The Invalidity of the Argument from Illusion and the Argument from Appearance

Abstract

One crucial premise in the argument from illusion is the Phenomenal Principle. It roughly states that if there sensibly appears to be something that possesses a sensible quality, then there is something of which the subject is aware that has that sensible quality. The principle thus enables the inference from a mere appearance to an existence (usually a mental one). In the argument from appearance, a similar move is taken by some philosophers –– this time, they infer a content from a mere appearance. There are two kinds of defences for the Phenomenal Principle in the literature, namely the epistemological one (e.g., H.H.Price) and the semantic one (e.g., Frank Jackson). I argue that neither consolidates the Phenomenal Principle. I particularly demonstrate that the appearance verb in premise 1 of the argument from illusion is not used in the phenomenal sense as it is used in the Phenomenal Principle, which renders the argument essentially invalid. To avoid invalidity, the proponents either give up the phenomenal use, which makes the argument unable to serve its original purpose, i.e. inferring an unusual existence, or they insist on the phenomenal use in all premises of

the argument, which will trivialise the argument. I also demonstrate that a similar objection applies to the argument from appearance.

Keywords: appearance verbs, illusion, invalidity, the Phenomenal Principle, the phenomenal use

Introduction

Appearance words, such as "appears", "looks", "sounds", etc., play a unique role in the contemporary philosophy of mind debate. Philosophers analyse various uses of appearance words and expect that some uses could convey a particular metaphysical position of mind or consciousness.[1] Two prominent examples of this endeavour are the argument from illusion (see Ayer, 1967; Foster, 2000; Price, 1932; Robinson, 1994; Smith, 2002) and the argument from appearance (Byrne, 2009; Schellenberg, 2011; Siegel, 2010). The former has lost its popularity as the sense-data theory fades out, although illusions still interest philosophers.[2] By contrast, the argument from appearance draws more attention, probably because it is centred in the debate between the dominant representationism[3] and the newly upsurging naive realism[4] about perception. Both arguments rely on a particular use of appearance words: the

[1] Chisholm (1957) and Jackson (1977) are early practitioners.

[2] See Brewer (2008), Phillips (2016), French and Phillips (2020).

[3] See, for example, Dretske (1995), Tye (1995, 2007), Crane (2009), Pautz (2010). I lump them together under the heading representationalism. This is certainly imprecise but only serves for the current purpose. And for the criticism of representationalism see Langsam (forthcoming), Robinson (2009).

[4] Naive realism, coming in many forms, mainly maintains that a (veridical) perceptual experience is constituted at least partly by the perceived worldly items, such as objects, sensible qualities, events and states, etc. See, for example, Campbell (2002), Martin (2004; 2006), Brewer (2011), Allen (2015), Moran (2018), Niikawa (2019), Ivanov (2022), Beck (2022).

argument from illusion on the phenomenal use and the argument from appearance on the noncomparative use (see section 3 and section 6, respectively) .

This paper is mainly a reminiscence of the classic argument from illusion, not defending it, but providing a new objection to it. The key idea behind my objection is that appearance words bear different usages or meanings across the argument, which renders the argument invalid. One may suspect that this endeavour is meaningful or academically interesting as the argument has long been outdated, and indeed very few philosophers still take it seriously.[5] So why should we make an effort to rekindle the debate in any sense? Here are my motivations. First, my objection is not repeating old ones; the novelty of my objection itself may be valued. Second, I personally do not think that the spirit behind the argument from illusion has gone away, because when contemporary philosophers of mind discuss the phenomenal character as a purely subjective quality that Jackson's (1982) Mary gains after being released and that Chalmers's (1996) zombie lacks, they are not far from the earlier proponents of the argument from illusion who devise the phenomenal use of appearance words to argue for the existence of something purely mental.[6] Third, and perhaps more interestingly, my objection against the classic argument can also be modified to reject the argument from appearance. This new potential application, I believe, deserves a revisit of the classic argument.

Roadmap: In section 1, I lay out the argument from illusion and the argument from appearance. Sections 2 and 3 discuss two classical defences of the argument

[5] Robinson (1994), Foster (2000), Smith (2002), French and Walters (2018) are the exceptions.
[6] Jackson and Robinson are typical representatives, who support both the argument from illusion and the knowledge argument. See Jackson (1977, 1982), Robinson (1982, 1994).

from illusion. In section 4, I explain why the appearance word in the first premise of each argument takes the common use. In section 5, I demonstrate that the argument from illusion is invalid. A similar objection is proposed in section 6 which shows that the argument from appearance is also invalid.

1. The argument from illusion and the argument from appearance

In an illusion, the perceived object appears to be different than it actually is. For example, the Müller-Lyer illusion exhibits two equal-length straight arrow-like segments that look to be unequal. The grey strawberries illusion presents a bowl of strawberries that look red, but are not red. The checker shadow illusion depicts a checker with light and dark squares, shadowed by a green cylinder, but the light and dark squares are actually of equal brightness. In the philosophical literature, many seemingly non-illusory examples fall into the category of illusion. For example, a straight stick looks bent when half of it is submerged in a tank of water; a white table appears yellowish when it is bathed in yellow light; everything looks blurred for a shortsighted person when she takes off her glasses, etc. These examples also meet the necessary conditions of illusion – namely that the perceived object appears to be different than it actually is. But it is controversial to classify them as illusions.[7]

The argument from illusion exploits illusory phenomena, arguing that the subject is not (directly) aware of ordinary environmental objects in perception but is only directly aware of "sense-data" that are not ordinary environmental objects per

[7] For the criticism of the abuse of illusion, see Austin (1962, p. 26). My position in this paper is neutral on this issue.

