

The Appearance of Things

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Introduction

Broadly speaking, Dennett has made two contributions to research on consciousness, one negative and one positive. The negative contribution is a root-and-branch attack on some of philosophers' favourite fantasies about consciousness, inverted spectrum and absent *qualia* (zombie) fantasies in particular, and the notion that underlies these fantasies, the notion that conscious states have a discrete, directly introspectible, separable felt quality (which is what philosophers call *qualia* and what would be absent if *qualia* could be absent). The positive contribution is to introduce the Multiple Drafts Model (MDM) of how consciousness might be achieved by a brain.

These two contributions have had different fates. The attack on *qualia* and related fantasies has been enormously influential, in part because it follows in a long line of scepticism about the traditional ways of thinking about this topic, a tradition including, among philosophers, the later Wittgenstein, Dennett's teacher Gilbert Ryle, John Austin and Wilfrid Sellars. Psychologists such as Tony Marcel and Bernard Baars and medical neuroscientists such as Marcel Kinsbourne are examples of leading researchers whose work is done in the light of Dennett's critique. Indeed, one can hardly pick up any leading journal of consciousness studies such as the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* or *Consciousness and Cognition* without finding Dennett's name mentioned somewhere. The influence has not been easily won and the ground is

still contested. Ringing rejections of Dennett's arguments still appear and he answers them in papers with ferocious titles such as 'The Unimagined Preposterousness of Zombies' (1995a). Thought experiments still appear purporting to show that *qualia* are remarkable, in fact utterly extraordinary phenomena. Such rear-guard actions notwithstanding, many consciousness researchers are now convinced that deep incoherencies lie buried in the traditional notion of conscious states.

By contract, MDM has not been widely taken up by consciousness researchers. Indeed, many researchers remain indeed more than a bit perplexed by it, in part because Dennett has not yet filled it out very completely, the hundreds of pages of (1991) notwithstanding. In this essay, we will examine Dennett's attack on *qualia*. In the next essay, Paul Churchland will take up MDM.

The attack on *qualia* may appear to be of rather local interest, an interline battle among philosophers of consciousness. It is not. At its most general, the notion of *qualia* is the notion of things seeming to be like something, feeling like something. The term '*qualia*' is the term for the feature of certain states in virtue of which, to use Nagel's (1974) well-known phrase, it is like something to have them. Related terms include the 'felt quality' and the 'phenomenal quality' of states. Most consciousness researchers believe that things seeming to be some way to someone is a central part of what it is to be a conscious state. Indeed, a standard way of pinning down consciousness is to say that conscious states are states that it is like something to have. The central intuition is this. If a state (or event or ...) does not seem like anything to me, then I am not conscious of it. I could be in various forms of informational access to the thing but if it is not like something to have it, I am not conscious of it and it is not a conscious state. Consciousness requires that something seem like something.

The condition called blindsight illustrates the link. Blindsight patients cannot see objects in a certain, often quite large part of their visual field. Ask them what they are seeing there and they will say, "Nothing". However, if you ask them to guess what is there, they guess with far better than chance accuracy. If you ask them to reach out to touch whatever is there, they reach

out with their fingers and thumb at the right distance apart to grasp objects that are there. And so on (Weiskrantz, 1986). Clearly these patients have some kind of informational access to what is in front of them. Equally clearly, it is not like anything for them to have this informational access. For this reason, we say that they are not conscious of what is there. This link between consciousness and it being like something to have something also applies to what it is to be a conscious being: it is plausible to say that a being for whom nothing seems like anything will not be a conscious being. This link between *qualia* and consciousness is what gives the former much of their interest.

Note that it is not obvious how far this link takes us. In particular, seeming to be like something might be only a necessary condition of consciousness, not also a sufficient condition. Or, an alternative worry, seeming to be like something might be *so* closely linked to the notion of consciousness that the ‘explication’ of one in terms of the other is really just to move in a tight little circle. Certainly this much is true: to say that a conscious being is one for whom things seems like something is to say almost nothing about what it is to be a conscious being, what it is to be a subject of conscious experience. Nonetheless, it is the link between *qualia* and consciousness that gives the former their interest.

We will begin with Dennett’s demolition of *qualia*, then examine the model of consciousness that he wants to replace them with.

How the Idea of *Qualia* Arises

If Dennett is right about *qualia* (1988, 1991), then the inverted spectrum and zombie (absent qualia) thought-experiments so beloved of many contemporary consciousness researchers should not be taken seriously. Inverted spectrum stories go like this: whether or not it ever happens, it could happen that what appears red to me appears green to someone else without this difference showing up in our cognition or behaviour in any way: we draw the same inferences from what we are seeing, use the same words (where I say ‘red’, the other person says ‘red’) and

so on. Zombies stories are stories about beings who are not conscious, yet who are cognitively and behaviourally just like us, so like us that nobody could tell: again, they draw the same inferences from what they see as we would, use the same words we would use, and so on. The qualification that the other is cognitively and behaviourally just like us in both cases is crucial, as we will see.

Here are some illustrations of what philosophers have in mind when they talk about *qualia*. When we feel pain, the sensation does various things to us, for example makes us cry out, jump back, or whatever – and the sensation *feels* like something, indeed feels painful, awful, etc. When I see a round coin from an angle, the coin, though still round, *appears* to be oblong. When I read a passage in Kant, however clear the prose may appear to others (!), it *seems* quite unclear to me. ‘*Qualia*’ is the philosophers’ term for these feelings and appearings and seemings. (Note: It may seem obvious that the causal processes resulting in crying out and jumping back and the felt quality are two different things. Tempting thought this intuition is; I recommend that it be viewed with scepticism, at least for the time being. Give the *whole* causal picture and maybe it would contain *qualia*. Who knows? No one knows what the whole causal picture might be like.)

