

Swiss Philosophical Preprint Series

15

Olivier Massin

**The Phenomenology of
Mind-Independence**

added 10/11/2008

ISSN 1662-937X

© Olivier Massin

Existence and resistance:

The phenomenology of mind-independence

I shall defend the view that the experience of resistance gives us a direct phenomenal access to the mind-independence of perceptual objects. In the first part, I address an objection against the very possibility of experiencing mind-independence. The possibility of an experience of mind-independence being secured, I argue in the second part that the experience of resistance is the kind of experience by which we access mind-independence.

1. Is a phenomenology of reality possible?

1.1. Two different questions

Two questions arise concerning the connection between appearances and reality. First: are appearances real? Second: is reality apparent? When we ask about the reality of appearances, we try to understand whether the objects presented to us in experience exist independently of this experience. When we ask about the appearance of reality we try to know whether the objects of our experience are *presented to us as independent of our experience*. Historically, the first question is the most important one: do the direct objects of our perceptual experiences exist independently of their perception? Direct realism answers yes, while indirect realism and phenomenalism answer no, claiming that the immediate objects of our perceptual acts are mind-dependent sense-data. I shall address the second question, which concerns the phenomenology of reality: do the direct objects of our perceptions appear *as mind-independent*? Can we experience the very “moment of reality”¹ of perceptual objects? Let us call the positive answer to this question the thesis of the phenomenality of independence (PI).

(PI) The mind-independence of perceptual objects can be experienced.

Hume clearly rejects PI:

¹ The expression is from M. Scheler.

As to the independency of our perceptions on ourselves, this can never be an object of the senses. *Treatise*, 1.4.2.

I shall try, *contra* Hume, to defend PI.

1.2. Direct realism and Phenomenal Independence

Two remarks are in order concerning the relations between the questions of the reality of appearances and the question of the appearance of reality. First, these two questions are *prima facie* independent. This is one thing to ask whether the objects of perception are mind-independent; this is another to ask whether their mind-independence can be perceived. For instance, one can be a phenomenalist and agree that there is a phenomenology of reality. It is sufficient for that to adopt an error theory of perception: the objects of perception appear to be mind-independent, but this aspect of the perceptual content is systematically illusory. Conversely, it is possible to be a direct realist and to reject the phenomenality of independence: we may see mind-independent objects without seeing them as mind-independent. Though the objects of perception are real, this is an aspect of them that is not accessible in experience.

This doesn't mean however, that these two questions are not closely related. Though direct realism and the phenomenology of reality are not necessarily tied, they fit nicely together. The question of the phenomenology of reality has some important consequences concerning the epistemology of realism. If there is a phenomenology of reality, then there is an empiricist answer to the question "how do you know that the stone is real?" The answer is the same as to the question: "how do you know that the stone is round", namely: "Because I see it." As an *internalist* answer², it cannot refute sceptic objections such as the arguments of the deceiving God or of the brain in a vat. But it may help to refute other kind of objections against realism, such as the (conceptual) quietist's challenge according to which the notion of reality is not meaningful (possible answer: it is meaningful in so far as it is grounded in perception). The general idea is to avoid reluctance raised by the putative unobservable nature of mind-independence.

² This answer is internalist in the sense the evidence for the existence of an external world are perceptually *accessible to the subject*. Following L. Bonjour (1992), I take internalism to be compatible with direct realism.

1.3. Definitions

I shall admit the following definitions. What is real is what is mind-independent. More precisely, since I will be interested here only in the reality of the objects of our experiences, I shall define the reality of an object as follows:

x is real iff its existence x is independent of its being perceived (= of the existence of any perceptual act that takes x for its object)³.

As for perception, I agree that in order to perceive, the subject must have some *phenomenal* access to the content of his perception. Perception is a kind of experience. Consequently, blindsight subjects do not see, although the world is under their eyes and makes some difference to their behaviour. Phenomenality, or the fact that perceptual content makes some subjective difference, is *necessary* for perception.⁴ However, it does not imply that it is sufficient. This phenomenological condition is quite compatible with the view that perceptual verbs are factive: illusions may not be perceptions. Moreover, I take it that the objects of our experience are not simple, uncomposed, whole or blobs: we may perceive only certain parts, properties or aspects of an object. Therefore, we may not see the reality of an object, although the perception of some of its other aspects is veridical (in the same way, we can feel the temperature of an object without feeling its colour⁵). Finally, an appearance is whatever is presented to S in experience.