se.[8] For the sake of convenience, I cite Howard Robinson's version of the argument as my target for discussion.[9] Such an artificial choice will not make my criticism lose its general force because, to the best of my knowledge, other formulations have the same problem. Here is Robinson's argument:

> P1. In some cases of perception, physical objects appear other than they actually are—that is, they appear to possess sensible qualities that they do not actually possess.
>
> P2. Whenever something appears to a subject to possess a sensible quality, there is something of which the subject is aware which does possess that quality.
>
> P3. In some cases of perception there is something of which the subject is aware which possesses sensible qualities which the physical object the subject is purportedly perceiving does not possess.
>
> P4. If *a* possesses a sensible quality that *b* lacks, then *a* is not identical to *b*.
>
> P5. In some cases of perception that of which the subject is aware is something other than the physical object the subject is purportedly perceiving.
>
> P6. There is such continuity between those cases in which objects appear other than they actually are and cases of veridical perception that the same analysis of perception must apply to both.

[8] I follow the tradition that supposes that the argument from illusion promotes the sense-data theory. Representationalists, of course, can modify it to favour their view.
[9] Similar arguments can be seen, for instance, in A.D.Smith (2002, pp. 21–28), Snowdon (1992), French and Walters (2018).

> C1. Therefore, in all cases of perception that of which the subject is aware is other than the physical object the subject is purportedly perceiving. (Robinson, 1994, p. 57)

P2 states the controversial Phenomenal Principle. Robinson, on an earlier page, formulates it as follows,

> 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. (Robinson, 1994, p. 32)

The principle essentially enables one to infer the existence of a sense-datum from a mere appearance. Specifically, the antecedent ascribes a sensory experience to a subject, and the consequent suggests that some entity has the sensible quality that determines the experience. Many find the principle objectionable, because it opens a door for obscure mental entities that might not be compatible with trendy naturalism. Indeed, the widely endorsed representationalism rejects this inference. Representationalists suggest that representational content, or intentional objects, or the mode of representation can explain the sensory experience without invoking any dubious entity. However, naïve realism cannot take the representationist strategy of resisting the argument from illusion. In literature, naive realist friendly views tend to reject the phenomenal principle. For example, Austin argues that a church looks like a barn, but we do not need to infer from this fact that there is an immaterial barn (Austin, 1962, p. 30). I will show instead that the argument from illusion itself is

invalid, and the invalidity stems from the different usages of appearance words across the argument (see section 5).[10]

Now let's turn to the argument from appearance. In Byrne's argument, two consecutive experiences with different phenomenal characters are assumed to be detected by the subject. Given that no defect is present in the subject's cognition, the way things seem to the subject differs when she undergoes these two experiences. That is, the content of one experience differs from the content of the other. Byrne then concludes that differences in phenomenal character convey differences in the representational content (Byrne, 2001, pp. 206–217). In other words, a specific content can be inferred from the phenomenal character of a perceptual experience.[11] For the convenience of discussion, let's reconstruct Byrnean argument as follows:

> Q1. When a subject has a perceptual experience of something, that thing appears a certain way to the subject.
>
> Q2. If a thing appears a certain way to the subject, she has an experience with a content, which corresponds to the way the thing appears to her.
>
> C2. Therefore, perceptual experience has content.

Q2 is the key to this argument, but it is also the most controversial premise. It bridges appearance and content as the Phenomenal Principle bridging appearance (phenomenology) and reality. For this reason, let's call it the Neophenomenal Principle (NPP for short). It is not surprising that the argument from appearance

[10] Snowdon (1992), French and Walters (2018) also demonstrate that the argument from illusion is invalid. But their argument has nothing to do with the analysis of appearance words. See also Crane and French (2021).
[11] Byrne (2009), Siegel (2010), and Schellenberg (2011) further defend this line of thought.

rekindle a series of discussions over the use of appearance words, because the attack[12] and the defence focus on NPP, whose being true or false heavily relies on our understanding of the appearance words involved. Therefore, both arguments hinge on the use of appearance words. I will demonstrate in section 5 and 6 that the argument from appearance has the same problem as the argument from illusion, i.e. they are both invalid. But before proceeding to my objection, let's examine how philosophers defend the Phenomenal Principle and the Neophenomenal Principle.

2. The Epistemological Defence of the Phenomenal Principle

Robinson appeals to H.H.Price's well-known passage (quoted below) to defend the Phenomenal Principle:

> When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether there is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is any material thing there at all. Perhaps what I took for a tomato was really a reflection; perhaps I am even the victim of some hallucination. One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is directly present to my consciousness. What the red patch is, whether it is physical or psychical or neither, are questions that we may doubt about. But that something is red and round then and there I cannot doubt. (Price, 1932, p. 41)

[12] Prominently, see Travis (2004, 2013b, 2013a). For further developments, see Wilson (2018), Raleigh (2013), Ivanov (2017), Gu (forthcoming).

Price's main idea is that the simple sensible qualities that we experience are immune to being doubled. So there must be something to having them. For example, when I see a red, round, and bulgy tomato, I can doubt many things about the tomato, including its existence, but I cannot doubt the red, round, and bulgy thing presenting itself to me. So, at any rate, "something is red and round then and there I cannot doubt", namely that something red and round exists. The scope of doubt indicates that the Phenomenal Principle is only applicable to simple sensible qualities rather than objectual appearances.