Chalmers’ well-known (1995) distinction between what he calls the easy problem and the hard problem of consciousness is another illustration of what *qualia* are supposed to be like. When something seems to be a certain way to us, the representation in which it seems that way can play two roles in our cognitive economy. On the one hand, the representation (or the contents of the representations) can connect inferentially to other representations (if the stick appears to have two straight parts with a bend in the middle, this will preclude representing it as forming a circle), to belief (if the stick appears straight with a bend in it, I will not form a belief that it bends in a circle), to memory (I can compare this stick as it appears to sticks I recall from the past), and to action (if I want something to poke into a hole, I might reach for the stick). It would seem, however, that so long as I am *representing* the stick in the appropriate way, it is irrelevant whether I am *aware* of the stick or not. My representation could do these jobs for me just as well even if I were not aware either of the stick or of my representation of it. But I am also *aware* of

the stick – it does *appear* to me in a certain way.

This distinction between the cognitive role of representations and something appearing to me in them seems to lead to two problems. Chalmers calls them the easy problem and the hard problem. The easy problem is to understand the inferential and other roles of such states. The hard problem is to understand how, in these states or any states, something could appear as something to me, how certain stimulations of the retina, processing of signals by the visual cortex, application of categories and other referential and discriminatory apparatus elsewhere in the brain can result in an *appearing*, a state in which something *appears* a certain way. Chalmers says that the easy problem is easy because it is simply the problem of the nature and function of representation in general, while the hard problem is hard because it appears to be *sui generis*, quite unlike any other problem about cognition that we face. If the first problem is easy, I'd hate to see what a hard one is like but there do seem to be two distinct issues here and the issue of how anything can appear to us at all does seem to be special. One aspect of this specialness is well captured by Levine (1983). *Qualia* present an explanatory gap that cognitive functioning does not present: we cannot begin to imagine a mechanism that would give us any account of what kind of neural or neural/environmental mechanism would and must result in *qualia*.

In order to understand Dennett's attack on *qualia*, there is one more thing that we need to put in place. '*Qualia*' is not only a generic name for the felt qualities of things. The term carries a specific view of what the phenomena in question are like. Roughly, the view is that *qualia* come one to a representation. *Qualia* may or may not represent anything themselves – there is a controversy about this – but they come with representations, roughly, one per representation, and representations are themselves real, discrete, isolable states of the mind/brain. Thus, if I perceive a car going past on the street, that perception is a real, discrete, isolable state of me and there will be a closely related state which is the car *seeming* to me to be going down the street. It is this picture of *qualia* that Dennett goes after. When things seem to us to be a certain way, he asks, what is the process that yields this result really like? One of Dennett's terms for *qualia* pictured as something given with representations, roughly one to a representation, where representations

are themselves real, discrete, and isolable is 'Seemings'. To mark the fact that Dennett is going after a certain picture, I will use the term 'Seemings' for the target of his attack. As a reminder that 'Seemings' is a technical term, I will capitalize it.

The Nature of Seemings

Dennett has two kinds of problems with Seemings. First, he thinks that the notion gives a completely wrong picture of something seeming to be like something. Indeed, some of the suggestions that flow from the notion may well be incoherent, subtly disguised nonsense. And he raises important questions about whether anything answering to the notion of a Seeming exists. A lot of theorists share Dennett's point of view on the first issue. Even some of who agree with him on it think that he goes too far on the second issue.

Skepticism about the existence of Seemings can easily be taken to be skepticism about the existence of consciousness as such. In Dennett's case, that would be a major mistake. He believes that consciousness exists; he just thinks that nothing resembling Seemings has anything to do with it. Put in jargon that has become commonplace among philosophers, he is an eliminativist about Seemings (and says he is [1988, note 2]), but he is not an eliminativist about consciousness. Eliminativism is the view that if there is no room for talk about a certain kind of thing in scientifically respectable discourse, we should hold that things of that kind do not exist. Dennett says exactly the opposite about consciousness. He insists that conscious states are real. He says, for example,

Conscious experiences are real events occurring in the real time and space of the brain
[1994a, p.135].

And,

Sensory qualities are nothing other than the dispositional properties of cerebral states to produce certain further effects in the very observers whose states they are [1994b, p. 146].

Of course, this leaves open the question of what it is that *makes* a state conscious. All Dennett is committed to so far is that it is not in virtue of having a Seeming. This combination is puzzling: does Dennett want to say that conscious states do not have a property of something seeming a certain way? We will return to this puzzle.

How exactly does Dennett deny that Seemings exist? The question needs to be handled carefully: Dennett does not deny, indeed insists, that various things *seem* to us to have various features. The question is: in addition to the thing appearing, is there another state of affairs, the appearing of the thing? Certainly there seems to be. With pain, if the cause of our crying out is real, so, it would seem, is the hurting. With the round coin, if the coin is real, so, it would seem, is some state which is its appearing oblong to me. With Kant, if his prose is real, so, it would seem, is some state which is its appearing unclear to me. And so on. Not at all, says Dennett. While things certainly appear to people in various ways, the idea that there are states that are these appearings, states that are Seemings, is a philosopher's myth. Appearances (!!) perhaps to the contrary, here are no such states.

