If we simply reflect on the parallel examples for cases other than perception, we can see that we have little inclination to accept the move as valid. Either we are inclined straight off to reject it, or at least to see it as questionable. If there is no more to the argument than asking us to make a move we find so mistaken in the other cases, then the suggestion is simply that the argument's proponents are making an obviously fallacious move.

The claim here is not the pessimistic one that there is never progress in philosophical thought; nor is it the optimistic one that human powers of reasoning are such that we are never in the sway of illusions of thought or false pictures which take time and perseverance to overcome. It is no doubt true that in the past and in the present, there has been much philosophical reasoning about thought, representation and perception which comes to exhibit the kind of mistake suggested above. The problem is not so much with the imputation of error, but with the imputation of what is now, for us at least, so obvious an error, or at the very least so obviously a questionable move. The story as told so far identifies an error, but does not have the resources with which to explain why past thinkers should have been liable to fall subject to it in a way that such authors clearly expect their current reader not to.

Moreover, the problem here is not merely that this diagnosis leaves work undone, it is also that it misses something in the thought of past thinkers which ought to warrant

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20. 'I want to argue that the traditional sense data theorists were correct in recognizing that we have experiences, visual or otherwise, but they mislocated the Intentionality of perception in supposing that experiences were the objects of perception...' (Searle 1983), p.61.

21. (Harman 1990); (Tye 1992); (Millikan 1991).

more pause for thought. It fails to notice a certain systematic element in the use of the argument from illusion: that it is consistently used in relation to sensory states and the context of perceiving properties, even where no parallel argument is applied in relation to other mental states. While some of the early moderns and the early twentieth century theorists posited non-physical objects of awareness in order to explain sensory phenomena, neither group were inclined to do so in order to explain our powers of thought in general.

This pattern may have been obscured for some writers, given a certain mistaken narrative that has been popular in the description of the early Modern period. For there has been a temptation to suppose that the new philosophy was dominated by a revolutionary way of ideas which posited an account of the intentional powers of the mind in terms of representative intermediaries, ideas, which mediated our contact with the physical world around us. On such a story, philosophers as diverse as Descartes, Arnauld, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley and Hume all exemplify this approach. Following Reid, one might think that the distinctive role of Hume in this story is just to make explicit the sceptical problems which lurk within the tradition as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Once one thinks that this problem arises for all of these philosophers simply in relation to the question of how we relate cognitively to the world around us, then the specific problems in relation to perception will just be an instance of this wider puzzle.

If one wants an explicit commitment in relation to thought of the kind of misconception one has in mind, perhaps one can do no better than the following notorious passage from Malebranche:

I think everyone agrees that we do not perceive objects external to us by themselves. We see the sun, stars, and an infinity of objects external to us; and it is not likely that the soul should leave the body and stroll about the heavens, as it were, in order to behold all these objects. Thus, it does not see them by themselves, and our mind's immediate object when it sees the sun, for example, is not the sun, but something that is intimately joined to our soul, and this is what I call an *idea*. Thus by the word *idea*, I mean here nothing other than the immediate object, or the object closest to the mind, when it perceives something, i.e., that which affects and modifies the mind with the perception it has of an object.<sup>23</sup>

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22. This kind of interpretation has its origins in Reid, but for recent proponents see in particular (Bennett 1970).

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Malebranche talks here of perception – but he is ready to talk in terms of perception, or to exploit perceptual metaphors, wherever he speaks of knowledge and understanding. If Malebranche is representative of this group of philosophers, and of the whole tradition ready to talk of sense-data, then perhaps there is simply a systematic misunderstanding of what it is for us to think of objects or relate to them cognitively at all; a shadow of deep confusion which we have managed to rescue ourselves from only within the last hundred years.

A tale so told, however, would ignore first that Malebranche is writing in reaction and opposition to Arnauld, each of these writers glossing Descartes's talk of ideas and his associated metaphysics in rather different terms. Even were we to focus alone on Malebranche, in whose writings one can find many seeming examples of the fallacy about intentional objects, there are complex motivations for his extraordinary views which are more specific (and interesting) than any such simple confusion. These motivations really do not carry over to writers prior to him such as Descartes, or later ones such as Locke who wrote against his English followers, and Berkeley and Hume, however strongly influenced these latter to were by him.

For a start, it is a difficult question whether any of these thinkers intends to offer a theory of the representational powers of the mind in general – i.e. an account of how a finite mind can think about things at all. There is in each of these authors often concern with potentially illegitimate ideas – or with words or notions which fail to represent. But these discussions are not presented within the context of a general account of how thought is possible at all. Rather, one might think, the kinds of ambition to give an account of the representational powers of creatures who think or use languages is an ambition that belongs in the twentieth century and after, and is part of a more general ambition in philosophical strands which seek to locate humans entirely within a natural and principally physical order. In which case, it should be no surprise that there is little but anachronism in looking back with these motivations to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, given that the emphasis on naturalism is out of sorts with some early modern figures, and the emphasis on the physical inappropriate for others.

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23. Malebranche 1992), *The Search after Truth*, Bk. 3, Pt. 2, Ch.1, p.27. (I am not here endorsing or rejecting this interpretation of Malebranche.)

If we discard with appropriate disbelief the notion that there is a common theory of ideas among these philosophers, one can still find used in different authors to different effect, a fairly common usage of either the argument from illusion or the argument from conflicting appearances. While it is difficult to discover a systematic confusion about the nature of thought and representation, it is fairly easy to discern a repeated use of the argument from conflicting sensory appearances or from illusion across the centuries in different intellectual contexts and put to different purposes.<sup>24</sup>

This suggests a separation of concern between thought and sense perception, and a specific cluster of assumptions or ideas associated with the latter. That impression is surely reinforced when one reflects on the debate about sense-data in the early part of the twentieth century. For example, when one looks at the work of Russell and Moore, one finds both a concern with sense-data and a concern with the nature of judgement and the possibility of true and false judgement. If the inclination to take the argument from illusion seriously was simply a symptom of confusion about intentionality, then one should expect parallel arguments and confusions in both sets of debate. But for all the oddity of Russell's and Moore's various different theories of judgement at different times, it is notable how far their discussions of these matters are from the way in which they treat the issues of the objects of perception.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, in the case of C.D. Broad, we find a distinction drawn between the material and epistemological objects of perception, which suggests some sensitivity to the special properties of thoughts and intentional states of mind.<sup>26</sup> And the point is made clearest in the work of H.H. Price: he not only endorses the argument from illusion in a modified form, but also emphasises the intentionality of perceptual experience, which he calls perceptual acceptance—explicitly indicating that this is a belief-like state of mind, in the process

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24. Indeed, this is one of the points stressed most strongly in (Burnyeat 1979). Burnyeat also offers evidence for seeing Plato's discussion of perception and knowledge in the *Theaetetus* in terms amenable to the thrust of argument in the text: when Socrates finally rejects Theaetetus's identification of knowledge and perception, part of the concern is to allow for the possibility of false thought; but the separation of the two leaves intact the thought that it is impossible for perceptions themselves to be false.

25. For useful discussions of various of Moore's and Russell's views on the nature of judgement see, (Cartwright 1987), (Hylton 1990), (Baldwin 1990).

