

Appearance and Reality

An inaugural lecture as Director of the University of London's Institute of Philosophy

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by

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I'd like to begin, if I may, by repeating myself. When I spoke at the Institute's official launch last June, I quoted W.V. Quine's remark that logic is an old subject, and since 1879 it has been a great one; and I commented that whatever the truth of this, it is undeniably true that philosophy is an old subject and has been a great one since the 5th century BC. The foundation of an institute of philosophy in the University of London has been, in my opinion, a great thing for philosophy and for the University. Our mission is to promote and support philosophy of the highest quality in all its forms, inside and outside the university. With our programmes of events, fellowships and research facilitation, I think we have been carrying out this mission pretty well since our foundation in 2005. But I have already said enough in public about the Institute. Given the occasion, it is appropriate for me to say something instead about philosophy itself.

I have to confess, however, that the philosophy of philosophy has not been one of the discipline's greatest achievements. In a fine understatement, the Australian philosopher David Armstrong once called it an 'unrewarding subject'. No-one is really quite sure what philosophy is, and in my opinion all accounts of what it is are utterly unconvincing. For myself, I don't find this particularly worrying. We aren't

really sure what science is, either, or poetry, or art – in the sense that we can't *define* these practices, or tell someone who is unfamiliar with them what they are. But those who know enough about these things know them when they see them, and this is the same for philosophy as for art and science. Defining things is a pretty over-rated activity.

What is odd about philosophy, though, is that every so often philosophers are told that philosophy is impossible or that it cannot be done, or that it is all based on some kind of mistake. And some of these denouncements have come from the most influential philosophers of the 20th century. Ludwig Wittgenstein came to think that philosophy was a kind of disease which was in need of therapy rather than government funding; Martin Heidegger thought that things started going wrong with Plato, when philosophers started to lose sight of what he called the 'question of being'; and W.V. Quine thought that philosophy should hand over its traditional role to science, allowing only that 'philosophy of science is philosophy enough'.

Philosophy itself has perversely collaborated in its own public denunciation. When I was a first year undergraduate, I was told to read A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*, which as you will all know, begins with the line: 'the traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful'.¹ This was before I had any idea *whatsoever* of what the traditional disputes of philosophers even were. Imagine starting a degree course in engineering or history by being given a book which begins: 'the subject you have decided to study is essentially rubbish'.

With friends like this, philosophy hardly needs enemies. Yet, as with the rumours Mark Twain heard about his own death, these rumours of the death of philosophy are greatly exaggerated. Anyone familiar with contemporary philosophy

¹ *Language, Truth and Logic* p.1

will know that philosophy is far from dead, and far from impossible. The ideas of the philosophers just mentioned are as disputable as any in philosophy – if not more so. We are not obliged to accept what Wittgenstein, Heidegger or Quine say about the possibility of philosophy. A better view is that of my teacher Hugh Mellor, who would typically answer the charge that philosophy is impossible by saying that we know it is possible, because it exists.

Nonetheless, it has to be admitted that philosophy is not popular in some quarters, even outside philosophy. It is often criticised for being too arid and ‘technical’, as well as irrelevant to the rest of society. John Gray once memorably – though surely unfairly – commented that contemporary philosophy has as much relevance to society as heraldry.

It is true that much philosophy is pretty dry and can appear frustratingly pedantic. This is not something new: it’s always been like this. Try as you might, it is hard to get much aesthetic edification from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Although contemporary philosophy – particularly that inspired by logic with its *ps* and *qs*, is sometimes singled out for special opprobrium – the idea that ‘all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy’ was no less true in Keats’s day as it is today.

But the criticism is misguided. Philosophy is, first and foremost, an *intellectual* attempt to understand the world and our place in it; it is not an aesthetic project, it is not about charm, and it does not aim towards aesthetic pleasure, satisfaction or edification. It aims towards understanding. It is, nonetheless, a curious feature of philosophy that it inspires dismissive remarks and even contempt from outside. This is something that requires a little reflection. Few outside mathematics would dare to criticise the most abstract projects of pure mathematics; but for some reason, philosophy is fair game.