“I'm denying [that Descartes' real seemings] exist.” [1991, p. 363]

[The category of] the way things actually, objectively seem to you [is a] bizarre category [p. 132].

There is no such phenomenon as really seeming – over and above the phenomenon of judging in one way or another that something is the case [p. 364].

There is no such thing [as] actual phenomenology [p. 365].

What Dennett is after might be put like this. Sentences such as, ‘It seems to me that the coin is oblong’, are often true but even when they are, sentences such as, ‘There exists a state of affairs, the seeming of oblongness’ would not follow and would not be true.

This strain in Dennett's thought derives from the work of the later Wittgenstein, especially the part of his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) that has come to be called the Anti-Private Language Argument (see especially remarks §§243-314). Dennett's work on these topics

frequently refers to Wittgenstein and Dennett acknowledges the influence (1991, p. 463). As we said, Ryle (1949), Austin (1962) and Sellars (1963) have developed similar analyses.

With these preliminary remarks about the existence of Seemings in place, let us turn now to Dennett's claim that many pronouncements made on behalf of them are incoherent, subtly disguised nonsense. Recall the distinction we made between having informational access to something and being conscious of it. In the latter, it is like something to me to have access to the thing. This distinction has played a large role in recent thinking about consciousness – for example, it is behind Chalmers' distinction between the easy and the hard problems of consciousness, as we just saw –, but there is a danger lurking in it. It risks making conscious access or what Flanagan (1992) calls *experiential* access look too different from informational access. We should not rule out the possibility that conscious or experiential access is simply *one kind* of informational access. The alternative, thinking of the two as very different, almost forces us to the view that consciousness and the stuff of consciousness, Seemings, have some strange and wonderful properties.

Historically, it has been claimed that (the features of) Seemings are ineffable (i.e., indescribable), intrinsic (i.e., knowable independently of knowing how the state relates to other states), private (i.e., directly knowable only by the person who has them), and directly introspectible (i.e., consciousness of them does not involve inference or interpretation). Dennett focuses his 1988 attack on these claims and presents powerful reasons to reject all of them. I won't rehearse those arguments here because one could reject all these claims about what Seemings are like and yet continue to maintain that such states exist, i.e., that there are real, discrete, isolable states which it is like something to have, states in which something seems to be like something. Dennett goes further in (1991). In different places in that work, he confronts two of recent consciousness studies' favourite thought experiments. They are about *inverted spectra* and *absent qualia* (*zombies*). If inverted spectra and zombies are impossible, it is hard to see how Seemings of any sort could exist. We will focus on Dennett's attack on these thought experiments.

The idea that inverted spectra are possible is very old, going back at least to Locke (1690). It goes like this. Experience of colour could be inverted, so that the way red things look to me might be the way green things look to you. Moreover, the states in which such things appear to me could be inverted in this way without anything else changing. I could still call the same states of the world 'red' as you do, apply colour wheels and additive and subtractive rules for colour the same way you do, and so on. There would be no way to tell but the situation is possible. If this situation is possible, the Seeming aspect of our cognitive states must be radically isolated from how those states function in the cognitive economy. If so, Seeming states must have very sharp boundaries: clear start and stop points, thoroughgoing separation from other similar states, and complete independence of perceptual and memory inputs and ensuing behaviour. There are serious empirical reservations to be raised about how much of the inverted spectrum story can coherently be told (Hardin, 1988; Palmer, 1999) but we will let them pass. Before it could take on the empirical problems, it would first have to overcome some serious conceptual challenges.

The idea of absent qualia or zombies (philosophers' zombies, not the real ones in Haiti) is the idea that a being could lack all consciousness without anything else changing. Where for us it is like something to engage in information processing activities, beings are possible in which such information processing takes place, right down to detailed self-reporting of how things seem and feel to him or her, with no consciousness at all. There would be nothing it is like to be that creature or to have its representations. As with inverted spectra, the claim is again made that states of consciousness are so isolated from perception, memory, behaviour and the rest of the cognitive system that it could be impossible to tell.

Dennett urges that both notions are incoherent. The thought-experiments that purport to support them do not lay out genuinely imaginable scenarios. I think that for the most part he is right. Like Wittgenstein and his teacher Ryle, Dennett proceeds against his targets by amassing details, in his case awkward thought experiments (he calls them *intuition pumps*). By contrast, I want to focus on getting the overall shape of his case clear.

As I see it, Dennett's central claim is that the two notions share a common assumption. They both assume that we know what a Seeming is like. We need such a clear conception to know what an inverted Seeming or a complete absence of Seemings would consist in. Wittgenstein once expressed the following worry about such assumptions: "we talk of processes and states and leave their nature undecided. ... But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter." (1953, §308) Dennett's most important conclusion, it seems to me, is that no property of any cognitive state or process in isolation could be a property of something seeming a certain way. Something coming to seem a certain way is a result of a complex cognitive process, not a property there to be 'read off' individual cognitive states. If so, the notions of inverted spectra and zombies are not coherent.