26. See (Broad 1925), Ch. IV.

alluding to the work of Reid and of Husserl.<sup>27</sup>

In none of these cases can we be content with the supposition that the authors suffer from a general confusion about the notion of intentionality which explains their endorsement of the argument from illusion in the particular case of sensory states. In each case, we have a contrast between the author's treatment of thoughts and their treatment of sensory states. In the final example, we have someone who accepts that experience has intentionality, but still supposes that the argument from illusion generates a problem—for him, at least, an intentional approach could not be thought adequate to dissolve the problems of perception.

If we relied on the thought that the past attractions of the argument from illusion resided solely in a form of fallacious reasoning or a general mistaken conception of intentionality, we would fail in our understanding of past philosophy of perception in two ways. On the one hand, we would simply be attributing a near self-evident mistake to past thinkers, without any explanation of why they should have made such a mistake. The ancillary suggestion that past thinkers are just confused about intentionality in general is not borne out by the actual record. On the other hand, such a blanket interpretation ignores the systematic exploitation of the argument from illusion in relation to sensory states, in contrast to the variety of treatments of thought. An explanation of the past tradition needs to find more systematic structure in the viewpoint which takes the argument from illusion to present a genuine difficulty, we need therefore to look beyond the intentional fallacy to find the relevant assumptions peculiar to the sensory case.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4. The Hidden Assumption

Burnyeat in his survey of the arguments from conflicting appearances and illusion claims that philosophers who use such an argument are in the grip of an 'undeclared picture or model of what perception is or ought to be like. It is an inappropriate picture...and for that reason is not something a philosopher will readily acknowledge,

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27. Price 1932), Ch.V, esp. pp. 150-6.

28. f. here also Snowdon's suggestion that we need an explanation of the psychological attractions of Hume's and Price's positions, (Snowdon 1992).



even to himself.<sup>29</sup> If correct, this would explain why Hume offers us no explicit argument, and why many should have doubted that any such explicit argument could be formulated: once the premisses of such an argument are made explicit, they lose all attraction.

There is certainly some reason for thinking that this must be so. It is one thing for the argument from illusion to impose on us the positive claim that we perceive images along with external objects. As surprising as this conclusion would be, we have learnt in other areas that there is more to the world than we had previously anticipated. But as Hume is well aware, the negative half of the conclusion does seem to conflict directly with a belief that is commonsensical and that acts as one of Hume's premisses, namely that we do perceive such mind-independent objects as tables.

So the argument from illusion in Hume's hands appears to have the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*. But such a form of argument can have suasive force only if we find its premisses more compelling than the rejection of its conclusion. Since the relevant premisses Hume must be employing are left unstated, there is no reason for us to think such an assumption better grounded or more unshakeable than the common sense thought that we perceive mind-independent objects. To make his assumptions explicit rather than implicit would seem to dissolve the force of the argument entirely.

Burnyeat himself actually seems to go further than this. Starting with an observation from Austin that no one seriously believes that a straight stick has to look straight on all occasions it is viewed, Burnyeat claims that proponents of the argument are indeed committed to that strange view. He takes the relevant added principle to be the following:

- (1) If something appears *F* to some observers and not-*F* to others, then it is not inherently/really/in itself *F*.

As he then points out, this is equivalent to its contraposition:

- (2) If something is inherently/really/in itself *F*, then it appears *F* to all observers or it appears not-*F* to all.<sup>30</sup>

Ignoring the second disjunct of the consequent as irrelevant to our concerns since we

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29. Burnyeat 1979), p.75.

30. oth *op. cit.* p.74.

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are focusing on examples where at least on occasion an object is supposed to appear as it is, the formula amounts just to the claim that Austin insists no one seriously believes. On the other hand, Burnyeat notes that one can find the principle stated in the form of (2) only very rarely. This he takes to indicate that those attracted to it are also wary of taking seriously its consequences. He then takes the explanatory task to be one of showing the way in which someone might come under the sway of certain metaphors or models which would make the otherwise unappealing assumption seem correct. In this case, the relevant model is what he calls the 'window model' of vision, which he characterises variously so:

...that we look through our eyes as through a window... (83) The window-pane should be transparent, without spot or blemish. Or better, since Greek windows were unglazed, the eye should be an aperture with no pane at all. There is as it were nothing between the perceiver and the thing he perceives... (85) at the core of the perceptual experience there will be an unmediated knowing, like Moore's diaphanous awareness of blue, and when a suitable story has been told about the objects of this knowing, the problem of conflicting appearances is solved. (95)

We could then see the window model of perception as providing the hidden premiss of Hume's argument. The table cannot be the object of awareness in a case of illusion, for given the window model, the object of awareness must be as it appears to be, and *ex hypothesi* the table is not as it appears; hence only some image or impression could be the object of awareness. On this model whatever one is aware of must be as it appears and only such an object is guaranteed to be as it appears.

Now at the heart of Burnyeat's account is the thought that there can be no rational explanation of why the argument has been found so compelling. He criticises Austin (and no doubt would criticise the authors cited in the last section) for attacking past philosophers without according them due respect or trying to understand them. But Burnyeat's suggestion is that we understand them not by finding appropriate grounds for the assumptions they make, but rather by seeing how they may have been seduced by various errors, and by recognising the same impulses in our own breasts:

Whether it is the flawless close-up vision or the prehensive grasp, whether it secures a whole object or only some part of the surface of one or just a non-physical substitute for these, such pictures have their origin in our earliest and deepest experience. If they elicited a smile, it should have been a smile of recognition and not contempt. For if, as Heraclitus advised, we remember our dreams, we will recognize that there was a time in

our own lives when the problem of conflicting appearances engaged our strongest feelings...<sup>31</sup>

Burnyeat's method here seems to be a form of philosophical pathology. We are to recognise that it is part of the human philosophical condition to be swayed by a conception of perceiving which is simply inappropriate. Our respect for past thinkers is to be instilled in us by our recognising the fact that we share a failing with them.

But in giving the initial grounds for suspecting a role for therapy, Burnyeat has somewhat overstated his case. While it is true that we can find no explicit statement of the required assumption in Hume or his contemporaries, when we come to the twentieth century discussion of the objects of perception, authors have been less coy about offering explicit examples of the assumption. Moreover the explicit statement is often conjoined with the admission that the author can offer no independent grounds for it. Such candour is evidenced by H.H. Price when he writes:

When I say 'This table appears brown to me' it is quite plain that I am acquainted with an actual instance of brownness (or equally plainly with a pair of instances when I see double). This cannot indeed be proved, but it is absolutely evident and indubitable.<sup>32</sup>

And Howard Robinson, one of the few recent defenders of a sense- datum conception of experience, happily identifies the key premiss of the argument from illusion as what he calls the *Phenomenal Principle*:

If there sensibly appears to a subject to be something which possesses a particular sensible quality then there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that sensible quality.<sup>33</sup>

Robinson sees it as the great advance of early twentieth century philosophy of perception that the role of this assumption was made explicit in discussions of perception. Like Price, Robinson offers no direct argument for the principle, he takes it to be intuitively plausible, and defends it only by criticising what he takes to be rival accounts of the nature of sensory experience.

How does Burnyeat's strategy apply to Price and Robinson? Not well, I suggest, and for two reasons. First, it is an important element of Burnyeat's strategy that we should suppose the relevant assumptions or model of perception are hidden or at least half-

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31. *p. cit.* p.108.