1.3. The Trouble with PI

³ One important problem with this definition of realism in terms of mind-independence is that it threatens the reality of mental states, existential dependence being apparently reflexive. I think this threat can be met if we insist on the fact that the definition asserts not only that real entities must be independent of mental states, but also, that they must be independent of their being *represented* by mental states. This may solve the problem of the reality of the mind (see J.Heil, 2003 : 58-59).

⁴ I'm reluctant to say that one must be conscious of the content of his perception, because I don't want to exclude the possibility of unconscious phenomenality, but consciousness may still help to understand the point.

⁵ This is compatible with a transparent use of perceptual verbs if we admit that different properties of a same object can be perceived separately.

The question of the phenomenal character of reality has received less attention than the debate about direct realism⁶, maybe because its answer seems obvious to many. Some would say that the answer is trivially positive: it is a basic phenomenological fact that the perceptual world appears to be independent. Others think on the contrary that the answer is trivially negative. According to them, the impossibility of experiencing reality follows from the very definition of reality in terms of mind-independence. If being real means existing unperceived, the reality of an object is not something we can perceive, for this would imply to perceive an unperceived object. I shall try to show in this first part that this objection relies on some dubious conceptions of existential (in)dependence (namely, temporal or modal ones), and that as soon as existential dependence is understood in terms of essence or ground, there is no more absurdity in claiming that mind-independence can be experienced.

1.4. The temporal approach of existential dependence.

Many usual definition of existential dependence imply that the mind-independence of perceptual objects cannot figure in the phenomenal content of our experiences. According to a first approach, a perceptual object is independent of perception if and only if it existed before, or continues to exist after its perception. This is a temporal definition of independence:

(TI) x is real if and only if there is a least one time at which x exists without being perceived.

If this is what is meant by “the reality” of an object, then it becomes obvious that this reality cannot be perceived. Not (or not only) because this would imply to perceive times that are not contemporaneous to the act of perception. But mainly because to see the reality of an object would implies to see an unseen object. Trying to perceive the mind-independence of perceptual objects would be as impossible as to try to see if the light of the fridge is on when

⁶ In a recent paper, Susanna Siegel make the same distinction between these two questions, and address the second one, concerning the phenomenology of independence. Nevertheless, she doesn't address the issue of the phenomenology of *existential* independence, but only the one of independence of the variation of *properties* (especially location properties) with respect to the variation of the position of the perceiver. (“Subject and Object in the Contents of Visual Experience”, June 2005).

the door is closed. The empiricist realist who believes only what he sees and who believes that there are some unseen things, must be seeing unseen things⁷.

But TI certainly asks too much. Actually existing unperceived is indeed a sufficient condition for existing independently of perception, but this condition is not necessary. Take events. The preceding temporal definition of independence implies that if a clap of thunder is wholly heard, it is dependent upon its being heard since it didn't exist before nor will exist after its being heard. This strange conclusion generalises if perdurantism is true: if persistent objects consist in spatio-temporal worms with temporal parts, and if these temporal parts are the only 'things' we perceive, then every object of perception is necessarily dependent upon its perception. Far from securing phenomenalism, such a temporal definition of independence trivializes it. We need a notion of independence that allows shaping the debate between realism and anti-realism in a substantial way.

1.5. The modal approach of existential dependence

The obvious move is to switch from a temporal to a modal notion of mind-independence. What must be required, for a perceptual object to be real, is that it *could* exist without being perceived.

(MI) x is real if and only if there is at least one possible world in which x exists without being perceived.

Such a definition solves the precedent worries concerning the reality of events and temporal parts. Does it allow for the perception of reality? That is, is it possible to perceive an object as *possibly* existing without being perceived? To put it in the language of possible worlds: can we perceive an object as existing unperceived in at least one possible world? It might sound strange to bring possibility into the content of perception. For one thing, intuitively, only the actual world can be perceived. It is dubious that we can perceptually experience possible worlds. Consider first the *possibilist*, who thinks that possible worlds

⁷See Hume: Thus Hume writes:

To begin with the SENSES, 'tis evident these faculties are incapable of giving rise to the notion of the *continu'd* existence of their objects, after they no longer appear to the senses. For that is a contradiction in terms, and supposes that the senses continue to operate, even after they have ceas'd all manner of operation *Treatise*, 1.4.2.