I am not thinking here simply of the misguided attempts to call upon the authority of Heidegger or Wittgenstein and declare that philosophy is over; or (even worse) of those who think that no tradition of abstract study or non-practical study is worthwhile. I am thinking even of those who clearly believe that there is such a thing as the truth about the world, who think that we can know it, and that this knowledge can be something worth having for its own sake. Stephen Hawking, one of the world's leading cosmologists and one of the most famous scientists of our age, has this to say in his best-seller, *A Brief History of Time*:

‘Philosophers have reduced the scope of their inquiry so much that Wittgenstein, the most famous philosopher of this century, said, “The sole remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language”. What a come-down from the great tradition of Aristotle and Kant!’²

Hawking says this in the course of explaining how physics has taken over the role of philosophy in answering the big questions. But two things about this remark immediately stand out. First, I am not an expert on Wittgenstein, but as far as I know, Wittgenstein never said what Hawking says he did. Still, he did say some very similar things, so we can pass over that one. Second, it is odd to use Wittgenstein as an example of a philosopher who has ‘reduced the scope of his inquiry’, since Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* (to which Hawking may be alluding) is a work which attempts to make claims about the entire world, beginning famously with ‘The world is all that is the case’ and ending with ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’. In the preface to the book, Wittgenstein said that ‘the problems have in

² *A Brief History of Time* page 206.

essentials been finally solved'. He may have tried to do this and failed, but no-one could have accused Wittgenstein of downsizing his ambitions.

Nonetheless, I suspect that there may be readers of Stephen Hawking's book who share his view on philosophy – perhaps because of encounters with pundits demanding that you explain what you mean by a certain word, or to 'define your terms'; or perhaps because of a familiarity with something known as 'linguistic philosophy' which flourished as an explicit ideology for a few years in Oxford in the 1950s.

The analysis of language is a fine thing, of course; but what has it got to do with philosophy? Philosophers philosophise about language (in part) because they philosophise about almost everything, and because language raises especially difficult philosophical questions. But philosophy is, as I have said, an attempt to understand the world and our place in it, and it is hard to see why the analysis of language should have any specially privileged role in this attempt. As the early 20th century philosopher Frank Ramsey said, 'we are not schoolboys parsing sentences'. So what can Wittgenstein possibly have meant when he said that the remaining task for philosophy is the analysis of language? It turns out that the answer to this question is more interesting than someone like Stephen Hawking might think.

Wittgenstein is sometimes classified as one of the first 'analytic' philosophers, thinking of analytic philosophy as a tradition which began with Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore at the end of the 19th century. I agree with those who argue that the term 'analytic' in the phrase 'analytic philosophy' is now so disputed as to be almost worthless, but nonetheless the historical movements here are relatively well-understood. Moore and Russell led what became known as the 'revolt against idealism'. The idealism in question was the metaphysical view, inspired by Hegel,

that we can never experience the world as it really is, but our experience and thought can only approximate to the ultimate reality, which some of these idealists (the most distinguished of which were FH Bradley, JME McTaggart and TH Green) called the 'absolute'. Bradley and Green thought that ordinary empirical judgements, like the judgement that the cat is on the mat, cannot be simply true. Rather these judgements can only ever be partial approximations to the truth.

Moore and Russell rejected this completely. They insisted that ordinary judgements like this could be simply and absolutely true or false. The judgement that the cat is on the mat can be made by confronting experience directly; we can judge that the cat is on the mat on the basis of our experience. The judgement is true or false not because of how some more or less inadequate representation relates to the absolute, but simply because how things are – the cat, the mat, the one being on the other – in the world around us.