32. Price 1932), p.63.

33. Robinson 1994), p.32.

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hidden. For the problem, as he poses it, is that rational reflection will show that the principle has unacceptable consequences and hence cannot be endorsed. The only way the principle can retain its grip, on his interpretation, is by not being revealed in rational light for what it is. This ill-fits Price, and indeed his slightly senior contemporaries Moore and Broad, all of whom are explicit that the argument from illusion relies on just such an assumption for which they can provide no further justification, but which seems to them indubitable.<sup>34</sup> So in relation to such writers, Burnyeat's strategy shows no greater respect than does Austin's: the targets of criticism must be so confused that we cannot find them readily intelligible.

Second, the cogency of Burnyeat's strategy depends on the problem being one of historical interpretation of past figures with whom we cannot conceive ourselves to be engaged in active debate. While we can try to be engaged by their problems and their arguments, we can also allow that there is a point at which we find their assumptions or reasoning unintelligible or unsupported by our lights. There is no further task of debate, but simply one of understanding. The latter, Burnyeat suggests, can be engaged in by seeing ourselves as equally subject to philosophical illusion as our forebears, even if we come to recognise it as illusion in a way that they failed. But when we consider Robinson, and indeed other philosophers who still explicitly endorse the traditional problem and forms of the argument from illusion, Burnyeat's strategy is bound to seem inadequate.<sup>35</sup> For we cannot pretend that we are not in debate with our contemporaries. To say of them that they are simply in the grip of a false image expresses no more than our disagreement with them.

This is not to say that there is no problem here. Burnyeat is surely right to highlight the deep disagreement involved. The question is rather one of how to respond to the problem. One could simply adopt the view of the past inherited from Austin, and from some followers of Wittgenstein, which simply sees philosophical debate as so immersed in confusion that there is no intellectually respectable project of understanding to be undertaken here. All that one can do is express one's disagreement and distaste with

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34. See, Moore (Moore 1922) and Broad (Broad 1923).

35. f.(Perkins 1983), (Foster 1986), (Maud 1995). One might also include (Jackson 1977): Jackson explicitly disavows the argument from illusion, but not because of the principle here under debate, but rather for independent issues concerning the role of subjective indistinguishability in the argument.

past discussion of the matter and those of one's contemporaries who insist on pursuing the matter. But here again, Burnyeat must be correct to insist that we owe the past the respect of attempting to understand past views and that it is a proper and genuine project for philosophers to understand the reasoning and concerns of other times. The acute problem for gaining such an understanding is simply that the shift has been so immense: from a perspective in which the argument from illusion frames the whole debate, to one in which the argument must be rejected from the outset as evidently bad. At the same time, the time scale for that shift has been so short: although the argument from illusion has had a long history, it is only within the last thirty to forty years that its place at centre stage of philosophical discussion of perception has been overthrown. From our current perspective, it seems near impossible to place us in a position where these arguments could hold the same authority over our deliberations.

However, I suggest that the root of the problem is not quite where Burnyeat suggests that it is. It is not that we have here people under the sway of a philosophical illusion which needs uncovering, but rather that we have a dispute which centres on the nature of appearances. The intractability of the debate simply reflects the paradoxical nature of this type of problem. We have difficulty in making sense of past philosophers here because the assumptions they make about appearances are so different from the ones that we are inclined to. The parties to the dispute disagree about the nature of appearances, while yet supposing that this nature is somehow obvious to us, and hence beyond dispute. Since the parties do dispute the question, it is difficult to find any common ground among them. If we are to make the debate tractable, we need to try and make sense of how there can be dispute about the nature of appearances.

## 5. Grounding the Obvious

Our first move is to show how we can make better sense of the debate by seeing it strictly in terms of a dispute about how things appear to us. From that point we can move to the question of how there can be such a dispute, and why we might end up with the different positions of sense-datum views and intentional theories. That, in turn, raises an urgent question about the status of appearances.

We can solve Burnyeat's initial problem once we ask how Price and Robinson could think that a controversial principle, which is clearly not a self-evident truth, is still

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somehow intuitively correct, or obviously right. I suggest that the best explanation of their attitude is to see them as supposing that while the principle is not self-evident, it is nonetheless evident in the light of experience. If all one has to go on is reflection on the proposition itself, then one cannot determine whether it is true or not. But the proposition in question concerns appearances, how things appear to one, and that one can test just by reflection on how things *do* appear to one. Hence, simple reflection on one's own case should show one whether the principle in question is true. So we might interpret Price and Robinson as supposing that one's self-conscious knowledge of sensory consciousness is sufficient to reveal to one the truth of the principle. Although not self-evident, the principle is taken to be an obvious and indubitable truth given how experience presents itself to us to be. Or so they are convinced.

Certainly this line of interpretation helps to make sense of Hume, and it explains why the key premisses are missing from his argument. If a relevant claim just seems so obviously true to one, then one will be unlikely to bother to make it explicit or to attempt the fruitless task of justifying it. Indeed, where a principle is so obvious, it is often extremely difficult to consciously articulate it, and make explicit its role in one's reasoning. Rather than taking the lacunae in Hume's reasoning to be evidence of argumentative incompetence, we can rather see it as evidence of how deeply embedded the relevant principle is in his reflection on appearances.

Now, if the principle is thought to be evident in the light of experience, then the problem about justification in the light of its unpalatable consequences is not so pressing. For even when faced with a counter-intuitive conclusion, one cannot help but endorse the principle (through the force of 'the natural light of reason', so to speak), if one is convinced that it is correct simply by reflection on what experience is like. The option of *modus tollens* in the light of such an argument will not arise. Suppose that introspection of experience gives conclusive grounds for the problematic principle. Simply coming to recognise unpleasant consequences of the principle needn't by itself alter the kind of experience one has, and hence won't alter the support that the principle rests on.

But this, of course, does not solve the wider problem of interpretation which Burnyeat raises. We may now understand how proponents of the argument from illusion could take Robinson's Phenomenal Principle to be beyond justification because they thought it obvious in the light of reflection on experience. But this moves

the problem one stage back. We now need to understand how they could have taken it to be obvious in just this manner. For, of course, the mere fact that Anscombe, Searle, Harman and others have thought that the principle is false, and have failed to find any justification for it apart from the seductions of a certain fallacious form of reasoning indicates that the principle cannot be obvious, even were it true. So, why should those who take the argument from illusion seriously think that experience shows the principle to be obviously true?

If we leave that question on one side for a moment, and stand back from the whole debate, we can see a suggestive parallel between traditional sense-datum theories and some proponents of the intentional theory. Both approaches appeal to what one can know about appearances from introspection in support of their positions. We have just noted how the sense-datum tradition makes such an appeal. In the case of intentional theories of perception, the appeal is in support of the link between experience and the mind-independent objects of perception. For example, Gilbert Harman thinks that introspection supports his case in defending a form of the intentional theory and at the same time creates a problem for the sense- datum theory:

Look at a tree and try to turn your attention to intrinsic features of your visual experience. I predict that you will find that the only features there to turn your attention to will be features of the presented tree, including relational features of the tree “from here”.<sup>36</sup>

Harman is confident that his readers will agree with him that initial reflection on one’s visual experience supports the thought that one encounters only mind-independent objects and their features and how they relate to one when one introspects. There is a positive and a negative side to the claim here: that one does encounter the mind-independent world in experience; and that one encounters nothing else. We might call the positive thesis *Transparency*: that the character of one’s experience involves in some sense, or is directed on or of the mind-independent objects and their features which we take to be around us in our environment.