Dennett goes after our assumption that we know what a Seeming would be like in (1988), then turns to the notion of inverted spectra specifically in (1991). Here are some of the thought experiments that Dennett amasses against the general assumption. I hate cauliflower. A magical doctor comes along and reverses this revulsion so that cauliflower now tastes great to me. Does it taste the same after the procedure as before? When I first tasted beer, I thought it tasted like swamp water (a common experience). Later, beer came to taste very nice. Did the taste continue the same or has it changed? One of my favourites is Dennett's case of Mr. Chase and Mr. Sanborn. Mr. Chase and Mr. Sanborn both used to like their company's coffee. Recently it has lost its appeal. The reasons *sound* very different. Chase: 'The flavour of the coffee hasn't changed but I just don't like that flavour very much now.' Sanborn: 'No, no, you are quite wrong. I would still like *that* flavour as much as ever. The problem is that the coffee *doesn't* taste that way any more.' (All these thought experiments are derived from 1988.)

These intuition pumps point to a single idea: common sense intuitions to the contrary, in these cases we *do not* have any clear idea what a change or lack of change in a Seeming would consist in. In an older terminology, we do not have criteria for Seeming identity. We do not know what the difference would be between two Seemings being exactly similar and being different (or for when we are encountering the same Seeming again and when we are

encountering a new Seeming, though this second gap is less important here). If we do not know what it would be for a Seeming of one kind or a Seeming of another to be present, we do not have a conception of a Seeming that we could apply to anything.

Seemings and Verificationism

It may be useful at this point to say something about verificationism and the argument just given. ‘Verificationism’ is close to being a term of abuse for many philosophers. If an argument is verificationist, that by itself is a knockdown reason for rejecting it. Whatever the merits of this attitude (and they are probably few), it is not often enough noticed that two very different kinds of move attract this epithet. One urges that if we cannot verify some claim, there is a problem with it. The other is much stronger. Starting from the idea at the heart of verificationism as it was originally articulated early in the 20th century, the idea that the meaning of a term is simply our method for verifying the correctness of its applications, it urges that if we cannot verify the application of a term, the term lacks meaning.

The move made using Dennett’s intuition pumps about cauliflower and beer is clearly not verificationist in the first sense. True, we cannot verify whether cauliflower or beer continues to taste the same but that is a consequence of the problem, not the problem. Think of the asteroid just visited by a space vehicle. I cannot verify whether there is a fully-furnished apartment in the middle of it. However, I know exactly *what would have to be the case* for there to be such an apartment. And *that* is what is missing in the stories that Dennett tells. We do *not* know what would have to be the case for beer to continue to taste the same as one got used to drinking it and came to enjoy it, if one suddenly went from hating to liking cauliflower, and so on. The problem, just to hammer the point home, is not that we cannot *determine* sameness or difference here. It is that we have *no idea* what state of affairs sameness would consist in and what state of affairs would constitute a difference. In short, we don’t know what we are talking about.

Nor is Dennett’s move verificationist in the second sense, the sense built on the idea that

the meaning of a term is our method of verifying the correctness of its applications. This idea yields 'duck' principle: 'If it looks like a duck and waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it is a duck'. Or at the very least, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, we should accept that it is a duck. So: if a creature makes all the judgments about how things seem to it that we would make, we should conclude without further ado that things seem to it as they seem to us. Once again it is clear that this is *not* the move that Dennett is making here. He does make a similar move on occasion, a point to which we will return, but that is not the move he is making here. The move he is making here, again, is to urge that, in the situations he imagines, we have *no idea* what state of affairs sameness or difference would consist in. It is rather like asking whether the universe is right side up or upside down (an example of Dennett's [1991, p. 462]). The problem is not that we do not know how to verify which option is right. It is much worse than that. We have no idea what facts, what states of affairs, would constitute either option.

Inverted Spectra Undetectable by Others

With these preliminaries, let us turn to the inverted spectrum. Again Dennett relies on intuition pumps. I put on colour inversion glasses and the colours that things seem to have is inverted. A few days later, everything seems normal again. Do colours again seem to me as they do to others or do they continue to seem different but I have compensated somewhere later in processing? I wake up after an operation and colours seem inverted. But there are two possibilities: perhaps my perceptual system is now processing colour information differently; or perhaps my memory system identifies as green results of colour-processing that it used to identify as red. Based simply on how things seem to me, can I – can anyone – determine which has happened? (Note that the determination has to be based simply on how things seem to me because appealing to neurophysiology or anything else here won't help. We would first have to map the differences in how things seem onto neurological or other differences – and our problem is that we don't know what the difference between them seeming one way and seeming another way would consist in.)

Here is a particularly telling story. It is from (1991, p. 395). Suppose that a particular shade of blue reminds you of a car in which you had a bad accident and so is a colour to be avoided. Your colour spectrum is inverted. At first things are fine. The things that used to look blue to you now look yellow and you do not react to them. However, you adapt to the inversion. (Evidence for this is that you again call 'blue' the shades of colour that others call 'blue', fit these shades into a colour wheel the way others do, and so on.) Suddenly you start avoiding the things that you again call blue *and it is because they remind you of the car in which you had the bad accident*. That is to say, the shade of colour in front of you strikes you as the same as the shade of colour of the car as you remember it. Does the shade of colour in front of you and/or the remembered colour of the car now seem to you as yellow seems to others or as blue does? Here one is inclined to say, 'Given that everything, *everything*, is exactly as it would be if the colour in both cases appeared as blue does to others and indeed to her own preinversion self, what could appearing as yellow does in others *consist in*? What state of affairs could be the state of affairs of either colour appearing as yellow?' Certainly this appearing-as-yellow is a "wheel which plays no part in the mechanism" (Wittgenstein 1953, §271) and that is enough to make it at least very difficult to gain any sense of what such a state could consist in.