⁹ For Lewis (1986) x and y live in the same world iff they are spatiotemporally related.

really exist beyond our own actual world. How could we perceive a possible world from our actual world? These worlds may be conceived, or imagined, but it is hard to understand how they can be perceived. For perception seems to require some spatial, temporal and causal relations between the subject and the object, and no such relation holds between possible worlds⁹. Indeed, when asked how to determine the actual world among all those worlds, David Lewis answers that “ ‘Actual’ is an indexical like ‘I’ or ‘Here’ ” (*Counterfactuals*: 86). Indexicals are usually taken to be closely dependent on perception. This suggests a stronger reason why perception can’t go farther than the actual world: if a possible world were perceptible from the actual world, it would collapse into the actual world. Consider now the actualist, who claims that only one world exists, the actual one. If he grants that modal discourse is intelligible and purports to state the facts¹⁰, he will try to account for possible worlds in terms of actual entities. There are many options here and I can’t go through each one of them. Just to take two, possible worlds can be treated as actual but abstract entities, such as set of sentences or unexemplified properties. But clearly, abstract entities can no more be seen than alien worlds (intuition may be an epistemological option, but it is not perception). Possible worlds can also be treated as combinations of actual and concrete entities. Here again, if concrete entities can be perceived, their possible combinations are not reachable by perception: we can see the horse, we can see the narwhal, but we cannot see the unicorn. In conclusion, however we construe possible worlds, we are driven back to the intuition that only actual objects can be perceived¹¹. Their non-actual counterparts lie beyond our perceptual reach¹². This conclusion is of course disastrous for the Phenomenality of

¹⁰ I’m here paraphrasing Fine, « The problem of possibilia ».

¹¹ It has been challenged. J.J. Gibson (1986 : 127sq) claims that objects affords their different *possible* uses (the apple is seen as eatable, the terrestrial surfaces as climb-on-able, etc). But Gibson has no interest for the phenomenology of experience: as soon as we focus on what is immediately present to us, it is quite intuitive to claim that the actual apple is all what we see, and that on the basis of this perception, we anticipate, expect, imagine or conceive different possible actions. These non-perceptual mental events can arise spontaneously, non-inferentially, from the perception of the apple, but they remain distinct from it. Moreover, even if the possible use of object were perceivable, this would be of little help if we are to secure a phenomenology for reality; for the possibility we need to access is not a possibility of use, but a possibility of existence unperceived.

¹² A related problem is that, granting the perceptual accessibility of the possible worlds, however we construe them, we still to experience several worlds *at once*. need *different* experiences in order to access mind-independence of an object. For we need one experience of the actual object, and another experience of the possible, unperceived object. Even if the experience of an actual object is conjoined with the experience of its possible, unperceived, counterparts, there is no *singular* experience that present us with mind-independency. This problem is more acute when we consider mind-dependence. We certainly want to maintain that the mind-dependence of a pain is experiential. But if dependence is understood in modal terms, this would mean that we experience a huge number of possible worlds (maybe all of them) at once. How can a single pain experience do this?

Independence, since in order to perceptually access to the reality of an object, we need to perceive at least one possible counterpart of this object that is not perceived.

The second problem that MI raised for PI, is that even if we were able to perceptually access possible worlds, it would remain absurd to claim that we can see an unseen object, be it possible. This object may be non-perceived *in its world*, but it will be perceived *from our world*¹³. What is true of TI is still true of MI: since both define existential independence in terms of (non-present or non-actual) existence unperceived, it is trivially impossible to perceive the reality of an object.

This conclusion is not devastating for realism: it only shows that the claim that the world exists independently of our perception cannot be justified on the sole ground of our perceptual contents. When asked “How do you know that the stone is round”, we can plausibly answer “Because I see it”. But to the question “How do you know that the stone is real”, we can no more answer “Because I perceive it”. Our belief in the reality of the stone must be either justified by extra-perceptive considerations, such as inference to the best explanation; or granted to be a basic, unjustified and incorrigible belief: we may be so constituted that we spontaneously believe in the reality of the object of perception. Be it as it may, MI implies that perception cannot *justify* the belief in the mind-independence of external objects for the simple reason that mind-independence cannot be perceived. Nevertheless, it would certainly be a good news for the realist if the reality of perceptual objects could be perceived as such.