While Harman thinks this evident, sense-datum theorists such as Jackson, and predecessors such as Hume, think it wrong. So they do not suppose that the principle of Transparency is obvious, given reflection on one’s experience. However, that it is not to say that they think that experience obviously involves only mind-dependent objects

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36. Harman 1990), p. 39.

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or features; rather, they suppose that experience is neutral about these matters. As Hume puts it:

[the senses] give us no notion of continu'd existence, because they cannot operate beyond the extent, in which they really operate. They as little produce the opinion of a distinct existence, because they neither can offer it to the mind as represented, nor as original... We may, therefore, conclude with certainty, that the opinion of a continu'd and of a distinct existence never arises from the senses.<sup>37</sup>

And while Hume would agree with Harman that Harman's view is the view of common sense, since 'the universal and primary opinion of all men' is that this table which we see is independent of the mind, Hume is careful not to ground this belief in how appearances strike us. The only explanation of the belief is that it is natural in us.

In this way, therefore, we can see the sharp discontinuity between the older debate about sense-data and the objects of perception and more recent discussions of the intentionality of experience as reflecting a deep disagreement about the nature of appearances. Since there is a tendency on both sides to appeal to introspection to support their claims, there is a consequent difficulty in making sense from either side of the view of the other, and equally a difficulty in stepping back from the whole debate and finding some common ground from which the disputants then move to their opposed positions. But we can make progress here, I suggest, by seeing how the principles each side ground in introspection of experience can be combined to reveal a possible position against which both of the traditions will be united in opposition.

The dispute between traditional sense-datum theories of perception and recent intentional accounts turns on two claims relating to appearances, and not just one. Each side supposes that one such claim is evidently true when one reflects on the character of experience, while the other side insists that reflection on experience neither shows the truth or falsity of that principle—while at the same time, denying the principle in question. So neither side claims that appearances themselves show the principle put forward by the other side is false. The dispute about appearances is more indirect: whether they can offer positive support for one principle or the other.

Now the two claims in question are not inconsistent with each other. The claim of Transparency requires that experience be of mind-independent objects and their features; while the claim of Hume and the sense-datum theorists, which we might call

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37. (Hume 1978), pp.191-2.



*Actualism*, requires that whatever qualities one senses, some actual instance of those qualities and the object which bears them must exist and be sensed. In combination they would simply require that when one senses some quality, an appropriate mind-independent object and feature should exist and be sensed by one.

Given the consistency of the two claims, one might hold that introspection of one's experience gives equal support to each of the claims. Indeed, if we combine the two claims together we end up with a position which seems very like the kinds of view the sense-datum theorists labelled *Naïve Realism*, and which they took to be refuted by the argument from illusion. For, if we accept the Transparency of experience, we will suppose that the very mind-independent objects and qualities which we take ourselves to perceive are aspects of what our experiences are like; while if we insist on the Actualism of experience, we will accept that in having such experience, such objects and qualities will actually have to be there before us. If I can see a table, and it looks to me as if there is a table there, then what I sense is a table which exists independently of my mind, and I could not so experience if the table were not there.

When I stare out of the window I can see the lavender bush at the end of the street, the straggling rose on my fence, and I can hear the sound of traffic in nearby roads. When I reflect on what it is like for me so to experience, these very same objects and features remain the focus of attention as aspects of how I experience: this commits me to Transparency with regards to perception, as proponents of intentional theories stress. At the same time, it is evident to me that I am experiencing these things, and not merely thinking about them, or imagining or remembering them. The latter things I can do in the absence of the objects of perception, but it does not seem to me that I can be this way, actually experiencing, without the relevant objects or features present in my environment. This recommends Actualism to me, as defenders of the sense-datum tradition have observed.<sup>38</sup>

So, if we take seriously the hypothesis that reflection on experience gives equal support to both Transparency and Actualism, then we will think that such reflection ought to compel the acceptance not of sense-datum views or intentional theories of perception but rather of some kind of *Naïve Realism*. From this perspective, what is

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38. And not just proponents of the sense-datum tradition; compare Sartre's discussion of the phenomenological contrast between perception and imagination in (Sartre 1991).

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notable about each of the main traditions is not what they seek to defend by reference to introspection, but what they are prepared to reject in the face of introspective support. The sense-datum tradition denies the manifest fact that it seems to us as if we are presented in experience with mind-independent objects and states of affairs in the world around us. The intentional tradition denies the introspective evidence that things apparently sensed must actually be before the mind for one to experience so.

From this perspective, the explanatory task is not to explain why the sense-datum tradition thought that Actualism was an evident truth, but rather why both the sense-datum tradition and intentional theories reject one or other aspect of Naïve Realism. In as much as introspection gives support both to Transparency and Actualism, one will find no answer to this question by appealing to how our experiences strike us as being. But one can easily find reasons elsewhere for rejecting this option. For here we find a role for the argument from illusion after all. Rather than thinking of it as a positive argument for the existence of sense-data, or for that matter for the intentionality of experience, it is better to view it as an argument against Naïve Realism.

When I stare at the lavender bush at the end of the street, it certainly seems to me as if I could not be this way without the bush really being there. On the other hand, it also seems quite clear to me that for all I know, it is possible that I should be in a state of mind which just by reflection I cannot distinguish from this state of mind and yet in that case not be perceiving anything in the physical world at all, but only be hallucinating. It is common to take this admission as revealing something about the kind of state of mind, the kind of sensory experience, one has when perceiving: that it is the kind of state which could occur whether one is perceiving or hallucinating.<sup>39</sup> Hence whether an experience counts as a case of perception or hallucination tells us something about its aetiology but does not determine its fundamental kind.

Now in a case of hallucinating a lavender bush just like this one, I would be as inclined on the basis of introspection to assert that both Transparency and Actualism were true of that experience. For, just as in this case, it would seem to me as if I was presented with a piece of flora independent of my awareness, there in my environment

39. This assumption is rejected by so-called 'disjunctive' accounts of perception. For such approaches see (Hinton 1967), and (Hinton 1973); (Snowdon 1980-81) and (Snowdon 1990); also (McDowell 1982); and (Putnam 1994).

regardless of whether I was paying heed to it or not. Likewise, it would strike me that what was distinctive of my situation is that things could not be this way with me and no object be there at all. This is, after all, a case of sensory experience and not thought. Nonetheless, in such a situation there need be no appropriate candidate in one's environment, no lavender bush to catch one's eye. So in such a case of hallucination, it seems clear that at least one of the two principles must be false. Either Transparency must be wrong and one is aware of an object, just not one in one's physical environment; or Actualism must fail, and one's experience does not require that there be an object there.