They realised, of course, that they could not just *say* this; they had to say how it was possible. How it is possible to make a judgement about the world around us? What is required of us, and of the world, and how should they be related? We can understand objective truth – truth about the mind-independent world – only if we understand judgement. But to understand judgement we have to understand *what* is judged. Russell and Moore called what is judged a *proposition*. Propositions are not words, they are not even sentences, they are what sentences express. An interest in propositions is not an interest in words: it is most fundamentally an interest in truth and therefore in reality. It is propositions which are true and false, and so the truth or falsehood of judgements reduces to the truth and falsehood of propositions. To understand judgement, then, we have to understand the proposition.

The problem Russell and Moore now encountered was how to understand the structure or the *unity* of the proposition. We can best understand this by comparing propositions with language. A sentence, like ‘the cat is on the mat’ *says something*, or it can be *used* to say something. A list of words, ‘the’, ‘cat’, ‘on’, ‘the’, ‘mat’ does not say anything – it is just a list. To say something, the words have to be combined into a sentence. The German logician and philosopher Gottlob Frege had answered this by saying that the different parts of a sentence have to play very different kinds of role. Names are fundamentally different kind of terms from general terms (what he called ‘concept-words’, what are called today ‘predicates’). Concept-words he thought of as being *functional* expressions, exactly like functional expressions in mathematics (square root, addition and so on). Names – words for objects – are the inputs for the concept expressions. The outputs were names for truth and falsehood.

Russell thought that propositions – the things we judge – are made up of, or constituted by, the very things we think about. Russell thought this because of a fundamental principle of his philosophy: what we can make a judgement about must be independent of our mind. He moved from this to the claim that what we *judge* must be independent of our minds, and he thought that this requires that what we judge is *made up* of things independent of our minds. So the proposition that the cat is on the mat is actually *constituted* by the cat, the mat and the relationship they have.

But the proposition could not simply *be* the collection of the cat, the mat and the relationship. For that collection exists whether the cat is on the mat or the mat is on the cat, or neither is on either. The collection is the same, however they are related. So how then are the constituents of a proposition related, on Russell’s view? Something must account for the way these things ‘hang together’ in the proposition,

but what could it be? This question gave Russell one of his biggest headaches, and it was one he never quite managed to get rid of.

There were two questions. First, how can the constituents in a proposition combine in order for judgement to be possible? And second, how can things in the world combine in order for judgement to be *correct*? Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein all gave different answers to this second question. Their answers can be summarised like this. Frege thought that objects were one kind of thing (complete in themselves, not needing anything else for their completion) but properties (which he called ‘concepts’) were a completely different kind of thing. Concepts contain ‘gaps’ so to speak, whereas objects don’t – objects are complete in themselves. When an object is (so to speak) ‘put’ into the gap in the concept, then this yields either truth or falsehood. Judgement is possible because what can be judged picks out objects and their properties, and their combination yields the value true or false.

On Russell’s view, both objects and properties are complete in themselves. So an account of judgement needs to explain how they fit together. One version of his view was that in addition to the cat and the mat, there is the relation between them – the relation of *something’s being on something* – which something entire in itself, but *also* there is a complex ‘formed by certain constituents combined in a certain manner’, where the ‘mode’ of combination is not itself one of the ‘constituents of the complex’.³

Wittgenstein rejected both Frege’s and Russell’s views. Wittgenstein’s solution to this problem in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (published in 1921) rested on a wholly different account of the relation between judgment and reality. The world, he says at the beginning of the *Tractatus*, is the ‘totality of facts, not of things’.

³ Russell, ‘Of Functions’ p.98.

At the ground level, there are the facts: everything that is the case. There are objects, too; objects are the constituents of facts, but they are not complete in themselves. Rather, objects are only what they are because of the ways they combine in facts. In a sense, then, objects also have ‘gaps’ in them. It is the gaps in objects which enable them to be constituents of the atomic facts, since it is what enables them to combine with other objects. This is why Wittgenstein says ‘In the atomic fact, objects hang one in another, like the links in a chain’.⁴ The thing about the links in a chain is that they are incomplete in themselves. To paraphrase a remark of Colin Johnston’s, the theories of Frege and Russell both ‘have it that it is *something other than the objects* which is responsible for the unity of atomic facts’.⁵ Wittgenstein’s alternative is that it is the *objects themselves* which allow essentially for the possibility of unity: this is what it means to say that objects hang together like the links in a chain. (I am very happy to acknowledge, especially on this occasion, that I owe whatever understanding I have of this aspect of Wittgenstein’s philosophy to Colin Johnston, a former student at UCL and now a Jacobsen Research Fellow at the Institute of Philosophy.)