But there is still hope. It may be a mistake to define mind-dependence in terms of possible existence unperceived. Suppose that God exists, that he is a necessary being, that he sees everything, that he created the world and its laws a long time ago, and that he no more intervenes in it except for sporadic miracles. According to the modal notion of independence, the world then existentially depends on the perception of God: no objects are real since

¹³ This may be a perceptual version of Berkeley’s so-called “Master’s Argument”:

HYLAS. What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.

PHILONOUS. How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

HYLAS. No, that were a contradiction.

PHILONOUS. Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is *unconceived*? First Dialogue, p. 86.

This argument is widely reject as far as it concerns conceptions (although there is little agreement on the reasons of its unsoundness), but it seems at least correct as far as perception of possibility is concerned.

nothing could possibly exist without his perception¹⁴. But this is strongly counter-intuitive: for even if the world can't exist without being perceived, it is not here *because* God perceives it that the world exists. The world appears to follow its course independently of any perception of God. If God is not almighty, the world may even resist God's will. The perceptions of God appear to be purely epiphenomenal in this story. Yet the Modal view of Independence implies that they determine the reality of objects. So the Modal view of Independence appears to be false: possibly existing unperceived is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for existential independence¹⁵. The general problem with the modal approach of existential independence is that it registers only the fact that in each world where x exists, y exists, but it remains silent about the source of such a correlation. The correlation may be due to the dependent nature of x , but it may as well be due to the necessary nature of y . We wish to exclude the latter case.

1.6. The essentialist and foundational approaches of existential dependence.

As an alternative, K. Fine (1995) and J. Lowe (1998) have proposed to define existential dependence with the help of the notion of the identity (or essence) of an object¹⁶. The notion of essence is taken to be modally irreducible: the essence of a thing is what makes it what it is, its real definition (Fine, 1994). Every essential property is a necessary property but not every necessary property is essential. To take an example from Fine, it is necessary that Socrates is distinct from the Eiffel Tower, but this is not essential to him. In the same

¹⁴ I've adapted the God example proposed by P. Simons (1987: 295) to the case of perception. For more detailed critics of the modal conception of dependence, see Fine 1994, 1995; Lowe 1998, chap. 6; Correia, 2005. Jenkins (xxx) applies this critic to the definition of realism.

¹⁵ The defender of the modal definition of dependence that wish to preserve PI may reply that the problem here is not with the definition of dependence, but with the choice of the dependee, namely, God's perceptions. It would be a mistake to define mind-independence in terms of independence from perception, for what matter is independence from the will:

(MI') x is real iff there is at least one possible world in which x exists without being willed.

This definition deals with our above example. But it is possible to construe an example which renders MI' dubious in the same way. Suppose that God created the world and its laws so perfectly that the world will forever follow its course in accordance with God's will. Then it is not possible that something happen without being willed by God. But in that case, the fact the world necessarily conforms with God's will doesn't imply that the world depends on God's will. If the world at t conforms with God's will, this is not because God wills it at that time, but only because he created the world in such a way that such a concordance becomes necessary. Another possibility is that God's will is completely determinate by the content of its perceptions, so that he necessarily wills what he perceived. Here again, this is not because of God's will that the world is so and so, but rather because of the world being so that God wills it. If God wills everything that happens, this may be either because God's will is almighty, or because his will is so weak and blissfully happy that he cannot but will everything.

¹⁶ In fact their focus is wider since it includes every kind of dependence, not only existential ones. Lowe even claims that a purely essential dependence entails existential one, which is rejected by Correia (2005, 2.5.)

way, it is necessary that if I exist, then $2+2 = 4$, but I'm not essentially dependent on $2+2 = 4$. The idea is then that x depends on y if and only if the existence of x necessarily implies the existence of y *in virtue of the identity of x* . In other words, the source of the dependence must rely in the dependent object in order to avoid the conclusion that everything is dependent on necessary beings (God, the number 2). This solves the problem of the all-seeing God: it is true that the world can't exist without being perceived by God, but *this is not true in virtue of the nature of the world*. What the world is doesn't necessitate that God perceives it (though it may necessitate that God created it). We arrive at the following essential definition of independence:

(EI) x is real iff it is not true in virtue of the identity of x (=it is not part of the essence of x) that x exists only if it is perceived.