There is strong resistance to this claim that we do not know what the difference between an inverted and a noninverted Seeming would be like in supposed colour-inversion-with-perfect-adaptation situations. 'Surely it is a perfectly straightforward matter of fact whether something seems red or seems green to someone!' Well, no, it is not. Is the difference between an inverted and a noninverted Seeming to be detectable, even by the person whose Seeming it is, or not? If it is not detectable by anyone, then it is hard to see how we could have any notion of what state of affairs inversion would consist in and what state of affairs noninversion would consist in. If it is detectable, then, since *ex hypothesi* the difference is not detectable outside the person, it has to be the person his- or herself who could detect it. Could it be detectable by the person him- or herself?

Suppose the person who has the putative inversion is Kanta. If Kanta can detect a change

here, there would have to be three possibilities:

- her Seemings have changed and she can spot this.
- her memory has changed, so that when she identifies her current Seemings by reference to other remembered Seemings, her current Seemings *appear* to have changed when they have not.
- she is simply making a mistake, misidentifying what her Seemings are like, so that even though her current Seemings have not changed and her memories have not changed, she gets it wrong what her current Seemings are like.

All of these situations would lead her to *believe* that her Seemings have changed. even though in two of the three cases she would be wrong. Now, based solely on how things seem to her, does she know – does she have any conception – of what one of these three situations rather than either of the other two would consist in? (Again, she cannot go outside how things seem to her without having a way to map how things seem onto this other thing – and for that she would have to make just the distinctions among different situations of seeming that we are discussing.)

Something is amiss. For Kanta to detect that the colours of things suddenly seem different to her, she has to call up the right memory (Wittgenstein 1953, §265). But *based solely on how things seem to her*, what would the difference between calling up the right memory and a wrong one consist in? Checking that a putative memory is right or wrong requires that there be something independent against which to check it, independent of both the putative memory and the introspective context of it, something such as archives and artefacts. There is nothing independent against which to ‘check’ whether a Seeming has been correctly identified, misremembered or misidentified. If so, the whole idea of a check or an identification here is a myth.

Another indication that something has gone wrong: These three supposed possibilities all require a *really* peculiar notion – that how something seems could be different from how we judge it to seem. In Dennett’s view, the category of “the way things actually, objectively seem to

you [is a] bizarre category” (1991, p. 132).

Our results so far. In the imagined scenario where we have to rely solely on how things seem to Kanta, we do not know what it would be for the way colours seem to her to have been inverted. If you tell me that this tomato could seem green to Kanta when it seems red to everyone else without this affecting her behaviour, we have no answer to questions such as: What would count as it seeming *green* to her? Why not pink, or purple, or the taste of cayenne? Note: this is not a problem about what she can or cannot verify. It is a problem about what the relevant phenomena would consist in, whether anyone can verify anything about them or not. We have *no idea* what the difference between seeming one way and seeming the other would consist in.

So what is going on when we notice and say how something seems to us? If when we express a sensation or other mental state in words, we are *not* identifying the sensation as an instance of what those words describe, if, more generally, when we determine how things seem to us in our conscious states, this not a result of reading an appearance off the conscious state, then what is going on? Dennett’s suggestion is this. When I determine how something seems to me, this is a judgment: “there is nothing more to phenomenology ... than judgment” (1991, p. 366; see also p. 364). When I react to shades of what are in fact blue in the same way as I react to the colour of the car that crashed, I am judging that the colours are the same. When I say that beer does not taste the same to me as it did the first time I tasted it, I am judging that the tastes are different. That is what it is for colours and tastes to seem a certain way to me and there is no further fact of the matter about how they seem. Our question now is: judgment of what? And done in what context?

Something like this. When I decide how something seems to me (how cauliflower or beer tastes, whether two colours seem the same, how clear a passage of Kant is), this judgment is based on the history and context I am in and what I go on to say and do. So: I start from how things are apt to seem given my environment (cauliflower or beer in the mouth, the reading of a passage of Kant and everything else that I know about the context). I then take into account and relevant history and the behaviour that ensues, especially the words. Am I inclined to reach for

more cauliflower? Am I reacting to the colour in front of me as similar to the colour of the car that crashed? Am I finding crisp, insightful interpretations of the passage? I could also check to see how others are reacting to me. And so on. Taking things like this into account via some cognitive process that aims to achieve a good equilibrium among them, things come to seem a certain way to me. That is all that seeming to me consists in. I am not ‘reading off’ quasi-perceptible qualities of some hidden inner state because there are no such properties.

Though initially counterintuitive, Dennett’s picture yields nice explanations of some puzzling phenomena. One of them is the *Capgras delusion*. People caught in this delusion are convinced that their relatives and friends have been replaced by visually, aurally, exactly similar impostors.¹ Dennett says that it should send shock waves through philosophy (1996, p. 111). The Capgras delusion is said to result from lesions in the visual recognition system at a stage where visual images “connect with” feelings of familiarity (Ellis and Young 1990). On Dennett’s account, what is going on is that some result of visual processing, who knows what, has set off a process of interpretation at that point that results in people these patients are perceiving seeming to be impostors. A very natural explanation of an otherwise very puzzling phenomenon.