Wittgenstein’s account of truth and the proposition required that the fundamental structure of the world be a certain way: it should contain simple objects connected in atomic facts. The basic language used to describe the atomic facts should parallel this too. But – and this is the problem – the world and language does not *seem* this way. So what we must explain is why it is that our language does not *seem* to involve statements of these peculiar atomic facts, why we don’t have any names in our language for the simple objects etc., -- given that in reality they *must* be

⁴ *Tractatus* 2.03

⁵ ‘The Unity of Tractarian Fact’ forthcoming.

like this. In other words, we have to explain the relationship between the appearance of the world in language, and its reality.

The account that we have to give must explain how the ordinary statements we make are related to the underlying facts. We need to give an analysis of language because we do not confront the simple propositions or the simple facts of the world *neat*, so to speak. Wittgenstein's view was that we need an analysis of ordinary propositions, which will (in Wittgenstein's words)

‘come to the point where it reaches propositional forms which are not themselves composed of simpler propositional forms. We must eventually reach the ultimate connection of the terms, the immediate connection which cannot be broken without destroying the propositional form as such. The propositions which represent this ultimate connexion of terms I call, after Russell, atomic propositions ... It is the task of the theory of knowledge to find them and to understand their construction out of the words or symbols. This task is very difficult, and Philosophy has hardly yet begun to tackle it..⁶

Where language and the world are concerned, then, things are not as they seem. Our language as we have it is not a transparent guide to reality, but needs to be analysed in order to get at the ultimate reality.

The large theme in philosophy that Wittgenstein's remarks point towards, then, is the relationship between appearance and reality, between how things seem and how they are. Far from being a recent invention of ‘analytic’ or ‘linguistic’ philosophy, this theme is as old as philosophy itself. Before Socrates, Parmenides had

⁶ ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ p.29

denied that the world contained any real plurality; plurality and difference were mere appearance, the underlying reality must be 'one' (whatever that means). Plato thought that the world we experience is a kind of illusion, not the ultimate reality. For Plato, the world of appearances was, in Yeats's magical phrase 'but a spume that plays upon a ghostly paradigm of things'. Aristotle, by contrast, thought that the ultimate realities of the world (which he called substances) were things that we did encounter in experience. This is the point of the contrast between Plato and Aristotle, represented in one of the few great paintings of philosophers, Raphael's *School of Athens* – where Aristotle calmly holds his hand towards the earth and Plato points towards the skies.

Conceived in this general way, we can see the theme exemplified throughout philosophy. Leibniz, for example, thought that cause and effect was a kind of appearance, and the underlying reality was what he called the pre-established harmony between substances. Kant called the world of everyday objects the 'phenomenal world' – the word 'phenomenal' deriving from the Greek word for appearance – and distinguished it from the world of things in themselves. And I have already mentioned, the idealist tradition which followed Kant and Hegel, was exemplified in England by F.H. Bradley's most famous work, *Appearance and Reality* published in 1883.

The general problem of understanding the relationship between the appearance of things and the underlying reality has not disappeared from contemporary philosophy. Contemporary metaphysics is *naturalistic* in approach, meaning roughly that metaphysical theories must be informed by the discoveries of natural sciences, pre-eminently physics. But the world according to contemporary physics is made up of a four- (or more-) dimensional spacetime, and the apparently solid objects

occupying it are made up of combinations of smaller and more weird and unfamiliar particles held together by fields of force, in what is mostly empty space.

But this is not how things seem to us. We don't see things in four dimensions, we don't see the past or the future, and objects do not look to be mostly empty space. So even on a naturalistic world picture, any adequate account of the world has to explain how the world as we experience it (the world of appearance) is related to the world as described by physics. I think it's fair to say that attempts to do this have not got very far.