The mind-independence of x is compatible with its being necessarily perceived. F. Correia has recently given another definition of dependence in terms of *ground*, which avoids the reference to essences or natures while still excluding the trivial dependence on necessary beings. According to him, x depends on y iff "y's existing helps makes x exist." That is, an entity existentially depends on another when its existence is *explained* (in an objective sense) or *grounded* in the existence of the other. Then mind-independence can be defined as follows:

(FI) x is real iff its existence is not grounded in its being perceived.

There are important differences between EI and FI but they don't seem to be crucial for our problem of the phenomenology of reality. In both cases, mind-independence is no more defined in terms of existence unperceived, and this paves the way for PI. For the above objections against the perception of the reality of an object don't work anymore: it seems possible to experience the fact that the existence of an object is not grounded in its experience. The absence of the experience is no more present in the content of the experience. The conclusion of all this is that we have no more reason to reject the possibility of an experience of reality. The next question is: which experience gives us access to mind-independence?

2. What is the phenomenology of reality?

2.1. *The Resistance Thesis*

In his paper “Idealism and Realism”, the realist phenomenologist Max Scheler raised the following questions:

(1) What is the givenness of reality? What is experienced [*erlbet*], when anything whatever is experienced as real? This is the question of the phenomenology of the lived-experience of reality. (2) In what sorts of acts or modes of human behavior is the factor of reality [*Realitätsmoment*] originally given?¹⁷

Scheler’s answer is: the experience of resistance. Paradigmatic experiences of resistance occur when we carry a heavy bag, when we swim against the stream, or when we hold back a baby carriage in the stairs. According to Scheler, the experience of resistance gives us a direct access to the reality of the experienced objects. Let us call this the resistance thesis:

(RT) x is experienced as existing independently from its being experienced, if and only if x is experienced as resistant to our will.

Conjoined with the foundational approach of independence, the Resistance Thesis implies that if an object is experienced as resistant, then its existence is experienced as not being grounded in our experience. The intuition that the experience of resistance gives us a strong feeling of reality is widespread. One of the most famous examples is certainly Samuel Johnson’s “refutation” of Berkeley by kicking against a stone¹⁸. This refutation is generally held to miss the point because it tries to refute a metaphysical doctrine on the sole basis of a phenomenological feeling, thus conflating the question of the reality of appearances (to which immaterialism is an answer) with the independent question of the appearance of reality. I

¹⁷ 1973 [1927], p.313.

¹⁸ « After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it thus." Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, p.292. I take it that the experience of resistance was Johnson's focus, but other interpretations have been given. It is also possible to interpret Johnson as drawing attention to his experience of pain (xxx) or of pressure in the foot.

think nevertheless we should be more lenient with Johnson's refutation. For one thing, if there is a mistake, it is already present in Berkeley. Berkeley himself considers that the Phenomenality of Independence would be a problem for his immaterialism¹⁹. Secondly, there may be no mistake. For immaterialism, broadly construed, intends to be a non-revisionary thesis, compatible with commonsense. If so, Berkeley has better not to adopt an error theory concerning the phenomenology of independence.

Beyond Johnson and Scheler, many authors have claimed for a central role of the experience of resistance in the genetic explanation and the epistemological justification of our belief in the external world: Fichte (1795), Maine de Biran (1812), Schopenhauer (1819) T. Brown (1827), A. Bain (1872), Dilthey (1890), G. Heynmans (1905) J.M. Baldwin (1906), G.F. Stout (1931) and, more recently, S. Hampshire (1959), A.C. Garnett (1965), D. W. Hamlyn (1990) T. Baldwin (1995), J. Russell (1995, 1996), A. D. Smith (2002), and Q. Cassam (2005). Note that some of them are anti-realists (Fichte, Maine de Biran, Schopenhauer, Dilthey), while the others are realists²¹.

¹⁹ Berkeley believes that the most plausible candidate for the Phenomenality of Independence is not the experience of resistance (RT), which he barely mentions, but the experience of the distance of the objects from us. He consequently takes great pains to reject the three-dimensionality of sight and explicitly ties this project with his adoption of immaterialism. (See especially *Principles*, §43-44, and see Armstrong, 1960: 26sq, for a critic of the commonly claimed connection between Berkeley's view about the perception distance and his immaterialism

Moreover, pressed to explain if God induces every man to believe erroneously in the existence of matter, Philonous asks:

Whatsoever opinion we father on [God], it must be either because he has discovered it to us by supernatural revelation, or because it is so evident to our natural faculties, which were framed and given us by God, that it is impossible we should withhold our assent from it. But where is the revelation? Or where is the evidence that extorts the belief of matter? (Third Dialogue, p. 125.)