Some philosophers' objections to the Phenomenal Principle are off-target if Price's account is taken into account because the principle's application scope is narrower than the objectors' counterexamples. For example, J.L. Austin invites readers to think of a cunningly decorated church that appears to be a barn. According to that principle, a barn should be there. But this is ridiculous. Austin thereby concludes, "[w]e see, of course, a church that now looks like a barn. We do not see an immaterial barn, an immaterial church, or an immaterial anything else"(Austin, 1962, p. 30). In Austin's counterexample, the complement of the appearance verb is 'a barn', which is not a simple adjective, as such it is not in the principle's scope. Hence, Austin's objection may have simply been dismissed by Price's followers.

Roderick Chisholm also raises several counterexamples: an animal looking centaurian does not imply that there is anything centaurian; the pail feeling empty does not mean that there is something empty; the woods sounding inhabited also does not mean that anyone is there (Chisholm, 1957, p. 115). Grammatically, these counterexamples are different from Austin's since the complements of appearance

verbs are adjectives. But from Price's perspective, these adjectives are not within the principle's scope either. A centaurian look is an objectual appearance; it has a distinctive gestalt, as Byrne (2009) suggests. But a centaurian animal is something more than just its appearance. If the Phenomenal Principle applies to complex adjectives, it will follow, in this example, that there is something centaurian, which is absurd. The second example involves a peculiar concept, namely emptiness. It is a negative spatial concept that is contrary to existence, while the Phenomenal Principle aims to convey something existent. Hence, the principle, in nature, does not apply to 'feeling empty'. In the third example, Chisholm discusses the properties of being inhabited. The subject of this complement must be some creature, but all creatures must not be purely mental. Hence, the nature of the property of being 'inhabited' is inconsistent with the purpose of the phenomenal principle –– to bring about some sort of mental existence.

These counterexamples can be ruled out by stipulating that the Phenomenal Principle only applies to simple sensible qualities such as red, round, bulgy, etc. The stipulation may sound superficial or arbitrary (M. G. F. Martin, 2010, p. 180). Even if we put Martin's criticism aside, Price's inference from mere appearance to the existence of something is nonetheless problematic. Appearances (or sensible qualities) are indeed presented to the subject, but why should one draw from this that there is something other than the environmental object that has these sensible qualities? Can't we just admit that it is an objective fact that an environmental object has a particular appearance? As Austin described the submerged stick case,

> Well now: does the stick 'look bent' to begin with? I think we can agree that it does, we have no better way of describing it…it may be said to look rather like a bent stick partly immersed in water. After all, we can't help seeing the water the stick is partly immersed in…What is wrong, what is even faintly surprising, in the idea of a stick's being straight but looking bent sometimes? (Austin, 1962, p. 29)

Austin does not think that there is any metaphysical consequence of using "looks bent" to describe a straight stick's appearance under certain conditions. The stick objectively has this appearance. From this fact, one at most infers that a straight stick has a bent look under certain viewing conditions, whereas one cannot infer that something is bent because nothing is bent except the appearance of bentness. Yet to say that the appearance is bent does not imply that something mental (or something in general) is bent. It may be legitimate to ask what an appearance's ontological status is. Admittedly, an object's appearance is not its intrinsic property. And the divergence of an object's properties and its appearance (sensible quality) is often thought to be problematic and provides fuel for the rejection of naïve realism. But this supposition does not do justice to naïve realists because they do not commit themselves to the claim that an object's appearance must be constant and unchangeable.

3. The Semantic Defence of the Phenomenal Principle

Apart from Price's epistemological defence, some philosophers appeal to a particular semantics of appearance verbs –– namely the phenomenal use –– to defend the Phenomenal Principle. As Frank Jackson writes:

> The phenomenal use is characterised by being explicitly tied to terms for colour, shape, and/or distance: 'It looks blue to me', 'It looks triangular', The tree looks closer than the house', 'The top line looks longer than the bottom line', 'There looks to be a red square in the middle of the white wall', and so on. That is, instead of terms like 'cow', 'house', 'happy', we have, in the phenomenal use, terms like 'red', 'square', and 'longer than'…It is the analysis of this use which leads to sense-data. (Jackson, 1977, p. 33)

In Jackson's proposal, the phenomenal use is only tied to pure predicates such as 'blue', 'triangular', 'longer than', etc. This restricted application echoes the scope of Price's doubts. What Jackson adds is the semantic dimension: appearance statements in the phenomenal sense ascribe sensible qualities (what the complements of appearance verbs refer to) to sense-data. But Jackson does not identify the claim that the phenomenal use leads to sense-data with the claim that the phenomenal use leads to the existence of mental entities. He instead establishes the thesis that sense-data are mental entities through an independent argument.[13]

The question is: How does the analysis of phenomenal use lead to sense-data? Jackson's positive argument appears two chapters later after the above quotation, where he writes: "...instead of talking about how something looks, we can talk about how the look of something is; and instead of saying X appears F, we can say that the appearance of X is F…"(Jackson, 1977, p. 87). The nominalized expressions of appearance verbs – "the look of…", "the appearance of…", and so on – refer to

[13] Briefly, Jackson argues that material things do not have colour properties because colour properties do not serve any scientific causal explanation of the interactions between objects, while sense-data as the immediate perceptual objects have colour properties. Hence, sense-data are not material but mental. See Jackson (Jackson, 1977, pp. 120–128).

sense-data, which is exactly what the phenomenal use is supposed to deliver.[14] Hence, once the phenomenal use is admitted, the antecedent of the principle ascribes a sensible quality to a sense-datum, which seems to justify the consequent, namely, that such an entity exists as the owner of the sensible quality.