I do not mean this to be an *objection* to the naturalistic world picture. Wittgenstein once asked why people used to think that the sun went round the earth. One of his students (we might even say, his disciples) said 'because it looks as if the sun goes round the earth'. Wittgenstein responded: 'but how would it look if the earth went round the sun?'. The obvious answer is: exactly the same. We can make a parallel point about the idea that matter might be largely empty space. Why did people think that matter was solid all the way down? Because it looks as if matter is solid all the way down! But how would it look if it were mostly empty space? Exactly the same!

The point I am making is not about the *correctness* of the naturalistic world view, but rather about how we are to explain the *appearance* of things if this view were correct. We can see this question is of the same general form as the question which arises for Plato, Leibniz, Kant and also for Wittgenstein: given that reality is a certain way, how do we explain the fact that it does not *seem* that way?

We can now see then why Stephen Hawking is so completely wrong in what he says about philosophy: Wittgenstein's views in his *Tractatus* are not a 'comedown' from the great tradition of Aristotle and Kant. Like these two philosophers, the

Tractatus is involved in its own engagement with the problem of appearance and reality. It may give an unbelievable solution to that problem – but this can't have been Hawking's complaint, since Kant's solution is equally unbelievable. Hawking's criticism was that philosophy has downsized its ambitions, maybe because it reduced itself to (as it may be) parsing sentences. I hope my brief remarks about the history of the problem of judgement and the unity of the proposition have shown how mistaken this is. Philosophy has not 'reduced the scope of its enquiry'. The enquiry has the same scope, even if the results are somewhat different.

The point I want to make here, though, is not just to tick off Stephen Hawking – to repeat the words of Bob Dylan, 'don't criticise what you can't understand' – enjoyable though this is. It is rather to point out the general structure of the pervasive theme of appearance and reality, and how this theme has manifested itself throughout western philosophy, even at times when it might seem as if the traditional themes of philosophy had been transformed into something else. An even more general point is that philosophy is a tradition of thought, whose problems are shaped by the solutions posed by previous generations, and that is one reason why philosophers should study their history. When considering the question of the relationship between appearance and reality, we are in the position, like Newton, of standing on the shoulders of giants. This does not mean that we should go so far as to let giants stand on *our* shoulders; that way, we won't get to see anything. But if we want to understand what we are doing when philosophising, we have to understand whose shoulders we are standing on.

In this area of philosophy, I claim, we are trying to understand the relationship between appearance and reality. Some might say that talking about 'reality' in this cavalier way ignores some of the most important developments in philosophy, those

developments which have questioned whether there is such a thing as reality or truth, or whether this rests upon some misguided conception of our ability to comprehend the world. This idea really deserves a lecture all of its own, but you will be relieved to know that time is short, and so I can only be dogmatic.

It seems to me that the frequently repeated claim that certain philosophers have undermined the applicability of the concepts of truth and reality is entirely mistaken. This simply has not been shown, or demonstrated, or established. It is true that although the concept of truth is in some ways a simple concept – Donald Davidson once called it ‘one of the simplest concepts we have’⁷ – the debates about the concept have been among the most complex. However, the fact that there is dispute about the concept of truth does not imply that it is in some way dodgy or that we should abandon it. Nor should the fact that people disagree about *what* is true. Disagreements about what is true are disagreements about what is the case, or about how things are. But without the concept of what is true – or the concept of how things are – we would be at a loss to say what real disagreement is at all.

The same goes for the concept of reality. Reality – *what there is* – is, like truth, something indefinable, in the sense that the concept of reality cannot be *defined* in terms of ‘simpler’ concepts. Someone who did not understand the concept of reality could not be brought to understand it by saying that it is *what there is*. And of course there are disagreements about what reality is like, some of which are hard to resolve. This does not make reality – any more than truth – a dispensable, outmoded, inapplicable or even an especially problematic concept. Without the concept of reality we would not be able to make sense of the idea of any inquiry, the results of which are constrained by how things are. We cannot dispense with these concepts without

⁷ ‘The Structure and Content of Truth’

dispensing with the idea of inquiry itself. (These dogmatic pronouncements will be not be news to philosophers; but experience has shown that they sometimes need to be made.)

