

PHIL 2606: Knowledge, Reason and Action

Lecture 16: Adverbialism

Readings:

Chisholm, R. M. (1966), 'The Status of Appearances', in D. M. Rosenthal (ed.) (1986), *The Nature of Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press), ch. 40.

Jackson, F. (1976), 'The existence of Mental Objects', in Rosenthal, ch. 41.

Chisholm

1. Chisholm argues in support of *adverbialism*.<sup>1</sup>
2. A couple of preliminaries:
  - a. Chisholm claims that 'white' is ambiguous: sometimes we use it refer to a way of appearing (he calls this the 'sensible' use), sometimes we use it to refer to a certain property or disposition of physical things (he calls this the 'dispositional' use).

Presumably, we use it in the first way in 'Patch appears white', and we use it in the second way in 'Patch is white'. We don't mean the same thing by 'white' in each case.

- b. He believes that to *be* white is to *appear* white when viewed by an ordinary observer under favourable conditions.

So, the sentence 'Without sight there is no white' is true on the sensible use, false on the dispositional use.

3. According to (many) sense datum theorists, for an object to appear white is for it to present an appearance (or sense datum) which *is* white.

Chisholm argues against this.

First, it is not plausible in the case of many adjectives (e.g. 'old').

Second, it leads to a vicious regress: Suppose that *x* is white; that means (according to Chisholm) that *x* appears white when viewed by an ordinary observer in favourable conditions; that means (according to sense datum theorists) that *x* presents an appearance which is white, when viewed by an ordinary observer in favourable conditions; that means that *x* presents an appearance which appears white when viewed by an ordinary observer in favourable conditions, when viewed by an ordinary observer in favourable conditions; that means that...; and so on.

Third, if appearances can be white (in the same sense that physical things can be white) then this raises all sorts of difficult questions: Do they have weights, insides, backsides? If not, what kind of things *are* they? Can they exist unsensed?

4. Chisholm agrees with earlier adverbialists that we use 'white' in 'Patch appears white', as an *adverb* (hence the name 'adverbialism').

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<sup>1</sup> He was not the first to do so. Earlier adverbial theorists include G. F. Stout (1909), 'Are Presentations Mental or Physical?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 9; and C. J. Ducasse (1949), *Nature, Mind and Death* (La Salle, Ill: Open Court Publishing), ch. 13.

We use adverbs to attribute properties, not to objects, but to properties or events/processes/state of affairs. We use ‘slowly’ in ‘John is walking slowly’, for example, to attribute a property to John’s walking (an event).

In a similar way, we use ‘white’ in ‘Patch appears white’ to attribute a property to Patch’s appearing (an event).

5. We can paraphrase ‘Patch appears white to John’ as ‘Patch appears whitely to John’, or better, as ‘John is appeared to whitely’ (to remove commitment to there being any Patch).
6. There is no need to think (as sense-datum theorists do) that there are such things as appearances (or sense-data), and that we use sentences such as ‘Patch appears white to John’ to attribute properties to them. All we need are people, and events of being appeared to.

### Jackson

7. Jackson argues *against* adverbialism.
8. He is concerned with the adverbialist claim that by ‘I have a red after-image’ we mean ‘I am appeared to redly’. (Compare: ‘Mary has a nice smile’ and ‘Mary smiles nicely’.)
9. He raises two objections, which he calls the *many property problem*, and the *complement problem*. We will consider just the first.
10. The many property problem. What, according to adverbialists, do we mean by ‘I have a red and square after-image’. He recognizes three possibilities, and argues against each:
  - a. ‘I am appeared to redly and squarely’

This *does* validate the inference from ‘I have a red and square after-image’ to ‘I have a red after-image and I have a square after image’ (a valid inference). But it also validates the *reverse* inference (an *invalid* inference).

Adverbialists might try appealing to locations in the visual field: ‘I have a red after-image to the left of a square after-image’. But this will face the same problem.

- b. ‘I am appeared to redly squarely’

(One adverb modifying the other, as in ‘He wrote astonishingly slowly’). But this does not validate the inference from ‘I have a red and square after-image’ to ‘I have a square and red after image’ (a valid inference).

- c. ‘I am appeared to red-square-ly’?

(Where being appeared to ‘red-ly’ is not a component of being appeared to ‘red-square-ly’). But this does not validate the inference from ‘I have a red and square after-image’ to ‘I have a red after-image’ (a valid inference).