Jackson defends the phenomenal use by arguing that it is not equivalent to the comparative use. According to Chisholm's classic classification of appearance words. When appearance words take the comparative use, the appearance statement

(1) X looks red to me.

is equivalent to the comparative statement

(2) X looks the way red things normally look to me in normal circumstances. (Jackson, 1977, p. 34)

By contrast, the noncomparative use does not support this equivalence. I will discuss the noncomparative use in detail when we turn to the Neophenomenal Principle. Regardless, Jackson's strategy is to demonstrate that the phenomenal use is different from the comparative use. He first demonstrates that (1) might be true while (2) is false:

> [T]here might be a disparity between the colours objects have and those they look to have. For example, there might be a shade of red which objects look to have at sunset but which no object actually has…(Jackson, 1977, p. 35)

[14] If Jackson's argument works, then the phenomenal use should be applied to complex adjectives. This is because what the phrase "the look of…" refers to can be complex sensible qualities, such as 'centaurian'.

Jackson's argument is unconvincing. First, Jackson's notion of a comparative statement is narrower than commonly believed. Sometimes a comparative statement may not include the adjective appearing in the appearance statement. For example, one may claim that a coin looks *elliptical* to him. The corresponding comparative statement might be that the coin looks the way that *round* things typically look to me from a skewed angle. In this case, the adjective 'elliptical' does not appear in the corresponding comparative statement. Apply this broader notion of comparative use to Jackson's sunset example. Suppose he is right that X looks red* to me, but X is not red* and nothing else is red*. Still, it makes sense to claim that X looks the way red* things typically look to me under normal circumstances. Note that red* is specifically connected to sunset, so sunset is the normal setting for redness*. In effect, Jackson should not have said that "no object actually has [redness*]. Second, the common comparative use of appearance verbs extends to non-actual objects. As Martin (2010, p. 192) points out, we can perfectly understand "Ellen is as acute as Sherlock Holmes", where Holmes is a fictional character. Hence, Jackson's restriction to actual objects seems to be arbitrary.

Jackson raises a further fancy example to illustrate that (2) might be true while (1) is false:

> [S]omeone might, like the totally colour-blind, see the world in shades of grey, but, unlike the totally colour-blind, have extremely good 'grey vision'; in particular, he might be also to make among the greys the same number of colour discriminations normal people make in the whole colour spectrum…Such a person might well see red objects as a unique shade of grey, and for such a person it might well be true that X

> looks the way red things normally look to him in normal circumstances, namely, that special shade of grey, without it being true that X looks red to him. (Jackson, 1977, pp. 34–36)

According to Jackson, the super-grey-vision man can discern red objects from other coloured objects because red objects are presented with a specific shade of grey. (2) is thereby true since X looks the way red things normally look to him in normal circumstances – a special shade of grey. But why does Jackson still deem (1) as false? He seems to assume that

(1) X looks red to me.

is equivalent to

(1)* X looks red.

From an objective perspective, X does not look red, because it is grey. So (1)* is false. Given that (1)* is equivalent to (1), then (1) is false. But Jackson's assumption may seem problematic. For the super-grey-vision man, X does look red to him because experiencing a unique shade of grey is how he experiences a red look. Hence, even though (1)* is false, (1) can remain true.

Martin (2010) criticises Jackson's phenomenal use of appearance verbs in a sophisticated way. He first complains of Jackson's argumentation strategy: Jackson does not provide any gloss on the distinctive characteristics associated with the phenomenal use; he only demonstrates (not successfully as I argued above) that the phenomenal use is irreducible to the epistemic or comparative use. No matter what

strategic advantage, Martin believes that "it must surely be a mistake to stipulate the existence of a phenomenal use or sense in this way" (M. G. F. Martin, 2010, p. 180).

Martin further comments on Jackson's argument for sense-data based on the nominalization of appearance verbs. He thinks that a distinctive phenomenal use can be conceded without appealing to a radical shift in logical form. Indeed, "one could accept the claim that there are different senses of the sentences here without supposing that there need be any difference in the sense of the verb 'look'..." More importantly, Martin suggests that appearance verbs have a constant interpretation across the different uses, namely that they "introduce a way of appearing that is to be ascribed to the subject, which way of appearing is further to be specified through the complement phrase, adjectival or infinitival" (M. G. F. Martin, 2010, p. 181). I shall discuss such use of appearance verbs in the next section. So for Martin, when the adjective or adjective phrase in the complement qualifies an appearance, the phenomenal use becomes legitimate, but it is secondary, and the way of appearing is eventually to be ascribed to the subject.

Martin's criticism, though partially vindicating Jackson's phenomenal use, undermines the phenomenal use as a semantic tool for conveying an ontological conclusion. Simply, if one can only secondarily talk about "an F-look", then ontologically, an F-look (or appearance) becomes dependent on the subject. I shall argue this point in section 4 when I put further pressure on the phenomenal use. At any rate, my interest is not to directly refute the phenomenal use. After all, one can arbitrarily stipulate linguistic use. I am instead interested in what impact the phenomenal use will have on the argument from illusion and the argument from

appearance. Before expounding the impact, I shall describe how we typically use appearance verbs.

4. The Common Use of the Appearance Verb in P1

Recall P1 of the argument from illusion: "In some cases of perception, physical objects appear other than they actually are – that is, they appear to possess sensible qualities that they do not actually possess." The appearance verb here does not seem to be used phenomenally. It is instead used in a non-philosophical way. Everyone at this stage agrees that an object typically appears differently if a subject perceives it from different perspectives or in different circumstances. That is to say, no specific philosophical position needs to be or should be taken in articulating P1. This premise thus is meant to be common ground among various camps. Hence, a natural reading of P1 should not commit one to any philosophical use of appearance verbs.