More needs to be said here to develop this into a proper argument, but the idea that somehow the existence, or possibility, of perceptual illusions is inconsistent with Naïve Realism is a familiar one. We have already seen in the case of Hume, and adverted to with respect to the sense-datum theorists, an appeal to the argument from illusion to show that something like Naïve Realism is false. As the quotation from Burge earlier indicated, while many philosophers would now repudiate anything with the title 'argument from illusion', they would not reject the bearing that illusions and hallucinations have on giving an account of perceptual experience. So it is not implausible to appeal here to some form of argument concerning illusion to explain why Naïve Realism might be rejected. The line of thought can be developed a bit further. If the same kind of state of mind, the same perceptual experience, can occur whether one is perceiving or having an illusion or suffering an hallucination, then whatever principles hold of the hallucinatory experience must hold of the veridical perceptual experience too. So, if at least one of the principles, Actualism or Transparency, must be false of illusions and hallucinations, then that principle must be false also of the corresponding veridical perception. The possibility of such perfect hallucinations seems to show that Naïve Realism cannot be true of any sensory experience.

In addition, if we assume that, with proper attention, the character of experience is obvious to us, then when one attends appropriately to one's experience one should be able to see that one of these principles is not, after all, supported by introspectible evidence. We should expect, therefore, a theorist who is moved by this line of argument not only to reject one of the principles but also to deny that it is seemingly correct to someone who reflects on their experience.

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But now, one might point out, if in fact introspection supports each principle equally, then there is no introspective evidence to lead one to reject one principle rather than the other. So we are not to explain the disagreement across the traditions of debate by reference to different kinds of experience that the disputants enjoyed, or to their different powers of introspection. The argument from illusion might lead one to the commitment that one of the two principles must be wrong, and if wrong not evidently supported by introspection, but nothing yet will show which to reject. That now leaves the way open for us to explain the disagreement in terms of other aspects of the two traditions' intellectual contexts.

If, in fact, there is nothing about introspected experience *per se* which should lead one to reject or endorse Actualism rather than Transparency, there are plenty of other philosophical concerns which separate typical sense-datum theorists from defenders of intentional theories. Some of these are sufficient to explain why one might antecedently be inclined to repudiate Transparency while upholding Actualism, or alternatively be inclined to excoriate Actualism and embrace Transparency.

Consider first Hume's intellectual context. Notoriously within the early modern tradition, common sense realism is taken to be problematic. In digesting the new science, one comes to question the status of sensible qualities such as colours and tastes, and the true nature of grossly observable elements of the world around us. In some figures, one finds a commitment to realism at odds with common sense—for example, in Descartes we witness the downgrading of the senses as a source of knowledge of the nature of the world, and instead an emphasis on the role of intellect. In Berkeley, on the other hand, we see an attempt to hold onto the most precious aspects of the sensible world, at the cost of rejecting a material and mind-independent world.

Hume's discussion in 'Scepticism with regard to the Senses' is sensitive to the distance these opposing approaches are from the views of the vulgar. For if it can be a matter for serious debate whether the world is as it is presented to us by the senses, then one will not suppose the matter settled simply by introspection. Yet, if Actualism and Transparency can be shown to be true and certain simply by reflection on one's experience, then that would be the outcome. For, were the combination of these two true, then the correctness of common sense realism would simply be obvious to us, and hence beyond dispute. So the rejection of Transparency seems naturally to cohabit

with the problematic status of such realism. It is symptomatic of the thought that the world is properly to be described only through a developing scientific discipline that the senses reveal to us much less about the nature of the world than we are vulgarly inclined to suppose.

If we move forward in time to the early twentieth century discussions of sense-data, we find relevantly similar concerns about realism. While one finds an opposition to the idealism of late nineteenth century, common sense realism is taken to be no less problematic than in early modern times: one of the central concerns is to explain how we place the mind in a world of the form described by then current science. Equally importantly, and again echoing the early modern period, there is no reason to resist the consequences of Actualism which in certain cases of illusion and hallucination will lead to a commitment to non-physical objects of sense. For the idea that the physical world must be causally complete, with purely physical events having sufficient causal explanation in terms of purely physical antecedents, is not a doctrine accepted on faith and without question. Rather the unity of science and the mind's place in nature are taken in many such discussions to be open. For example, at this time we find serious discussion of the para-psychological as a realm governed by psycho-physical laws uninvestigated by then current science.<sup>40</sup>

These intellectual concerns contrast sharply with much of the dominant philosophical ideology of the last forty years. One of the most notable developments since the middle of the last century has been the ascendancy of a commitment to physicalism in some form or another. In particular, in discussions of mind there has been a concern to avoid any commitment to the existence of peculiar, and distinctively mental, entities. An acceptance of Actualism would lead one to accept the existence of non-physical objects of sense in the case of hallucinations and some illusions, and so would apparently lead one to conclusions in conflict with physicalism.<sup>41</sup> If one already has reason to reject Actualism through a prior endorsement of physicalism, then the considerations about illusion and the general unreliability of the senses do not by

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40. In this context, it is worth noting that both Broad and Price professed a serious interest in the parapsychological.

41. Cf. here (Smart 1962), (Armstrong 1968); (Tye 1984). Some philosophers dispute whether there is a conflict between physicalism and sense-data, cf. (Cornman 1975) and (Perkins 1983) for a discussion of this.

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themselves give one any reason to dispose of Transparency as well. Even if common sense realism is taken to be controversial or to be false, one will simply think that this reflects a way in which our experience of the world is more or less accurate. Only the combination of Actualism and Transparency would commit us to the definite truth of common sense realism. Indeed, the more firm one's commitment to Transparency, the more implausible Actualism can be made to seem. One may be more inclined to accept that a non-physical mosaic of colours must exist whenever one has a visual experience than to accept that some non-physical table or rabbit should so exist because one's experience presents such entities. So the more reason one has to insist that experience really is as of tables and rabbits, the more evident it will be that Actualism cannot be true.

Given the implications of the considerations about illusion and hallucination, one finds a conflict between Actualism and Transparency internal to the problem of perception. Other intellectual proclivities, in favour of, or sceptical towards, physicalism and realism about the empirical world, explain one's antecedent inclination towards one of the principles rather than the other. When the focus is on the problematic status of common sense realism, and minimis is not assumed, Actualism can be taken to be secure and to define the options. When some of form of physicalism is beyond question, Actualism is highly questionable, and an insistence on the correctness of Transparency reinforces any reasons for thinking of experience as intentional in nature.

These suggestions offer us a strategy by which we can resolve our problem of interpretation. At first sight, the shift between the traditional problems of perception discussed by sense-datum theorists and recent accounts of perception has been so large that it is difficult to see how there can be a common concern here. Equally in looking back from our current perspective it is difficult to make sense of the early tradition as a cogent piece of reasoning about the senses. If we take seriously both the suggestion that the different views seek for support in the character of appearances, and that these different views get equal support from introspection of experience, then the disagreement becomes easier to comprehend. Underneath the apparent differences of approach, there is a common thread and a common problem: first reflection on experience recommends Naïve Realism to one; then, considerations which may loosely be tied together under the heading of 'the argument from illusion' suggest that no such

view can be correct. The sense-datum tradition and intentional approaches are just alternative responses to this problem. If experience does support the key principle of each view equally, then we are not to explain the differences between them, the rejection of one principle rather than the other, directly in terms of the evidence that they have available about the introspectible character of experience. At the same time, by taking a broader perspective and looking at other aspects of the intellectual context, we can see why certain thinkers would be predisposed to the rejection of Transparency or of Actualism.