This sounds very much like Scheler's question, and I think we should read Johnson's refutation as an attempt to answer it. So if it is a mistake to contest immaterialism from any feeling of independence (either distance or resistance), this is a mistake that Johnson inherited from Berkeley.

²¹ Another debate opposes the inferentialists to the intuitionists. The inferentialists consider that the experience of resistance has no intrinsic intentionality and that it is only the crucial starting point of an inference whose conclusion is the *belief* in the external worlds (see especially T. Brown 1827: 151, and, to a lesser extent, Dilthey). The intuitionists, on the contrary, claim that the reality of objects is *immediately experienced* in the feeling of resistance. I shall focus on this intuitionist view, which is implied by RT.

2.2. *The experience of resistance*

What is then to be understood by an experience of resistance”? There are, I submit, three necessary and conjointly sufficient conditions in order to have such an experience.

(i) First, a crucial point, for all the upholders of RT, is that the phenomenology of independence is not to be found in mere perception, but must somehow involve our actions. Here’s Scheler:

“reality is not given to us in perceptual acts, but in our instinctive and conative conduct vis-à-vis the world.”²²

In order to experience resistance, we have to be agents, that is, we must be exerting our will. The experience of resistance is not something that happens to us, but something that we at least partly do. Resistance is a relation between an object and an agent. It may be considered as the converse of the relation of effort: if *O* resists to *A*, then *A* makes an effort on *O*. The relation of resistance is not to be confused with the relation of force. First, we can experience forces without experiencing effort; for instance, when we experience pressures on our skin, or spontaneous contractions of our muscles. Second, at least one term of the relation of resistance is an agent, while forces can hold between inert physical objects. Third, resistance is a non-symmetrical relation: when *O* resists to *A*, then it is not necessary that *A* resists to *O* (indeed, even when two agents act on each other, such as in arm-wrestling, one can argue that there is in fact not one symmetrical resistance relation between them, but two asymmetrical instances of the relation, so that resistance may be an asymmetrical relation). On the contrary, forces are symmetrical relations: this is at least the most plausible interpretation of Newton’s Third Law.

(ii) But to be acting on something is not sufficient for having an experience of resistance. We must perceive at the same time the very same thing on which we act. Without any perceptual feedback, we could make an effort on something without ever knowing it. What seems specific of the experience of resistance is that we immediately perceive the very same object on which we are directly acting. Our volition and our perception share part of their content.

(iii) This is still not sufficient: for if the perceptual and the volitional contents match *perfectly*, there is no resistance to be experienced. In order to experience resistance, there

²² 1973 [1927]: 318.

must be a partial mismatch between the content of the volition and of the perception. An omnipotent God can't experience resistance, because his will ever reaches his goal.

As a result, the experience of resistance is a complex mental state, constituted by a conative act (such as a volition, or, more neutrally, an efference) and a cognitive one (such as a perception or an afference) whose contents are compared and discovered to mismatch. This story is not original: it is already to be found in Maine de Biran, Dilthey or Scheler, and is at the heart of the principle of reafference described by von Holst and Mittelstaedt²³. Some details are needed, but I shall now focus on three objections against the resistance thesis.

2.3. Descartes' Objection

One first objection against the resistance thesis is that the experience of resistance is not necessary for the experience of independence. It is sufficient to experiment the spatial exteriority of perceptual objects, their distance from us. The focus on the experience of the distance of the perceptual objects reflects the common definition of realism in terms of things existing "outside the mind". Descartes clearly dismiss the necessity of the experience of resistance:

If every time our hands moved towards any part, all the bodies in that place receded as quickly as our hands approached, we should never feel hardness; and yet we have no reason to believe that bodies which might thus recede would on this account lose that which makes them bodies. (*Principles*, II, iv).