Moreover, assuming the phenomenal use in P1 may trivialise the argument from illusion. The argument concludes that what the subject is directly aware of in a veridical perception is something other than an ordinary object. Meanwhile, the assumption of the phenomenal use has already entailed that the subject is directly aware of some non-ordinary object –– a sense-datum –– to which a sensible quality is ascribed. Hence, the phenomenal use of the appearance verb in P1 renders the rest of the argument redundant in reasoning towards that conclusion. Let me use an example to illustrate this. It is widely accepted that a perceptual report –– "I see a red tomato" –– entails the appearance statement –– "The tomato appears red to me"; the appearance statement "That tomato appears red to me" indicates that redness is

ascribed to a sense-datum. Hence, if the phenomenal use is assumed in P1, then a veridical perception involves the awareness of a sense-datum. Given that many philosophers conceive sense-data as something distinct from ordinary objects, the assumption of the phenomenal use in P1 trivialises the argument. Note that assuming the phenomenal use in the Phenomenal Principle does not introduce the same problem. This is because the Phenomenal Principle is conditional, and confining the phenomenal use to the Phenomenal Principle would not directly commit the proponents to that conclusion. Therefore, for the sake of constructing a meaningful argument, the proponents should reject the idea that the appearance verb in P1 has the phenomenal use.

Now let's consider what features the common use of appearance verbs have. One salient feature is that appearance statements ascribe sensible qualities to ordinary objects. For example, when someone says that the submerged stick looks bent, she ascribes the bentness to the stick, though she does not believe that the stick is bent. Similarly, a sophisticated perceiver would know that two arrow-like segments are equal in length in the Müller-Lyer illusion. Nevertheless, she may claim that the tail-like segment looks longer than the head-like segment, where she ascribes the appearance (one looks longer than another) to these two segments. Hence, the default use of appearance verbs in P1 is not the phenomenal use.

In addition to ascribing sensible qualities to ordinary objects, common use tends to be accompanied by the subject's epistemic state. The subject may not be sure whether an ordinary object indeed has a sensible quality, or may know that the ordinary object is not as it appears to be, but the appearances persist. For example,

suppose that a white wall is bathed in blue light. If the subject does not know the wall is white and does not notice the blue light, she will not say, “The wall appears blue to me.” Instead, she will say, “The wall is blue.” But suppose she finds that her right hand has turned blue. She then becomes suspicious of the colour of the wall and withdraws her previous description and says, “The wall appears blue, but I'm not sure what color it is.”

Although the use of appearance verbs tends to relate to suspicion or doubt, such an epistemic state is not necessary for the use of appearance verbs. Sometimes the subject knows exactly what is going on when she uses appearance verbs. In the above example, it is usually not difficult to detect that the white wall is not blue because the texture of a blue wall and the texture of a white wall in blue light have different looks. The colour blue in the former case lies on the wall’s surface and appears to seep into the wall. Suppose the subject notices that the white wall is bathed in blue light. Nevertheless, the blue will still appear recalcitrant. In such a case, she might say, “The wall appears blue, but it is white.” Similarly, in the Müller-Lyer illusion, a sophisticated subject knows that two segments are equal, but she says, “the tail-like segment looks longer than the head-like segment.” Regardless of whether the subject is in doubt or in knowing when she uses appearance verbs, it is often accompanied by an epistemic state.

In sum, the proper way of understanding P1 is this. First, the subject ascribes sensible qualities to ordinary objects rather than to sense-data. Hence, the appearance verbs in P1 are not used phenomenally. Second, the use of appearance verbs is usually accompanied by a subject’s epistemic states, e.g., suspicion, knowing, etc.

5. The Invalidity of the Argument from Illusion

So far, all critical conceptions of appearance verbs are in place. In this section, I will use them to demonstrate that the argument from illusion is invalid and that the proponents have difficulty in avoiding my accusation regarding its invalidity.

As widely interpreted, the appearance verb in the Phenomenal Principle takes the phenomenal use, ascribing a sensible quality to a sense-datum, while, as I argued, the appearance verb in P1 is used in a common, non-philosophical sense, ascribing a sensible quality to an ordinary object. That is, P1 and P2 express different propositions. Hence, the argument cannot proceed as supposed, and thereby becomes invalid. To secure the validity of the argument, the proponents must either give up the phenomenal use of appearance verbs in the Phenomenal Principle and accept that the appearance verb in the Phenomenal Principle is also commonly used as it is used, or they must insist on and justify the phenomenal use of appearance verbs in P1. I shall show below that neither is plausible.

Consider the first option that the appearance verb in the Phenomenal Principle is commonly used. First, this move recurs the traditional objections made by Austin and Chisholm discussed in section 2. As the proponents of the Phenomenal Principle suppose (to avoid objections from Austin, Chisholm, etc.), the phenomenal use requires that F in the phrase "appears F" be only simple adjectives. By contrast, the common use is inclusive. So, if appearance verbs in the Phenomenal Principle are used in a common way, then a nonbasic adjective, such as "centaurian", "barn-like", and so on, can appear in the complement. The traditional objections thus return.

Moreover, the phenomenal use has been developed exclusively for the Phenomenal Principle, which aims to make the inference from an appearance to the existence of a sense-datum possible. This objective cannot be fulfilled by the common use of appearance verbs, since an appearance statement does not ascribe a sensible quality to a sense-datum when appearance verbs are commonly used, as argued in the last section. But note that the common use itself does not falsify the Phenomenal Principle (if only illusions are concerned). This is because the antecedent of the Phenomenal Principle would ascribe an appearance to an ordinary object given the common use, from which one can derive the existence of the ordinary object. However, this is not the argument's original goal.