So what is going on when we use language in connection with how something seems to us? Here we can draw on another idea of Wittgenstein’s. (Dennett makes use of this idea, too, but elsewhere in (1991), not in the part concerned with *qualia*.) If what we have said is right, when we express how something seems to us in words, we are *not* identifying some state of affairs in us whose content is that thing seeming that way. Indeed, something like this *has* to be true if determination of how things seem to us is a matter of judgment taking into account context. If expressing how something seems to us were a matter of identifying some state of affairs in us as the Seeming, any such judgment would have been preempted. Well, if using

1 If these patients were good verificationists of the kind that critics try to foist on Dennett, this situation should be a contradiction in terms. If the people they see really are *indistinguishable* from their friends and loved ones, then on the ‘duck’ principle these patients should take these people *to be* their friends and loved ones. These patients are not verificationists of that stripe – and neither is Dennett.

words in connection with how things seem is not using them to identify something, then what is going on? Wittgenstein tells us that when conscious states are brought about in us, we are simply trained to react with words, in particular, to express the state in words. If so, words replace other ways of expressing what is going on in us consciously (1953, §244). If, as seems evident, crying out in pain is not identifying a sensation as a particular kind of sensation, why should saying ‘Ouch, that hurts’ be?

Dennett’s way of capturing the difference we are after here is to say that we do not *report* how things seem to us, we *express* it (1991, pp. 303-9). Expressing something is not a process of picking out a state of affairs and ascribing properties to it. Indeed, for Dennett the way we express something can actually be part of what *creates* how something seems to us. Dennett is very fond of Forster’s saying, “How do I know what I think until I see what I say?” (cited in 1991, p. 245). In this Dennett goes further than Wittgenstein did. So far as I know, Wittgenstein did not explore the possibility that expressing something may be part of what makes the expressed what it is.

Even when judgment does enter, as it does when, taking history, context, and ensuing behaviour into account (plus anything we might happen to know about what is going on in the brain), we judge how a situation will seem to someone, the judgment is not picking out something and attributing properties to it. The judgment is constructing or reconstructing a picture of what the equivalent process of judgment in the agent will have yielded. Dennett calls these judgments *heterophenomenology* when they are of how things will seem to others, *autophenomenology* when they are of how things seem to oneself.

To conclude this section. If our analysis is right, an inverted spectrum could not be coherently described. Note that this is not because inverted spectra could not happen for some empirical reason. It is because we cannot make *sense* of the idea. We cannot even state what would have to happen for a colour spectrum to be inverted without the change showing itself in behaviour. Next, absent qualia, zombies.

Undetectable Zombies

We have laid a lot of the groundwork and can move more quickly. Many commentators have taken Dennett's attack on the possibility of zombies to be verificationist so let us start by returning to that issue. For Dennett, verificationism is not a boogeyman. He wouldn't like to be thought of as the village verificationist (on the model, presumably, of the village idiot) but he doesn't mind the idea that he is an urbane verificationist (1982, p. 355). A verificationist argument, again, is one built on the principle that the meaning of a term is simply our method of verifying the correctness of its applications and strongly suggests the 'duck' principle. If a creature acts like us and talks like us and makes judgments (or 'judgments') about itself like us and in all other relevant ways behaves like us, we should accept that it is like us, including that it is conscious like us. To be sure, some of Dennett's arguments rely on verificationism. One such argument is the argument from zimboes (1991, pp. 310-1).

Zimboes are zombies but zombies that don't cheat. Dennett says that many invocations of zombies do cheat. They present zombies on the model of the real zombies of Haiti – creatures dim-witted, slow-moving, no longer possessed of a will of their own. Here it is easy to say that zombies lack something we have. But this is cheating. Philosophers's zombies are supposed to behave *just* like us and still lack consciousness. So let us imagine zombies that fill this bill: zimboes. Zimboes are lively and animated, talk about how they feel about the kids, curse when they smash their thumb with a hammer, toy with fine comparisons among different bits of what they remember from Kant's transcendental deduction, talk in fine detail about what the vividness, clarity, accuracy, etc., of their experiences, how they feel when they are with someone they love or someone else who enrages them – in short, they behave in all the ways that we do. Says Dennett, it is far from obvious that we can imagine *these* creatures nonetheless lacking all consciousness.

This move is clearly verificationist. Whatever its merits (and it would be rash to say that

it has none), Dennett offers something better. In virtue of what does a state become a conscious state for Dennett? In virtue of it being like something to have it or it being the basis of something coming to seem like something. But what is it for it to be like something to have a state, for something to seem like something? For Dennett, it is for those states and events, in the context in which they occur and with the behaviour that ensues, to be open to judgments of certain kinds. *And that is all there is to consciousness, full-blown phenomenal consciousness.* If so, once we have the full panoply of context, inner (=brain) goings-on, and ensuing behaviour and all of this can be judged a certain way, that is it – there is nothing left to be missing. If so, when the brain of a being with a similar history to ours is reacting as ours would in a given context and it is behaving as we would, including making the same autophenomenological judgments as we would, an absence of qualia is not even a possible state of affairs. This, I think, is Dennett's strongest argument against the possibility of zombies, far stronger than the verificationist ones.

This also resolves a puzzle that we left hanging earlier, the puzzle that for Dennett, conscious states lack the property of something seeming a certain way to someone. The resolution is simple: something seeming a certain way is an interpretation. This interpretation turns the related brain state into a conscious state but it is not a property of the brain state, not the brain state by itself at any rate. "Didn't you quote Dennett", it will immediately be objected, "saying that 'conscious states are real events occurring in the real time and space of the brain'?" Yes, we did. But in virtue of what are these states conscious? The answer, we just said, is: in virtue of being open to being judged to seem like something to someone. If so, then the states can be perfectly real while what makes them conscious is interpreted a certain way. This is a radical view. However, so is the most viable alternative to it: that consciousness is an organic property of brains (Churchland 1999).