Despite Descartes' declared intuition, it seems clear that something is missing in this world. In such a world, although we may experience the objects at a certain distance from us, they would plausibly not appear as independent of us. It is dubious that the experience of distance can give us any idea of existential independence. Independence is a formal relation, while distance is a material one. It is hard to understand how the mere perception of the distance between the eye (or the body of the perceiver) and the object could give us phenomenal access to the mind-independence of the seen object. First, distance is not sufficient for independence: pains and tickles are experienced in the three-dimensional space

²³ Holst E., von, Mittelstaedt, 1950, « Das Reafferenzprinzip. Wechselwirkungen zwischen Zentralnervensystem und Peripherie », *Naturwissenschaften*, 37, 464-476. Holst, E. von, 1954, « Relations between the central nervous system and the peripheral organs », *British Journal of Animal Behavior*, 2, 89-94 (donné par Jeannerod 2002).

of the body and they appear to be mind-dependent. Second, externality doesn't seem necessary for independence: touch, for instance, is generally held to be a sense of contact, in which no phenomenal distance between our body and the object appears. But touch is also often held to be the most objective of the five senses, giving us a strong impression of reality.

2.4. The Rehmke-Heidegger-Stout's Objection

According to a second objection, raised independently by Rehmke, Heidegger and Stout, the Resistance Thesis is circular. The experience of resistance is supposed to give us an exclusive phenomenal access to the existence of a mind independent world. But, in order to make an effort on something, we must already be conscious that there is something.

“How could the one who wills experience resistance, without presupposing the external world?” Rehmke, quoted by Scheler, . 326.

“The discovery of resistance, that is, of what resists our strivings, is ontologically possible only on the basis of the disclosedness of the world.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §43.

« If this view [according to which what resists voluntary effort must be an independently existing not-self] is to be taken seriously, further explanation is required. It is plain that by itself it cannot claim, without an obvious *petitio principii*, to be an account of the way in which physical objects are known. Awareness of an embodied self in interaction with an embodied not-self is already presupposed in the awareness of resisted effort. (Stout, *Mind and Matter*, p. 167)

The experience of resistance relies on our being able to act on things and to perceive the things on which we act. But both volitions and perception are intentional acts. To be in an intentional state implies to distinguish oneself from the independent world²⁴. As a consequence, the experience of resistance cannot explain the origin nor justify our knowledge of the distinction between us and the world because it presupposes it. So goes the objection.

The answer to it is that the volitions and perceptions that enter in the experience of resistance are not themselves experienced: they are sub-personal states. This is why Scheler prefers to speak of instincts or drives rather than of volition, which suggest a central, self-conscious act. This is also why it is misleading to speak of perception for, strictly speaking, there is no phenomenal intentionality in those kind of low-level states. Afference and efference are better names. Such states can occur in very rudimentary creatures that don't make any distinction between themselves and the “external” world. So the experience of

²⁴ This may be why many consider the thesis of the Phenomenality of Independence as trivial.

resistance doesn't require any intentional states, if by this we mean states whose intentionality is phenomenally given (these states may still be intentional in a weaker, non-phenomenological causal sense). Therefore, no subjective distinction between oneself and the world is assumed before the experience of resistance. The phenomenal world of a creature deprived of any experience of resistance is akin to the world of the neutral monist: there is no intentionality, no act-object distinction there²⁵. Of course, the creature and the world are in fact metaphysically distinct, but this is a distinction that the creature doesn't access.

This is only when we experience resistance that we come to realize the distinction between the world and ourselves. The experience of resistance, therefore, grounds phenomenal intentionality, not the contrary. Phenomenally, the experience of resistance should be understood as an internal relation in the following strong sense: a relation that constitutes its terms. The subject and the external world, so to speak, spread out from the experience of resistance. Strong anti-realist may go so far as understanding this metaphysically. But the point here is weaker: the experience of the resistance doesn't generate the ontological distinction between the self and the world but the phenomenological distinction between the experienced self and the experienced world. Through it, existential independence of the world from the self comes to be known.

2.5. A last objection: generalized VS restricted resistance theses

Here is a last important objection: if the intentionality wholly derives from the experience of resistance, does it follow that mere perceptual experiences, in which no resistance is apparently involved, have no intrinsic intentionality? In other words, does the resistance thesis imply that perceptual objects don't appear as real? This would sound odd. The answer to this question introduces an important schism among the upholders of the Resistance Thesis.

Some answer the objection by subscribing to a generalised resistance thesis. They claim that the objects of our ordinary perceptual experiences are all presented to us as resistant. Their main argument for this is that we cannot modify what we see or hear at will. So they can maintain, every ordinary perceptual experience is intentional in the strong phenomenal sense: they present us with the reality of its objects.

²⁵ To use the expression of C. Cassam, there is no self-world dualism. Scheler speaks of « extatic knowledge » to qualify this kind of non intentional states.

