

# Seeing-As

Philipp Blum

Université de Genève

ESPP 2013

We see things, situations and scenes and we see that they are such-and-such. In between these two types of seeing, some have thought to discover a third, our seeing things as such-and-such, where this does not reduce to either 'simple' nor to 'propositional' seeing. I am interested in exploring this third way of seeing, on an adverbialist construal of the 'as'-clause, as a way of solving problems with more standard accounts, having to do both with the subject- and the object-side of the perceptual relation.

On the subject-side, these problems concern

- the question how to account for appearances and looks of things, or more generally the phenomenon that in veridical perception we not only learn how things are, but also how they look, where these two things may come apart;
- the question how our perception may both motivate our actions and justify our beliefs, typically in a non-inferential and 'direct' way.

On the object-side, an adverbialist account may shed light on

- the ontological status of non-canonical and ‘ephemeral’ objects of perception, in particular the question how we make sense of our seeing things ‘in’ others, in the way we see a reflection in a window;
- the way our experience involves ‘formal’ objects, in addition to the ‘direct’ objects it is directed at, which may explain its correctness conditions, in particular in cases where these come apart from the conditions of satisfaction of experiential content.

# No ontological motivation

Jackson argues that the adverbialist will not be able to ‘group’ perceptual features in the right way, analysing both the perception of a red square and a green circle and the perception of a green square and a red circle as a case of perceiving roundly, squarely, greenly and redly.

But we may accept states, processes, cases.

And some ambiguity may be an advantage:

“James Bond, freshly captured, cleverly stammered stupidly to his interrogators”

# The argument from perspective

- 1 Every intentional object is either existentially independent from its intentional acts, or dependent on it (in which case it is called a 'sense-datum')
  - 2 Oval and round are contrary properties.
  - 3 A same cup can look round from certain point of views, and elliptical from certain other ones.
- ∴ Therefore, at least one of these points of view does not present us with a mind-independent property of the cup, but with a mind-dependent sense-datum.
- 4 There is no reason to privilege one point of view over another.
- ∴ Therefore, we are always presented with sense-data.

The best objection to the argument from perspective is that premise **3** is ambiguous between

- 3'** A same cup can look *round* from certain points of view, and *elliptical* from certain other ones.
- 3''** A same cup can look *round from certain points of view* and *elliptical from certain other ones*.

The best description of the phenomenological fact motivating **3** is, I submit, the following one:

- 3'''** A same cup can look *round from certain points of view* and *round from certain other ones*.

**Adverbialist solution:** Looking round from a certain point of view is not an appearance property, or to be accounted for in terms of phenomenal character, but is to be given an adverbialist reading: the cup looks round as seen from here.

*“Suppose with the neo-sentimentalist that being valuable is understood in terms of appropriate emotions or good, undefeated reasons to feel emotions. What, then, would knowledge of the value of an object amount to? [. . . ] presumably a neo-sentimentalist must hold that we sometimes have knowledge of the appropriateness of an emotion. And in the most basic cases this could only be knowledge that an emotion is appropriate, that there are undefeated reasons to feel an emotion. But if we have knowledge of values it is extremely implausible to think that such knowledge consists only of knowledge that, a knowledge by description which has no anchorage in any knowledge by acquaintance. On one common and plausible view, knowledge that p cannot motivate; even axiological knowledge, knowledge that it is valuable that p, is an intellectual state and, like all such states, cannot motivate. Feeling (dis)values, however, is no intellectual state and can motivate.” (Mulligan 2007: 225)*



# Ephemeral objects of perception

We see flames, soap-bubbles, glimmers, highlights, reflections, echoes, shivers, atmospheric phenomena like rainbows and mirages, shadows, after-images, constellations, affordances. Internal adjectives: what you taste is the taste of the wine, but that does not mean that there is such a thing as the taste of the wine over and above how the wine tastes to you.

**Adverbialist solution:** we taste the wine as having a certain taste, see the window as reflecting ourselves, hear the sound as echoed back from the wall.

# Perception of values

Cognitivists accept:  $x$  regrets that  $p \rightarrow (x$  correctly regrets that  $p$  iff it is regrettable that  $p)$

“Friends of correctness conditions” subscribe to: If  $x$  correctly regrets that  $p$ , then ( $x$  correctly regrets that  $p$  because it is regrettable that  $p)$

while buck-passers or neo-sentimentalists combine it with: If it is regrettable that  $p$ , then (it is regrettable that  $p$  because ( $x$  regrets that  $p \rightarrow x$  correctly regrets that  $p)$ )

The problem of buck-passing theories of value is that they get the explanatory direction wrong: the Evil Demon who inflicts pain unless I prefer the saucer of mud makes my preferring it valuable, but does not make eating the saucer of mud valuable.

**Adverbialist solution:** My fear of the dog is accompanied by a sensation of its dangerousness, which is not a representation of danger, but rather a perception of the dog as dangerous.