## 6. *Appearance & Error*

We started with an apparently sharp discontinuity between the traditional debate and some more recent approaches to perception which focus on its alleged intentionality. What we have found is an underlying common theme which has been presented in different ways in the light of different intellectual concerns. To this extent, the interpretation recommends that we take over from the traditional debate certain elements now dismissed within recent discussion: the argument from illusion remains central to our understanding of the accounts that we can give of experience, whether it occurs as an articulated element in discussions of perception or not. Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, despite the apparent commitment to the obviousness of the nature of appearances, the philosophical theories we have looked at seem committed to introducing a gap between what our initial or naïve reflections on experience might recommend, and what mature theory proclaims must be the case.

This is not entirely a new thought. The idea that there is a conflict between sophisticated theory and common sense beliefs about perception is one which is to the fore in Hume's discussion from the *First Enquiry* and before that the *Treatise*, albeit in Hume's hands the point of highlighting the gap is partly to point out how little advance the philosophical view is over the vulgar. Following Hume, the anxiety about the status of common sense belief is an element of much of the discussion of sense-data throughout the early to mid twentieth century. But, as noted at the outset, this is one aspect of the debate which has altered in the last thirty to forty years. Few philosophers now think of their account of perception as in conflict with common sense, or, at least, few are bothered to consider whether their theories are revisionary and do not seem to

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think that any revision of common sense would be problematic. So while the idea is not new, it has been left aside.

On the current interpretation, both sense-datum theories and intentional approaches are revisionary of our initial conception of experience. On the picture offered here, we start from naïve realism as recommended by initial reflection on perceptual experience; considerations about the possibility of illusions and hallucinations are then alleged to show that naïve realism cannot be correct. On both approaches, positive support for the account offered of experience is still derived from introspection, namely with respect to the element of naïve realism that each still holds on to. On the other hand, each rejects the other aspect of naïve realism, and so must deny that there is any proper introspective support for that principle. Given the symmetry between the two approaches that our interpretation suggests, the conclusion offered to us is that each approach is in the same position: either introspection offers no support to either principle, or it offers equal support to both.

In the latter case, we should surmise that introspection recommends a view of experience to us which according to philosophical theory cannot be correct, namely naïve realism. Hence, experience is not as it seems to us to be. This would seem to force on us a form of ‘error-theory’ of perception and perceptual experience. Revisionary or eliminativist approaches to observable phenomena have long had their proponents, from ancient and early modern times to recent discussion. J.L. Mackie, for example, argues that we should accept an error-theory of secondary qualities, on which objects appeared to us to be ‘objectively’ coloured in a way that they are not.<sup>42</sup> Echoing Mackie’s own approach to moral facts, Boghossian and Velleman have proposed an eliminativist rather than revisionary error-theory of colours. For such approaches there is a contrast to be had between the way the world is, the appearances we enjoy of the world being other than that, and potentially the possibility of explaining how such appearances can arise given that the world lacks colour entirely, or at least lacks colours as we conceive them. Whether this is sufficient to provide for the coherence of either

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42. (Mackie 1975), Chs. 1 & 2; Mackie also defended a different form of error-theory concerning values, which he denied were part of the ‘furniture of the universe’, while insisting that it still seems to us as if they are, and that these false beliefs play an important role in our lives, see (Mackie 1977), esp. Ch. 1. An error-theory about colour akin to Mackie’s view of value is defended in [Boghossian, 1989 #242], see also [Boghossian, 1991 #243].



kind of error-theory remains a moot point. Matters are more problematic, however, in respect of the case that we are looking at. In the current context, the suggestion is that in the light of introspection, our experience of the world seems to have a certain nature, i.e. that articulated by naïve realism, which it does not have. An account of perception then needs not only to tell us what the nature of appearances is, but also how states of being appeared to can come to seem to be different from how they really are.

Part of the assumption that appearances are simply open to introspective reflection is that these psychological states are directly available to cognition to articulate. There is no mere level of seeming or appearance between the psychological states and our introspective judgements about them. So the space for articulating a systematic error-theory, one which both posits a certain nature to experiential states and explains why we are mistaken about this, seems limited. In the case of sense-datum theories, the error in question will be one about the objects of awareness. Given introspective support for Transparency, we will be inclined to suppose that the objects we are aware of are just the mind-independent objects and features to be found in our perceived environment with which we interact. According to the sense-datum approach, however, the only entities of which we can be aware and which account for the character of our perceptual experience are the non-physical and possibly mind-dependent sense-data. So, accepting the evidential status of Transparency, the sense-datum theorist must suppose that we simply mistake the sense-data we are aware of for the physical objects that we are interested in.

Intentional theorists typically point out that sense-datum theories deny us genuine perceptual access to external objects along with their emphasis on the obviousness of Transparency. Yet if there need be no error posited about the objects of awareness, error will still be located in our initial conception of the manner in which objects are present to one when one is aware of them. Given introspective support for Actualism, one will initially accept that one's perceptual experience can only be the way it is now, staring at the bush at the end of the street, given that the appropriate objects and features really are there as they seem to be – there is a bush there and it possesses the signs of life it exhibits. For the intentional account, however, any experience which is the awareness of appropriately placed mind-independent objects and events is of kind which could have occurred even if nothing was there. So the character of my current

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perception of the bush cannot depend on the presence of the bush, as Actualism requires. If introspection does support Actualism, as the sense-datum tradition supposes obvious and naïve realism affirms, then the intentional approach posits an error in our initial conception of the character of perception.

And yet, in turn, this indicates that if we have settled our initial puzzle about the interpretation of the development of debates about perception, we have done so only to unearth a yet more puzzling problem. Our initial puzzlement led from the question of how there can be dispute about appearances, to how there could be such sharp disagreement over the different debates about perception. We have uncovered a unity to those debates, and found a way in which the parties disagree not directly about how appearances seem to us, but rather in their other intellectual commitments. This position can be maintained only if both agree, if only tacitly, that initial judgements about appearances must be in error. How could we be in error about our states of appearing, if these states are given to us directly through reflection. Moreover, if the sense-datum tradition and intentional approaches both affirm that some aspect of the nature of appearances is just so obvious that mere appeal to due attention on their readers part should recommend their basic tenets, how can they at the same time accept that such initial reflection on appearances is at the same time liable to lead one simply to a mistaken conception of experience?

An immediate response would be to suggest that the commitments now ascribed to the various parties are surely no less charitable than those rejected earlier, and hence that this interpretation of the history of the debate is equally flawed. But such a response ought to be tempered by reflection on how this problem itself is echoed in the traditional debate. For of course the idea that there is a conflict between common sense and philosophical theory is already to the forefront of Hume's text, and related to it is a tension within Hume's own position. The idea that there is such a conflict drives Hume's scepticism with regard to the senses. It is this which is to generate the sceptical problems for our knowledge of the world, and which indicates one of the main themes of traditional opposition between Naïve or Direct Realism, Representative Realism and Phenomenalism in discussions of perception and knowledge of the external world in the first half of the twentieth century. Most proponents of the sense-datum tradition wished to reject Hume's scepticism, and the bald assertion of common sense error that goes with it. But the idea that there is an error inherent in the common sense view of

perception is not altogether absent in Hume's successors. Notoriously, Harold Prichard, who otherwise abominated Hume, was prepared to assert that we mistake colours for objects.<sup>43</sup> Broad, in a relatively late discussion of *sensa*, admits that on his view there is an element of deception in our experience of the world.<sup>44</sup> Austin's complaint that the sense-datum theorists denigrate the common man is hardly without foundation.