If we are right, Dennett's view of inverted spectrum and absent *qualia* stories in which all the relevant behaviour remains the same but something fundamental about conscious experience changes or is absent, is that they cannot be coherently told. If I am right that this account has a lot going for it, Dennett has made a signal contribution to contemporary consciousness studies.

Hard Cases

A crucial feature of Dennett's story is that what it is like to have or be in states in the brain is never given with or determined by the state itself. Like every philosophical theory, Dennett's theory faces some hard cases. For his account, the hard cases are pains and simple pleasures and other body-rooted sensations. What a pain or a simple pleasure feels like is not, on the face of it, a matter of interpretation. Whacking my thumb will hurt and a glass of cold water on a hot day will feel good no matter how I interpret these situations or my experience of them. More complicated feelings can be most unwelcome and yet resist all efforts to interpret them away, as when I desperately want not to feel bored to tears by someone but still feel bored to tears.

Let us focus on pains. Here is a passage by Dennett on its close companion, suffering:

Suffering is not a matter of being visited by some ineffable but intrinsically awful state, but of having one's life hopes, life plans, life projects blighted by circumstances imposed on one's desires, thwarting one's intentions The idea of suffering being somehow explicable as the presence of some intrinsic property is as hopeless as the idea of amusement being somehow explicable as the presence of intrinsic hilarity. [1991, p. 449]

I don't know about the awfulness of suffering being ineffable or intrinsic— indeed, I am not even sure what these terms mean – but the idea that suffering is merely a matter of judgment does not seem right. However, let us grant it. Dennett distinguishes suffering and pain rather sharply (1995b, p. 352). Let us grant this, too. Now, what about pain? What does Dennett have to say about it?

No theory of *pain* as thwarted projects is going to do. If I hit my thumb with a hammer, what I feel will not be a gloomy sense of a reversal in my life fortunes! Indeed, a short, sharp pain like that will probably have no implications for my life fortunes (beyond the five minutes it takes the pain to fade). Yet it still hurts. Dennett himself offers an exactly parallel example

(1995b, p. 352). So what does he want to say about pain?

He has given two accounts of pain recently. One puts pain squarely on the interpretation side of the interpretation/physical realization split.

Are pains real? They are as real as haircuts and dollars and opportunities and persons, and centers of gravity ... [1991, p. 460].

A motley collection but (almost) all matters of interpretation – remember how Dennett views the reality of persons (I am not sure what haircuts are doing here). He seems to push the pain-as-judgment line in (1995b), too, even though he explicitly talks about short, sharp pains there.

The case of morphine suggests that no such account will work. As Dennett himself has articulated very nicely (1978a), morphine acts against pain in a peculiar way. Subjects claim that it does not remove the sensation of pain – but the pain no longer hurts. (Subjects say things like, “I still have the pain but it no longer hurts!”) That is to say, it seems to the subject that the pain is still there – but a feeling-state characteristic of pain is not, namely, the hurting, the awfulness. This example would seem to cut against any reduction of pain to judgment decisively. Yet like the short, sharp pain, again it is Dennett’s own example.

To respond to this objection, Dennett (private correspondence) has urged that how things seem to a subject is not definitive (except for how things seem to the subject). Moreover, there *is* a difference of judgment before and after: as we just saw, the subject *judges* her situation after the morphine to be different from her situation before. All true – and important. There is more judgment involved in even sharp, emotionally uncomplicated pain than many have thought. But! First, if even a difference as large as the difference between what I judge a feeling to be like and whether it hurts does not count, if even excruciating sensations come out as judgments, what is the force of the claim that all phenomenology is judgment? There is a risk in an ‘all’ claim like this. Is Dennett reducing phenomenology to judgment – or merely bending the notion of judgment out of shape, merely turning it into another name for phenomenology? What is being denied? What would a conscious state that was not a judgment *be like*? (This move should

appeal to Dennett.)

I don't think that this worry is real. The claim that all phenomenology is judgment includes, for example, a claim that how something seems is never given by a brain or representational state by itself. Dennett is not simply redefining 'judgment'. But there is a weaker worry. What is it about some judgments, descriptions, in virtue of which they hurt, while others don't? Absent an answer to this question, we have not made much progress with pain (or, *mutatis mutandis*, any other state in which what it is like to have it seems to be given by the state).

Nonetheless, the interpretationist approach leaves us with a pretty bloodless account of pains. At one point in his long campaign to wean us away from the traditional theory of Seemings, Dennett suggests that the traditional notion needs something like pseudo-pigment, an illusory substance that he calls figment (1991, p. 346). I am inclined to turn this move around. Dennett attempts to give us an account of pains but what he ends up with seem to be – fains.² Fains may make us act like they're pains and even thwart our intentions like they're pains (to the extent that pains do thwart our intentions) but they're not awful to have, so they're not pains. (This is one place where looking like us and "quacking" like us is *not* enough for being like us.)

Dennett is perfectly well aware of what pain is like, of course. Early in (1991, pp. 25, 60-4) and in more recent writings (1998, pp. 174, 280), he speaks eloquently about it. Part of the problem may be a nasty lurking dilemma. As Dennett says, any account of what the awfulness of pain consists in must, in some way, break it down into elements that are not themselves awful to have. If your analysis merely breaks it into elements that are themselves awful, you haven't analyzed the awfulness (1991, p. 64). (Compare Fodor on propositional content: "if it is something, then it is something else" [1985, p. 9]). This creates a *prima facie* dilemma: if you keep the awfulness, it will be at the cost of giving no analysis of it; but if you analyse the awfulness, it will be at the cost of losing "the thing itself, ... the pain in all its awfulness", as Dennett has his alter ego put it (1991, p. 64). Over the years, Dennett has gone both ways. In

² I owe this lovely neologism to Chris Viger.