To sum up, if the proponents choose the first option, namely adopting the common use of appearance verbs across the argument, it will bring about two problems: first, the traditional objections discussed in section 2 recurs; second, the Phenomenal Principle cannot serve its original purpose –– allowing an inference that leads to the existence of something other than the ordinary object.

Now let us consider the second option. One may contend, if I have granted the phenomenal use of appearance verbs in the Phenomenal Principle, I should have also granted that the appearance verb in P1 is used in the phenomenal sense. That is, it should be admitted that P1 ascribes a sensible quality to a sense-datum. They may say, "Isn't the look (or appearance) of the submerged stick bent? If so, the bentness is attributed to the appearance of the stick rather than the stick itself."

Here I raise one concern about the phenomenal use, which I do not regard as a conclusive objection against such use. Recall Jackson's argument. He thinks that the

nominalized expressions of appearance verbs –– "the look of…", "the appearance of…", and so on –– refer to sense-data (appearances) which differ from environmental items. I doubt that these nominalized expressions do not refer to anything other than sensible qualities that can be ascribed to ordinary objects.

An appearance statement involving a nominalized expression has an apparent grammar, which seems to commit one to the existence of appearance, sense-datum, or whatever. Admittedly, an appearance is not unreal, though it may not coincide with an object's properties as the stick example shows. However, an appearance or a sense-datum is not an independent entity of the object perceived. Consider the following statements:

(P) The look of a submerged stick is bent.

(Q) A submerged stick has a bent appearance.

(P) is true but it expresses no more than (Q), where the bent appearance is ascribed to the submerged stick. In other words, the appearance (or the sense-datum) does not exist independent of the stick. This seems to suggest that although the stick does not have the property that the appearance indicates, we should still ascribe the appearance to the stick.[15] Therefore, if, as Jackson proposes, the bentness (a sensible quality) is ascribed to the look (or the appearance, the sense-datum), then the bentness is also ascribed to the stick. Now that the bentness as a sensible quality itself is sufficient to explain "the phenomenal question: What determines the

[15] Along this line of thought, there are various proposals, see, for example, Genone (2014), Kaldron (2011), French and Phillips (2020), Hill (2022).

phenomenology of visual experience", the postulation of sense-data becomes futile, so does the phenomenal use.

The problem can be viewed from a linguistic perspective. The copula "is" in the statement (P) does not function as predication but as an identical sign, so it expresses that the sensible quality discussed is bentness. This means that the sense-datum in the example is no more than the sensible quality, i.e. bentness. The question then becomes: why do we need to posit an extra entity bearing this quality? One may contend that the look of a stick contains more qualities than a shape (it has colour, size, etc.), so the copula "is" in the statement does not function as an identical sign. This objection can be easily addressed if we articulate the initial statement in detail, updating (P) to (P*) "The shape-look of a submerged stick is bent". So, if (P) is an identical statement, then an appearance (or a sense-datum) is no more than a sensible quality. From (Q), we also know that the sensible quality expressed by (P) should be ascribed to the ordinary object.

The proponents of the phenomenal use need to argue that (P) is preferred to (Q) as the candidate for translating (R) "The submerged stick looks bent". And they also need to demonstrate that the copula in (P) is not an identical sign. To the best of my knowledge, no argument has been provided. Indeed, even if I acknowledge that "is" in P expresses a predication, the sensible quality should also be ascribed to the ordinary object. This is because, as (Q) shows, appearances (sense-data) should be ascribed to the ordinary object, and if a sensible quality is ascribed to a sense-datum, it should also be ascribed to the ordinary object (given transitivity).

To sum up, the above argument shows that even if appearance verbs in P1 adopt the phenomenal use, sense-datum theorists seem unable to achieve the promised result, i.e., inferring the existence of sense-data from appearance. That is to say, the phenomenal use cannot achieve the metaphysical objective as the argument from illusion aims.

6. The invalidity of the argument from appearance

Now let's turn to the argument from appearance –– the new wave grounded in a unique use of appearance verbs. Indeed, the new wave is not as new as it looks: It shares a structural similarity with the outdated argument from illusion, and its key premise is also similar to the Phenomenal Principle in nature. Structurally, as presented in section 2, both arguments start with a mundane fact expressed in terms of an appearance statement; then both arguments introduce a controversial principle, the Phenomenal Principle and the Neophenomenal Principle, respectively, in a conditional form; based on these two key premises, a novel (theoretical) entity is derived, namely the sense-datum for the argument from illusion and the representational content for the argument from appearance. Regarding the key principle in each argument, both are conditional, with the antecedent expressing an appearing fact and the consequent expressing an existential judgement. More importantly, the appearance verb in each principle has a specific philosophical use, namely the phenomenal use and the noncomparative use. Based on these similarities, it becomes natural to think that the objection to the argument from illusion can be

modified to apply to the argument from appearance. This is what I am going to do in this section. Yet because I have discussed how the argument from illusion is invalid, I will not repeat this very similar argument again. Instead, I will only sketch a similar objection to the argument from appearance.

As widely interpreted, the Neophenomenal Principle assumes the noncomparative use of appearance verbs.[16] According to Chisholm, contrary to the comparative use, the noncomparative use of 'appears F' can be understood independently of F-objects that appear under certain conditions. Take Chisholm's own example, the statement, "The mountainside looks red" (Chisholm, 1957, p. 50), if 'looks red' takes the noncomparative use, does not entail the following (comparative) statement, "The mountainside looks like a red object looking in daylight." Besides this semantic characterisation, Chisholm also offers an epistemological criterion for the noncomparative use:

> More generally, when we take the locution 'x appears so-and-so to S' noncomparatively, we can say that the subject S, referred to in such a statement, can know whether the statement is true even if he knows nothing about things which are so-and-so. (Chisholm, 1957, p. 53).