While Hume is prepared to countenance an error theory about sense perception, his more general views about ideas and the knowledge we have of the mind make it doubtful that his position is really coherent. The tensions are manifest in some of the puzzling aspects of the passages from the *Enquiry* discussed above. The difficulties for Hume are most pressing in the need to reconcile two claims: he both wants to ascribe to us a commitment to common sense realism, while denying that appearances themselves support the contention that they are directed on mind-independent objects. As he presents the position, the view of common sense needs to be undermined by an argument, albeit one that involves only the slightest amount of reasoning. Yet in the end, Hume does not present any such reasoning, but rather draws our attention to a feature of experience which he tendentiously treats as illusory and from that immediately draws his conclusion. This would fit better the model of supposing that his positive view was just shown to be obviously true by reflection on what experience is like. But, of course, were it quite so obvious, Hume would have to convict common sense of a commitment to a near self-evident contradiction, that things clearly dependent on the mind exist independent of it, and Hume's distinction between natural belief and belief arising from reason is not capable of bearing the weight of making such contradictory belief intelligible.<sup>45</sup>

In the end, Hume cannot really balance his recognition of the commitments of common sense, the character of experience, and his methodological assumptions

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43. See various of the papers in (Prichard 1950); compare also Price's memoir of Prichard, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 19??.

44. (Broad 1956).

45. One tradition of interpretation of Hume takes this as the key problem within the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* discussions, see for example, (Strawson 1973), and (Pears 1990), Chs. 10 & 11. The problem is made the more intractable in this interpretation by not taking Hume's intended target to be naïve realism, as here conceived.

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about how we can determine what the nature of the mind is. This problem is finessed by Hume in using the kind of example he does. In picking on the change in apparent size of the table when one alters one's position relative to it, he echoes a long debate about the nature of visual perception of distance, undertaken by philosophers and scientists of the eye. In those discussions, it tends to be assumed that one can discover the correct description of a sensation or sensory impression or idea by proper inner inspection, and by investigation of the structure of the eye and its connections to the rest of the brain: the correct account here is something to be discovered and not just obvious. Hume's sophisticated readers would not have been prepared to accept his description of the impression of the table against a background familiarity with such theories of vision. Yet, given Hume's own theoretical commitments about the nature of mind and our knowledge of it, he himself should in fact be critical of whether one could discover the nature of impressions or ideas in that way.

While the threat of incoherence is close to the surface in Hume's own writings, it is obscured in later writers who support sense-datum accounts of perception, but are less happy to insist on a manifest error within common sense. They take over elements of the account which allow for a gap between an understanding of sensory experience as it really is, and sensory experience as we might first describe it on initial reflection. Rather than using this to show how common sense can be implicated in error, they use it to show how introspection can support a view of experience radically separated from naïve realism, or any account one would be happy to ascribe to unreflective common sense. One historical source for this kind of distinction which does not directly rest on a concern with the argument from illusion is the debate about visual perception of depth which so dominated much of the philosophical and non-philosophical work on perception in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. So, one can find discussions in which we are invited to see what in one sense is our common experience of the world, as in another the upshot of judgement following immediately on what is the proper deliverance of the senses.<sup>46</sup>

This kind of approach allows for a proper distinction between a correct account of the nature of perceptual experience and the objects of awareness and what our initial conception of such things might be. There is room for correction of opinions formed by introspection, through the development of theories about the objects of awareness which themselves are grounded in further use of such introspection. The kind of

incoherence threatened in Hume is avoided in these discussions, but at the cost of taking seriously introspection of experience as a source of knowledge of an inner realm which has an existence independent of our initial judgements about it.

If the problems raised above can be discerned in the traditional debate, one will be hard-pushed to find any echo of them in recent discussion, either in the criticisms of the sense-datum like those of Austin, or in the positive developments of intentional theories. Yet, given certain aspects of the traditional debate it is no surprise that this is so. As we have just noted, the sense-datum tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century avoided the kind of incoherence facing Hume by supposing that there is a substantive epistemology of introspective knowledge of appearances. Sense-data or *sensa* form a category of non-physical entities which we can know of primarily through awareness of them, and proper attention to what we are aware of. Hence it makes sense to suppose that our initial thoughts about what we are aware of might turn out to be in error, to be corrected by further reflection on them. One of the main critical themes of the century, developed even earlier than Austin's attack on the sense-datum tradition, is the rejection of this idea, and a criticism of the thought that there can be any such substantial inner realm or non-physical realm of which we can come to have knowledge.

Consider the various rejections of introspectionism developed in many ways through otherwise diverse traditions of thought. Most obviously one might note the work of Wittgenstein from the late 1920s on, Ryle's attack on 'Cartesian' view of the mind in *The Concept of Mind*, Austin's discussions of certainty in *Sense & Sensibilia*, and the various developments of functionalism and physicalism in America and Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, such as in the work of Sellars and Armstrong. Even within the debate about sense-data, one finds a significant shift between Broad and Price on the one hand and Ayer on the other, under the influence of the Vienna Circle.

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46. One of the most notorious passages expressing this idea is to be found in Locke's discussion of Molyneux's question: '...we bring our selves by use, to judge of the one [Space, Figure and Motion] by the other [Light and Colour]. This, in many cases, by a settled habit, in things whereof we have frequent experience, is performed so constantly, and so quick, that we take for the Perception of Sensation, which is an *Idea* formed by our Judgment; so that the one, *viz.* that of Sensation, serves only to excite the other, and is scarce taken notice of it self...' (Locke 1975), BK.II Ch.IX, sec. 9, pp.146-7. The idea expressed here is familiar already in Descartes, and is a stock suggestion of theories of visual perception in the seventeenth century.

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In reading Broad and Price, one gains the impression that the task of the philosopher of perception is to use carefully introspective tools to discover truths about the objects of immediate awareness. For these philosophers there are substantive disagreements among different theories of the objects of perception. In contrast, Ayer in *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* wishes to show that there is no such substantive debate to be had, instead, echoing ideas of Carnap, the disagreement is supposed to turn on a choice of language.

Now if this tradition shares with sense-datum theorists the view that there can only be the coherent possibility of error in our initial beliefs about appearances where those beliefs can be corrected by further introspection, and hence only given a substantive epistemology of the inner realm, then the rejection of any such substantive epistemology also renders apparently incoherent the idea that there is any such conflict between common sense and philosophical theory. Indeed, in these diverse traditions we can discern a number of different considerations all of which militate against the idea of taking seriously any such conflict between common sense and theory.

For Austin, our best grip on matters of fact is reflected in the ordinary language we use to describe things. One of the themes of *Sense & Sensibilia* is precisely how much subtler our ordinary descriptions of situations are than are the philosophers' abstractions of appearance and reality. If we can find no evident incoherence in the ways in which we normally talk, nor any evidence that we cannot articulate how things are, then there can be no good reason to suppose that our common sense conception of perception, as expressed in our ordinary ways of talking, is incoherent or inadequate.