(1978a), the awfulness is essentially unanalyzed and Dennett focuses on how the awfulness and whatever it is that we are aware of as pain could be connected to the brain. In (1991), he tries to say something about what pain, including its awfulness, might consist in – and loses the awfulness. Nasty.

Very recently, Dennett has been working his way towards a much less interpretationist approach to pain. In (1991), he treats pain as like belief and perception, a result of interpretation. In the new approach, he is beginning to treat pain as like events upon whose reality he himself insists, namely, events in the brain. On this view, certain brain processes would simply *be* awful to have – would obliterate concentration, cause nausea, disappear with analgesics, etc., etc. What would the difference be between, say, an obsessive thought that causes you to suffer but does not hurt and what you feel when you are kicked in the shin? In the latter case, there is,

a variety of *further* neuromodulator releases and neural firings that are apt to provoke/enable (1) identificatory judgments about a location, ... (2) intensified involuntary muscle spasms That's what the difference is, I think, between cognitive events that hurt and those that don't. [2000, p. 369]

There is a lot to commend this view. Most pains are not intentional, i.e., are not about anything, and treating them as real brain events seems preferable to treating them as having the reality of blighted hopes, dollars, centres of gravity, etc.³ Moreover, we can accept this view of pain and still keep most of what Dennett wants to say about auto- and heterophenomenology and pain. Exactly what kind of pain one is feeling and what implications it has for one's life could still be a matter of judgment, as unforced by and not a property of brainstate reality as the result of any other auto- or heterophenomenological judgment. A pain can be awful, indeed truly horrendous, without us having any precise view of what kind of pain it is. In fact, we would end up exactly where morphine patients say they are: "I still have the pain" (heterophenomenological judgment) "but it no longer hurts" (the awful-feeling brain state has been altered). And we retain

³ I owe this view in a way to Don Ross – in a way because it first occurred to me when he was once trying convince me that pain is firmly on the other side of the real-state-of-the-brain/artefact-of-interpretation divide. He now shares my view that it can straddle the divide.

both blighted hopes and short, sharp pains.

This account of what I feel when I hit my thumb would be an application of Churchland's (1999) claim that consciousness is an organic property of brains to the special case of pains (and relevantly similar experiences). Whatever the merits of this view as a general theory of consciousness, it is a promising line to take about pain and the like. Here, at least, what it is like to be in a state *does* seem to be dictated by biology, not by acts of interpretation.

The Reality of Seemings

Dennett argues more than that what it actually is for things to seem a certain way to us does not support philosophical fantasies about *qualia* as Seemings. He argues that no such thing exists. I want to make a few quick comments on this issue.⁴ If the rest of what we have said is correct, here is what we have established concerning existence. The phenomenon that we call seeming to be like something is not remotely as philosophers have conceived it, not remotely like a Seeming. Not only is it not ineffable, intrinsic, private, it is not a property of an individual representational state or event by itself at all. Rather, it is a complex relational property, a property moreover that is purely an artefact of hetero- or autophenomenological *judgments*, judgments about how something seems given context, history, brain, and behaviour. Is this to be real property or not? So long as we are clear on the facts, we can, to use a phrase of the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe's, say what we like.

Dennett thinks it better, given that these artefacts have virtually none of the properties traditionally ascribed to Seemings, to say that there is no such thing as Seemings. My own preference is to go the other way. Briefly, here is why. Even leaving aside the hard cases (pain, etc.) and sticking to judgment, which is what is supposed makes a state conscious on Dennett's account, judgements certainly exist *and it is like something to make them*. Nor does Dennett deny either point. If so, judgments have two of the traditionally crucial properties of *qualia*. Moreover,

⁴ I have pursued this issue and others in more detail in Brook 2000.

when we are not playing thought experiment games, when history, context, brain response and ensuing behaviour line up as they normally do, we can say, and say not just determinately but very precisely, how things seem to us. All this is enough for me to conclude that states in which something seems a certain way exist. One can agree with Dennett that “inner sensations stand in need of outer criteria” (Wittgenstein) without having to say that ‘inner sensations’ and other states and events that it is like something to have do not exist. To be sure, one can go either way on the existence issues: the states at issue here are totally different from the way the tradition has thought them to be. Since these states do exist, my preference is to say that Seemings exist.

To conclude: Dennett’s account of what conscious states are really like is one of the major contributions to consciousness research of recent decades. There are a great many aspects of it that we have not even touched on. Dennett maintains, for example, that many temporal questions about conscious states – questions about when a state started or ended, when some change occurred – are as ill-formed as the questions we examined earlier about how something would seem in various inverted spectrum situations. These are the questions that give rise to the Stalinesque and Orwellian pseudo-options discussed in the introductory essay. For the rich details of the issues left undiscussed here, there is probably no substitute for reading (1991) itself. Fortunately, it is one of the most engaging and accessible books ever written by a major philosopher.⁵

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⁵ Thanks to Dan Dennett, Don Ross and Rob Stainton for many helpful comments. Stainton started off thinking that almost everything in this paper is wrong and despite my best attempts, still thinks so.

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