This means that knowing an appearance statement does not need to know how the object involved appears under other conditions. The noncomparative use instead implies that the subject's mere experience is sufficient for her to know whether "x appears so-and-so".[17]

[16] See Byrne (2009), Schellenberg (2011), Brogaard (2017).
[17] For a more detailed analysis of Chisholm's view on noncomparative use, see Gu (forthcoming).

The motivation for appealing to the noncomparative use is a reaction to Travis's objection to the argument from appearance (Travis, 2013a, 2013b; Travis, 2004). Travis's basic idea is that the appearance verb in the Neophenomenal Principle takes either 'visual looks' or 'thinkable looks', but neither can convey the content that representationalists are after.[18] To respond to his objection, Byrne (2009), Schellenberg (2011), and Brogaard (2017) interpret 'visual looks' as corresponding to Chisholm's comparative use and 'thinkable looks' as corresponding to Chisholm's epistemic use. They further argue that the noncomparative use is a genuine alternative to Travis's two notions of appearance verbs –– and can convey the content that they are after.

Let's set the debate over the noncomparative use aside and examine Q1 for a bit. Recall Q1: When a subject has a perceptual experience of something, that thing appears a certain way to the subject. Q1 is generally thought of as uncontroversial. There is a reason for this uncontroversiality, that is, we commonly describe our phenomenology in a way where the appearance verb is not used in any unique philosophical sense. In other words, the use of the appearance verb in Q1 does not commit us to any philosophical position. Hence, as P1 in the argument from illusion, the appearance verb in Q1 is commonly used: First, the subject ascribes sensible qualities to ordinary objects rather than to sense-data or any suspicious entity; second, the use of appearance verbs is usually accompanied by a subject's epistemic states, e.g., suspicion, knowing, etc.

[18]According to Travis, 'visual looks' are the visual effects an object has given a certain occasion, determined by environmental conditions, perspective, visual equipment, and the forth. He thinks that visual looks are 'silent', which do not make recognizable content. 'Thinkable looks' can convey recognizable contents, but they are not perceptual. See Travis (2004, 2013a). For interpretations of Travis's argument, see Wilson (2018).

Now it is easy to see why the argument from appearance is also invalid. Simply put, the appearance word in Q1 has the common use, whereas the appearance word in P2, namely the antecedent of the Neophenomenal Principle has the noncomparative use. They express different propositions, so the argument cannot proceed as supposed, and thereby becomes invalid.

To secure the validity of the argument, the proponents must either give up the noncomparative use of appearance words in the Neophenomenal Principle and accept that the common use as it is used in Q1, or they must insist on and justify the noncomparative use in Q1. I shall show below that neither is plausible.

Consider the first option, where the appearance word in the Neophenomenal Principle is commonly used. (Recall the Neophenomenal Principle: If a thing appears a certain way to the subject, she has an experience with a content, which corresponds to the way the thing appears to her.) First, when you claim, "the mountainside looks red'', the common use of 'looks red' ascribes the red appearance to the mountainside, but this ascription does not take the form '*O is F*', although the appearance is *F*. However, the proponents require that the content takes the form '*O is F*'. This is because content is supposed to have the accuracy condition; if it does not take a judgemental form, no definite condition can be conveyed. That's an unpleasant consequence because, for example, the mountainside is actually yellowish but looks red in some light conditions; given this, if the content takes the form '*O appears F*', then "the mountainside looks red" would be accurate. However, representationalists commonly hold that the statement –– "the mountainside looks red '' –– is not accurate given the facts about the mountainside.

Consider the second option, where appearance verbs in both premises adopt the noncomparative use. An obvious difficulty with this option is that the noncomparative use is overly philosophical so that a supposed uncontroversial premise, namely Q1, would become controversial. Moreover, as Gu (forthcoming) criticises, even though the noncomparative use can give rise to a content, in some cases it gives rise to incompatible content. Take the Uzumaki effect, where being moving and being still as a pair of incompatible properties are experienced simultaneously, so a pair of incompatible contents are conveyed. This is again unacceptable for representationalism.

Therefore, the argument from appearance has the same type of invalidity as the argument from illusion. And the rescue plan seems unpromising.

Conclusion

I have argued that neither the epistemological defence nor the semantic one succeeds in consolidating the Phenomenal Principle. The epistemological defence is grounded in the explanation of a certain phenomenology that relates only to "simple appearance". However, as Austin indicates, an appearance or a sensible quality itself is sufficient to explain the relevant phenomenology without any commitment to extra existence (independent of environmental objects). Hence, the epistemological defence of the Phenomenal Principle is not convincing. The semantic defence goes further, appealing to the particular semantics of appearance verbs to defend the Phenomenal Principle. But it renders the argument from illusion invalid because of the inconsistent use of appearance verbs in P1 and the Phenomenal Principle (P2). If the argument

becomes invalid, then the defence strategy for the Phenomenal Principle that serves the argument becomes meaningless. As I further show, the philosophical phenomenal use does not apply to P1, since either it would trivialise the argument, or the normalisation of appearance verbs does not convey an independent existence as it is supposed to do. Therefore, I conclude that the argument from illusion fails because of its invalidity.

Moreover, I demonstrated that the argument from appearance has the exact same problem as the argument from illusion; namely that appearance verbs in Q1 and Q2 have different uses, which renders the argument invalid. I also showed that the rescue plan does not work.

References

Allen, K. (2015). Hallucination and Imagination. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *93*(2), 287–302.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *Sense and Sensibilia* (Vol. 51). Oxford University Press.

Ayer, A. J. (1967). Has Austin refuted the sense-datum theory? *Synthese*, *17*(June), 117–140.