On the other hand, when we look to the development of functionalism, we see the idea that our common concepts of mental kinds, including perception and perceptual states, form a theory, picking out the mental kinds through their causal roles. If one assumes that the employment of such a theory is at least practically useful in explaining and making sense of each other, then correspondingly it becomes hard to see how there can be any manifest inconsistency within folk theory, whatever its ultimate inadequacies might turn out to be. Since it is a fairly obvious fact to us that illusions and hallucinations are possible, one would expect such a theory to be able to accommodate them without any inconsistency, and so again one has reason to suppose that there can't be any serious conflict between a common sense conception of

appearances and any theory the existence of illusions might impose on us.

Hence the rejection of the early tradition of debate about perception brings with it a commitment to dissolving the force of any argument from illusion as coming into conflict with what we are already inclined to believe about perception, or anyway should believe about perception and perceptual states once we have fixed down a coherent story of the place of the mind within the world. It is not just that the possibility of conflict between common sense and philosophical theory is absent as a theme within the more recent intentional tradition, its absence is enforced by some of the further philosophical commitments of those who propound such an approach.

Given this, it really cannot be part of the interpretative story offered here that the reconciliation of the traditions is given in terms of them knowingly advancing error theories of perception and perceptual appearances. It is rather that, the threat of conflict between philosophical theory and common sense which was so much a part of the sense-datum tradition should be seen as lurking hidden within the intentional approach as well, once we recognise the commonality of these two approaches. Rather than there being a problem with our interpretation of the development of the debate, there is rather a fundamental philosophical problem underlying it all which is the central problem of perception for us now. If one wishes to avoid either the kind of incoherence found in Hume's position, or the kind of commitment to an inner realm open to discovery through introspection, how can one make sense of the need for an error-theory that the argument from illusion imposes on one?

## 7. Disjunctive Theories & Misleading Appearances

The above discussion suggests the following dilemma: if we allow that we may be in error about our perceptual states, then we must allow that there is a substantial epistemology of our knowledge of appearances. This suggests that if we wish to resist the conception of introspection found in Broad or Price, we must reject the problems of the argument from illusion as a pseudo-problem. However, if the above discussion of the history of the debate is correct, then we also know that the argument from illusion is not a pseudo-problem. Intentional theories of perception no less than sense-datum theories are going to turn out to be error-theories, whatever else they claim to be. So we cannot side step the puzzle of how we can reconcile the idea that appearances

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are obvious to us with the idea that they must also mislead.

I shall argue that we do have to face up to the question whether our conception of appearances can match their reality. Here it is important to note that the sense-datum tradition and the intentional approach are really not our only options here. As I have argued, if it is correct to think that introspection of experience gives equal support to both Actualism and Transparency, then both sense-datum theories and intentional theories will be forced to endorse some form of error-theory: all perceptual experiences will mislead to some extent about their own nature. Each of these approaches suggests that if one of the principles must be false in relation to illusions or hallucinations, then one of the principles must be false across the board, for all experience. It is this which leads to the threat of having to adopt some form of error-theory in general about experience.

An alternative response does not sever the link between introspection and the nature of appearance in quite that way. We are used to the idea that illusions and hallucinations may mislead us about the nature of the world around us. We might also think, in the light of the above discussion, that such states of mind can be misleading not only about the world but about themselves too. When one reflects on one's veridical perception of a tree it may then seem to one that one cannot be so and there be no mind-independent tree present to one. In this case, introspection would recommend the truth of both claims in respect to one's current state of mind. Perhaps, when one has an illusion or hallucination indistinguishable from that veridical perception, one is not only inclined to believe that there is a tree before one, but also that one's experience can be so only given the presence of that (non-existent) tree. In this case, experience misleads about the world and introspection of experience misleads about the nature of that experience.

If we adopt this view, we can claim that while Actualism and Transparency seem to hold of all experiences, in fact they hold only of veridical perceptions. In virtue of the fact that illusions and hallucinations are indistinguishable for one from perceptions, one will be inclined to suppose that the principles hold of them too, but in this one is led into error. Just as sense-datum theories and intentional theories are forced to endorse error-theories once we take seriously the introspective character of experience, so too this is a form of error-theory. But unlike the alternatives, it allows that in some cases at least introspection of experience does reveal to us the true nature of



appearance. And, as will be discussed later, this turns out to be far less revisionary of our conception of appearances and the kind of first person knowledge we have of them than the alternatives.

This approach suggests a stark contrast between the kinds of state of mind one is in when one veridically perceives and that one enjoys when suffering certain illusions or hallucinations. This approach has come to be known as disjunctivism about perception, a view which rejects the idea that experience forms a common kind among perceiving, having illusions or hallucinations. One of the claims that I shall develop below is that, if we can show that Naïve Realism is the best characterisation of how perceptual experience seems to us to be, then in the light of the argument from illusion, disjunctivism is the best account of experience to adopt. On the views recommended here, the argument from illusion shows that we must adopt in some form or other a kind of error theory about perception, and within that context, a kind of disjunctivism about perception is the most coherent and attractive form of error theory.

The tradition of reasoning which led to intentional theories of perception repudiate the idea that there is any *argument* from illusion or any conflict between common sense views of appearances and their real nature in part by rejecting the view of the mind that came to be associated with the sense-datum tradition. Our discussion here suggests that this has been a mistaken reaction. One cannot make sense of the sense-datum tradition without accepting that it is grounded in part on how those within it have responded to reflection on experience. It is wrong to think that the only way of taking seriously the argument from illusion is to adopt some form of sense-datum view, and the corresponding need to endorse introspection as a source of knowledge of an independent realm of the mind. The kind of Naïve Realist disjunctivism sketched above both faces up to the argument from illusion, and yet has no need to appeal to the idea of introspection revealing the disguised nature of appearance to one.

Once we identify the underlying common problem of perception we can make sense of the history of the philosophical debates about perception. That in turn requires us to take seriously both Naïve Realism and the conflict between it and the possible occurrence of illusions and hallucinations. This is a genuine philosophical problem that we have to face now, and cannot leave as simply as a result of the confusions which generated the sense-datum tradition. Although the traditional problems of perception

are normally characterised in terms of a problem about how we are to come to know the mind-independent world around us, the really deep problems here are those which concern our relation to our own minds, and how we can know the nature of perceptual appearances themselves.

## 8. Prospects

In what follows, I first set out to show that the argument from illusion does pose a genuine philosophical problem for us. That is to say, I shall first illustrate how we can construct an argument inconsistent with the truth of naïve realism, and show that we are indeed committed through introspective reflection on experience to naïve realism. The problem we face is then to explain what the correct account of perception can be. In the second part of the book, I explain how a form of disjunctivism gives the best resolution of the conflict between the argument from illusion and common sense, before going on to argue that the most central objections to disjunctive approaches to perception are ineffectual against this modification of naïve realism. The most important of these concerns is that with subjective indistinguishability and inner access to the nature of our conscious states, in considering the relations between this and scepticism with regard to the senses, we shall in turn see what the proper response is to our puzzles about how appearances can mislead about themselves. A disjunctivist modification of naïve realism allows us to accept the fact that some at least of our appearances are misleading about their nature, while still allowing that we have introspective access to the nature of appearances, and yet avoiding the kind of substantive commitments of the sense-datum tradition.

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