

Class One - Introduction

Appearance and Reality - Ryan Simonelli

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1 The World as We Find It

- **Material Objects:** The world contains, as J.L. Austin puts it, a number of “middle-sized dry goods,” things like tables and chairs, waterbottles, laptop computers, and so on. These things:
 - Are solid.
 - Are extended in space and persistent through time.
 - Are colored.
 - Behave and interact with one another in predicable ways.
- **Persons:** The world contains different people. Some of them you know, most of them you don't. You yourself are one particular such person. These people:
 - Have individual identities, separate from one another.
 - Have varying levels of accomplishment or success.
 - Were born, are currently alive, and will die.

There certainly *appear* to be these things which have these properties, but do such things with such properties *really* exist? Or is the true reality of objects and persons (or the lack thereof) radically unlike the appearance of such things?

2 Appearance vs. Reality

- **A (Relatively) Mundane Case of Appearance vs. Reality:** It appears that the surface of the Earth is completely stationary. In fact, however, as the Earth rotates its surface is moving at over 1,000 miles per hour, and the Earth as a whole is.
- **Error Theory:** Any theory according to which the reality is radically unlike the appearances, if it is to be plausible, must offer an *error theory* which explains why the appearances are deceiving.
 - **An Example:** Normally, when we move *on* the surface of the Earth, we feel the rush of air. However, the Earth as a whole is in the vacuum of space, and the air moves with it as it moves.
- **A Somewhat Less Mundane Case:** Next class, we'll consider an argument, based in a scientific worldview, that objects aren't really colored.
- **The More Radical Cases:** In this course, our main concern will be with claims that there is much more radical potential divergence between appearance and reality, which call into question the platitudes about objects and persons mentioned above.
- **Two Philosophical Impulses:** Very generally, participants debates about appearance vs. reality can be characterized in terms of two opposing philosophical impulses.
 - **Revisionary:** An impulse to which *undermine* the seeming truth of the appearances, claiming that the reality underlying them is radically distinct.
 - **Conservative:** Aim to *preserve* the truth of the appearances in the face of claims that purport to undermine them.
- **Two Philosophical Traditions:** We'll consider these questions of appearance and reality across two philosophical traditions, one in India from (mostly) the first Millennium CE, and one from Europe, considering two different eras, Modern (18th century), and Ancient.