My theme – appearance and reality – is, of course, impossibly broad. And as the examples above show, there is not *one* thing which can be called the problem of appearance and reality. I am not saying that there is. There are many problems which can be understood as falling under this heading, and we can only make progress by focussing on individual versions of these problems. So in the rest of this lecture, I want to make some comments about how this theme has been exemplified in an area of my own research, the philosophy of mind.

My interest here is in appearance, rather than reality. In thinking about appearance, we should distinguish between questions about the appearances of *things* and questions about the nature of appearances *themselves*. (If I were coming from a slightly different discipline in the humanities, I might have used the general algorithm for generating academic paper titles, and called this lecture ‘The appearance of nature and the nature of appearance’.) The question I previously raised about how to accommodate our ordinary conception of objects within the physicalist world picture, is (so to speak) about the appearance of *nature*, the appearance of *things*. But there is also the question of the nature of the appearances themselves. What is it for something to appear at all? What is it, for example, for someone to have something presented to them in experience or thought? This is a question in the philosophy of mind.

The philosophy of mind is not the science of the mind, although its results should of course be consistent with truths discovered by any science. A large part of the philosophy of mind consists of properly identifying the subject-matter of any

study of the mind. We know that digestion is not a mental process, and visual perception is; but why are things like this? It is not an answer to say: because psychology does not study digestion. This gets matters the wrong way around: psychology does not study digestion *because* digestion is not a mental process and psychology is the science of the mental.

What we are after, as philosophers of mind, is an understanding of our mental life and what makes it mental. Part of this is understanding, it seems to me, consists in understanding the appearance of mind, what my UCL colleague Mike Martin has nicely called ‘the shallows of the mind’. Since ‘phenomena’ literally means *appearance*, then ‘phenomenology’ would be a good word for this aspect of the philosophy of mind, had it not been already captured as a word for an approach to philosophy as a whole.

This idea of phenomenology as the systematic study of mental phenomena or appearances derives from Edmund Husserl. Husserl put the concept of *intentionality* at the heart of his philosophy. ‘Intentionality’ here means the direction of the mind upon its objects: the fact that, as Husserl’s teacher Franz Brentano put it, ‘in the idea, something is conceived, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on’. I think Husserl and Brentano were right to give intentionality such a central role, and it seems to me that it is this idea we need to understand the idea of appearance.

Throughout his writings on intentionality, Husserl always took care to distinguish the *object* of an experience from what we would now call the *content* of the experience (but he would call the *noema* or the *meaning* of the experience). I would express this distinction as follows. For every state of mind, there is something which it is its object. If you believe something, the object of your belief is what you

believe; if you want something, the object of belief is what you want; if you fear something, the object of your fear is what you fear; and so on ... you get the general idea. In addition to the object of an mental state, there is also the way in which this object can be presented to you. The very same cat can be presented to you in different ways.

How do we apply the ideas of object and content to perceptual experience? The natural and straightforward thing to say is that the object of a visual experience is what we see. If the cat is what we see, then it is the object of our experience. The content of the experience would then be the way in which the cat is presented to you in experience – in the case of vision, it is the way the cat looks. The cat is one thing, it is the object of your experience; the way it looks is something else. A cat can look a certain way – it can look friendly, for example – even though it is not that way. This is one reason for distinguishing between the object and the content of an experience: the object (the cat) can be the same though the content (the way it looks) is different.

Husserl's distinction between the content and the object of an experience applies, then, to perception as it does to other mental states. But there is a difference here between perception and other mental states, in particular the states of mind I was talking about earlier, belief and judgement. When you believe that the cat is on the mat, what do you believe? The pleonastic answer is: that the cat is on the mat. The object of your belief is a *proposition*, in the sense of Moore and Russell. It is something that can be true or false: the cat can be on the mat, or it can not. For this reason, Russell called belief or judgement a *propositional attitude*: an attitude to a proposition. I will use Russell's terminology in what follows.