Beck, O. (2022). Naive Realism for Unconscious Perceptions. *Erkenntnis*, *87*(3), 1175–1190.

Brewer, B. (2008). How to account for illusion. In A. Haddock & F. Macpherson (Eds.), *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge* (pp. 168–180). Oxford University

Press.

Brewer, B. (2011). Realism and explanation in perception. In J. Roessler, H. Lerman, & N. Eilan (Eds.), *Perception, Causation, and Objectivity*. Oxford University Press.

Brogaard, B. (2017). Perception Without Representation? On Travis's Argument Against the Representational View of Perception. *Topoi*, *36*(2), 273–286.

Byrne, A. (2001). Intentionalism defended. *Philosophical Review*, *110*(2), 199–240.

Byrne, A. (2009). Experience and content. *Philosophical Quarterly*, *59*(236), 429–451.

Campbell, J. (2002). *Reference and Consciousness* (Vol. 72). Oxford University Press.

Chalmers, D. J. (1996). *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Vol. 4, pp. 609–612). Oxford University Press.

Chisholm, R. M. (1957). *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Vol. 9). Cornell University Press.

Crane, T. (2009). Is Perception a Propositional Attitude? *Philosophical Quarterly*, *59*(236), 452–469.

Crane, T., & French, C. (2021). The Problem of Perception. In *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Dretske, F. I. (1995). *Naturalizing the mind*. MIT Press.

Foster, J. (2000). *The Nature of Perception* (Vol. 110, Issue 438, pp. 455–460). Oxford University Press.

French, C., & Phillips, I. (2020). Austerity and Illusion. *Philosophers' Imprint*, *20*(15), 1–19.

French, C., & Walters, L. (2018). The Invalidity of the Argument from Illusion. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *4*, 357–364.

Genone, J. (2014). Appearance and Illusion. *Mind*, *123*(490), 339–376.

Gu, Z. (forthcoming). Propositional Intentionalism and the Argument from Appearance. *Philosophia*, 1–19.

Hill, C. S. (2022). *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford University Press.

Ivanov, I. V. (2017). Property-awareness and representation. *Topoi*, *36*(2), 331–342.

Ivanov, I. V. (2022). Bad to the bone: Essentially bad perceptual experiences. *Inquiry*, 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2028672

Jackson, F. (1977). *Perception: A Representative Theory* (Vol. 87). Cambridge University Press.

Jackson, F. (1982). Epiphenomenal qualia. *Philosophical Quarterly*, *32*(April), 127–136.

Kalderon, M. E. (2011). The Multiply Qualitative. *Mind*, *120*(478), 239–262.

Langsam, H. (forthcoming). Why Intentionalism Cannot Explain Phenomenal Character. *Erkenntnis*, 1–15.

Martin, M. F. (2004). The Limits of Self-Awareness. *Philosophical Studies*, *120*(1–3), 37–89. https://doi.org/10.1023/B:PHIL.0000033751.66949.97

Martin, M. G. F. (2006). On being alienated. In T. S. Gendler & J. Hawthorne (Eds.), *Perceptual Experience*. Oxford University Press.

Martin, M. G. F. (2010). What's in a look? In B. Nanay (Ed.), *Perceiving the World* (pp. 160--225). Oxford University Press.

Moran, A. (2018). Naïve Realism, Hallucination, and Causation: A New Response to the Screening Off Problem. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *97*(2), 368–382.

Niikawa, T. (2019). Classification of Disjunctivism about the Phenomenology of Visual Experience. *Journal of Philosophical Research*, *44*, 89–110.

Pautz, A. (2010). Why explain visual experience in terms of content? In B. Nanay (Ed.), *Perceiving the World* (pp. 254--309). Oxford University Press.

Phillips, I. (2016). Naive Realism and the Science of (Some) Illusions. *Philosophical Topics*, *44*(2), 353–380.

Price, H. H. (1932). *Perception*. Methuen; Barnes & Noble Books.

Raleigh, T. (2013). Phenomenology without Representation. *European Journal of Philosophy*, *21*(3), 1209–1237.

Robinson, H. (1982). *Matter and Sense: A Critique of Contemporary Materialism* (Vol. 93, Issue 372, pp. 630–632). Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, H. (1994). *Perception*. Routledge.

Robinson, H. (2009). Why phenomenal content is not intentional. *European Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, *5*(2), 79–93.

Schellenberg, S. (2011). Perceptual Content Defended. *Noûs*, *45*(4), 714–750.

Siegel, S. (2010). Do visual experiences have contents? In B. -Nanay (Ed.), *Perceiving the World*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, A. D. (2002). *The Problem of Perception* (Vol. 54). Harvard University Press.

Snowdon, P. F. (1992). How to interpret direct perception. In *The Contents of Experience*. Cambridge University Press.

Travis, C. (2004). The silence of the senses. *Mind*, *113*(449), 57–94.

Travis, C. (2013a). *Perception: Essays after Frege* (1. ed., 1. impr). Oxford Univ. Press.

Travis, C. (2013b). Susanna Siegel, The contents of visual experience. *Philosophical Studies*, *163*(3), 837–846.

Tye, M. (1995). *Ten problems of consciousness: A representational theory of the*

phenomenal mind (3rd print). MIT Press.

Tye, M. (2007). Intentionalism and the Argument from No Common Content. *Philosophical Perspectives*, *21*(1), 589–613.

Wilson, K. A. (2018). Are the Senses Silent? Travis's Argument from Looks. In J. Collins & T. Dobler (Eds.), *The Philosophy of Charles Travis: Language, Thought, and Perception* (pp. 199–221). Oxford University Press.