Some others consider that generalised resistance is implausible: if we can't change our perceptual contents at will, this is not because those contents resist to us, but only because we are not able to form any volition concerning them. This is a case of aboulia, not of resistance. They wish to stay closer from the original intuition of Johnson: therefore, they adopt a restricted resistance thesis according to which resistance is limited to the paradigmatic cases where a muscular effort is involved. As a consequence, only hard, impenetrable, material bodies can be felt as resistant, that is, as real. Their answer to the present objection is then to make the pills easier to swallow. For one thing, they can insist that ordinary perceptual experience may still have a derived intentionality. They can inherit, by association for instance, a quasi-feeling of reality from the experience of resistance. Secondly, the fact that only material objects or properties are experienced as mind-independent is not a so bad consequence, according to them, since the priority given to material objects is also deep-rooted in commonsense. We want robust facts, solid arguments, and hard or tangible proofs. The restricted character of the experience of resistance may explain this ontological priority given by commonsense to material entities, which may explain in turn the philosophical distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

References

- Baldwin, T., "Objectivity, Causality, and Agency", in *The Body and the Self*, ed. J. L. Bermúdez, A. Marcel, N. Eilan, (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 107-125.
- "Perception and Agency", in *Agency and self-awareness*, ed. J. Roessler & N. Eilan, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, 188-200.
- Baldwin, J. M., *Thought and Things*, London, Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1906.
- Bonjour, Laurence, 1992, "Externalism/Internalism" in *A Companion to Epistemology*, Ed. J. Dancy and Ernest Sosa, Oxford, Blackwell.
- Brown, T., *Lectures on the Philosophy of the human mind*, Edinburgh : William Tait, 1827.
- Cassam, Q., *Self and World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Correia, F., *Existential Dependence and Cognate Notions*, Thèse de doctorat ès lettres, Université de Genève.
- Dilthey, « De notre croyance à la réalité du monde extérieur » in *Le monde l'esprit*, trad. M. Remy, Paris, Aubier [1890].
- Fine, Kit, 1994, "Essence and Modality", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 8, ed. J. Tomberlin, 1-16.

- “Ontological Dependence”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, part 1, 1995.
- Fricke, Martin F., & Snowdon, P., « Solidity and impediment », *Analysis*, vol. 63, n°3, Juillet 2003.
- Garnett, A. Campbell, *The perceptual process*, (London: George Allen & Unwin), 1965.
- Hallett, H.F., « Dr. Johnson’s refutation of Bishop Berkeley », *Mind*, 56, 1947, p. 132-47.
- Hampshire, Stuart, *Thought and Action*, London : Chatto and Windus, 1959.
- Hamlyn, D. W., *In & Out of the Black Box*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Heil, J., *From an ontological point of view*, Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Heynmans, G., *Einführung in die Metaphysik auf Grundlage der Erfahrung*, Leipzig, Barth, 191, (1^{ère} éd. 1905).
- James, W., *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2, New-York, Dover, 1950.
- Jenkins, C.S., “Realism and Independence”, forthcoming in *American Philosophical Quarterly*.
- Lane Patey, D., « Johnson’s Refutation of Berkeley : Kicking the Stone Again », *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1986, 139-145.
- Lowe, E., J., *Subjects of experience*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- The Possibility of Metaphysics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Maine de Biran, *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie*, Paris, Vrin, 2001.
- Russell, James, *Agency, Its Role in Mental Development*, Erlbaum (UK), Taylor & Francis, 1996, partie 2.
- « At Two with nature : Agency and the development of self-world dualism », in J. Bermudez, A. J. Marcel et N. Eilan (eds), *The Body and the Self*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1995, p. 127-151.
- Scheler, Max, « Idealismus-Realismus », *Philosophischer Anzeiger*, II (Bonn : Verlag Friedrich Cohen, 1927 ; trad. anglaise par D. R. Lachterman in Scheler, Max, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973.
- « Zu "Idealismus —Realismus", Aus Teil V. Das Emotionale realitäts problem », trad. anglaise partielle par T.J. Sheehan, « Reality and Resistance : On *Being and time*, Section 43 », *Listening*, 12, 3, automne 1977.
- Smith, A. D., *The Problem of Perception*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Stout, G. F., *Mind & Matter*, Cambridge University Press, 1931, p. 273-308.