Things are not the same with perceptual experience. The object of your experience – by my simple formula – is what you experience: the things around you.

Of course, you cannot experience things without experiencing them as being a certain way. Remember the different ways you can experience the same cat. But this does not mean that *what* you experience is the *way you experience* the cat: Husserl's distinction between object and content must be borne in mind. But the point should be clear that if we are going to start our inquiry with the idea of *what we perceive* at all, then we should hang on to the idea that what we perceive are the things around us. The *content* of our perception is something else.

Unfortunately a broad consensus in the philosophy of perception today does not recognise this, and for this reason has been making a mess of the idea of the content of experience. The consensus is that perceptual experience has a structure a bit like belief or judgement. This idea – one which I once mistakenly endorsed myself – needs to be undermined if we are really to understand what appearances are.

One of the world's leading philosophers of mind, John McDowell, has famously said that when one experiences the world, 'one takes in, for instance, *sees*, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge'.⁸ McDowell's point is that just as you can see that the cat is on the mat, you can also judge that the cat is on the mat. The content of the experience is the content of a possible judgement. He thinks that saying this is the only way to account for the relation between mind and world.

And yet it seems to me that this position cannot be right, since there is no plausible sense in which what you judge is the sort of thing that you can see to be the case. If I judge that the cat is on the mat, I may do that because I see that it is, but that does not mean that *what* I see *is* what I judge. What I see is a particular cat, of a particular colour, curled up in a particular way. What I judge is silent on all this. The

⁸ *Mind and World* p.9

judgement does not specify the colour of the cat, its specific position, its size, its level of furriness ... and do on. What I judge is merely that the cat is on the mat, and this is compatible with many ways in which the cat can actually be. The visual experience of the cat, by contrast, is compatible with far fewer ways. Therefore, I claim, what you see, or visually experience, cannot be the same as what you judge. McDowell's claim is incorrect.

Thinking of perception as a propositional attitude in this way can lead to even more strange claims. Take the following example from a recent paper by Alex Byrne, a prominent philosopher of perception:

All parties agree ... that perceiving is very much like a traditional propositional attitude, such as believing or intending ... when one has a perceptual experience, one bears the perception relation to a certain proposition *p*.⁹

In my view, Byrne has let whatever analogy there is between perception and belief run away with him. He says that in perception, the perceiver bears a *perception relation* to a proposition. But surely if we bear the perception relation to anything, it is to the perceptible things around us, not to any proposition. Yet the view that perception is a relation to a proposition derives from over-generalising from the case of belief and judgement: just as belief is a relation to a proposition, so perception must be too.

This is why I don't think that these remarks of Byrne's are a mere slip: rather they spring from the mistaken idea that perception is a propositional attitude. For it is

⁹ 'Perception and Conceptual Content' p.245

perfectly OK to say that when you judge something, you bear a 'judging' relation to what you judge; just as it is perfectly OK to say that when you see something, you 'bear a seeing relation' to what you see. Things only start going wrong when you add the assumption that what you see to be the case is what you can judge. For then you are led, unless you are very careful, into saying that what you see is a proposition, since that is also what you judge. But if this, as I have argued, is absurd, then so is the idea that perception or seeing is fundamentally a propositional attitude.

This conclusion indicates the direction in which I think philosophising about perceptual appearances should go. Where does reality come into all this? The mind is part of reality, so if having a mind is having things appear to you a certain way, then this is part of reality too. In addition, the science of the mind studies the mind. We might call this the underlying reality, so long as we do not thereby deny that the appearance of mind might also be an appearance that is fundamentally correct. To understand whether or not this is so, however, we have to gain a correct understanding of the appearances. This seems a nice way to bring me to the conclusion of this lecture: that to understand reality, we have first to understand appearances.

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