Eugen Fischer

**Verbal Fallacies and Philosophical Intuitions:**

**The Continuing Relevance of Ordinary Language Analysis**

FINAL DRAFT VERSION of paper published in: Brian Garvey (ed.): *J.L.* *Austin on Language*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 124-140

In his brilliant if enigmatic lectures *Sense and Sensibilia*, J.L. Austin sought to ‘dissolve philosophical worries’ including what is now (since Smith 2002) known as ‘the problem of perception’. His treatment of this problem affords one of the finest examples of ordinary language philosophy: It attempts to ‘dissolve’ a major philosophical problem through an analysis of what we would say and infer when, designed to ‘unpick’ or expose, ‘one by one, a mass of seductive (mainly verbal) fallacies’ in the ‘arguments’ that engender the problem (Austin 1962, 4-5). Partly due to intriguing points of contact with the currently much discussed movement of experimental philosophy, this work is currently attracting again significant attention (see Gustafsson 2011).

Friends and detractors alike have frequently ascribed a problematic aim and approach to ordinary language philosophers. These philosophers supposedly seek to effect *‘semantic dissolutions’* of philosophical problems, by exposing lack of truth or meaning in philosophical claims that engender the problems, and in the questions that articulate them. The ordinary language approach allegedly consists in exposing these semantic defects by bringing out clashes with common sense and deviations from established linguistic usage (e.g. Hanfling 2000, 32-5). This approach is vulnerable to two simple but devastating objections: Both common-sense convictions and established linguistic practices ‘can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded’, as none other than Austin pointed out with reference to natural language (Austin 1979, 185). Hence falsity cannot be inferred from clashes with common-sense convictions, nor meaninglessness from deviation from ordinary language. Second, the introduction of the semantics-pragmatics distinction has been taken to ‘undercut most “ordinary language” philosophising’ (Robinson 2001, 52), namely inferences from such deviation: What speakers say and infer in any ordinary context is determined both by the semantic properties of expressions and more general pragmatic rules which are defeasible. Where deviation from ordinary linguistic practice involves violation of defeasible rules, it is liable to engender confusion but need not lead to falsehood, let alone meaninglessness. In particular this second objection, originating from Grice (1961), has not gone unanswered.[[1]](#footnote-1) But, jointly or singly, these two objections have led even philosophers who admired the brilliance of ordinary language philosophy at its Austinian best to take a rather dim view of its ultimate philosophical relevance (e.g. Hanfling 2000, 32-3).

By building on a methodological idea from experimental philosophy and findings from psycholinguistics, we will now develop Austin’s approach in *Sense and Sensibilia* in a way that facilitates a different kind of ‘dissolution’ of one important class of philosophical problems, a dissolution which exposes epistemic, rather than semantic, defects in the intuitions and arguments that raise them, and which is not touched by those two objections. While lacking the space to simultaneously pursue exegetical ambitions, we will thus show that ordinary language analysis of the kind practiced in key parts of Austin’s classic is of continued philosophical relevance (*pace* Snowdon, this volume).

Many philosophical problems are engendered by apparently valid arguments which take us from intuitively plausible assumptions to conclusions at odds with some common-sense conviction that p. Such philosophical paradoxes motivate questions of the form:

How is it possible that p, given that q?

where q is the conclusion of the paradoxical argument or the last step the querist still accepts, *in extremis* its initial premises. ‘The’ *problem of perception* is raised by a variety of arguments – including arguments from illusion, from hallucination, from science, from secondary qualities, etc. (see Robinson 2001, Smith 2002, Martin 2003) – which converge on the conclusion that, in sense-perception, we are not aware, or at any rate not directly aware, of public physical objects but only of ‘perceptions’ or ‘sense-data’. We shall focus, like Austin, on arguments from illusion, which were particularly influential among the philosophers to whom he responded (incl. Russell 1912, Broad 1923, Price 1932, Ayer 1940) and which attract significant attention again, today (Smith 2002, Fish 2009, Crane 2011). These arguments proceed from familiar cases of *non-veridical perception* (unhappily labelled ‘illusions’), where things look or otherwise appear different than they are: ‘When viewed sideways, round coins look elliptical’, etc. The apparent clash of the arguments’ conclusion with our conviction that we see, hear, and feel coins and coaches in our physical environment motivates the question of how it is possible for us to [correctly say that we] perceive physical objects – given that we are (directly) aware only of private sense-data (q=conclusion, Ayer 1940), or given that there are cases of ‘illusion’ (q=premise, Smith 2002, Crane 2011).

In contrast with semantic problem-dissolutions, *‘epistemic dissolutions’* seek to dissolve problems arising from paradoxes by showing them *ill-motivated*, namely, by showing that the thinkers worried by the problem have no right either to believe that the assumptions that engender it are true or to think that these assumptions are incompatible with p (i.e. that in conjunction with p they entail a contradiction or otherwise unacceptable conclusion). For problems engendered by several converging arguments, this approach involves patient examination of one argument after another. With a view to dissolving the problem of perception, Austin – who hunts down both semantic and epistemic defects – commences such an examination by scrutiny of the argument from illusion.

Findings from psycholinguistics will allow us to identify the true risks and perils of violating the – malleable and often defeasible – rules of ordinary language, and to appreciate how the analysis of ‘what we would say and infer when’ can contribute to the main moves potentially involved in the epistemic dissolution of problems such as the problem of perception: Such analysis helps (1) to reveal the need to justify intuitively plausible premises of paradoxical arguments, (2) to show that this need is not met, and (3) to expose conflicts between compelling claims and common-sense convictions as merely apparent. Through a case study on the argument from illusion, this paper will establish (1) and (2), and hint at (3).

**1. Exposing Merely Apparent Truisms**

Like many other paradoxes, the argument from illusion proceeds from intuitively compelling assumptions that appear to need no further argumentative support – and are duly maintained without such support. What is now regarded as the standard version of the argument from illusion (Robinson 2001, Smith 2002, Crane 2011) employs the *Phenomenal Principle*:

Whenever something looks or otherwise appears F to a subject S, she is (directly) aware of something that is F.

This principle allows us to move from descriptions of cases of non-veridical perception (‘When viewed sideways, a round coin looks elliptical’) to particular *phenomenal judgments*:

S is (directly) aware of something that is F (say, elliptical).

By Leibniz’ Law (If b has a property that a lacks, a≠b), the subject is aware not of the physical object viewed (the round coin), which merely looks F (elliptical) to S, but of something else. Various steps then generalise from this negative conclusion about one kind of non-veridical case to all cases of perception.

In the context of this argument, the phenomenal judgment is not perceptual but inferred, namely from verbal statements of (generalisations from) perceptual judgments, such as ‘When viewed sideways, round coins look elliptical’. Typically, champions of the argument are unable to say anything informative about why they confidently make such phenomenal judgments: They certainly do not report applying the Phenomenal Principle, which is virtually unintelligible in the absence of concrete examples illustrating it, and is typically accepted only on the strength of particular phenomenal judgments (rather than *vice versa).* Arguably, the phenomenal judgments philosophers are prone to make in considering cases of non-veridical perception result from inferences that are unconscious and, more generally, automatic.[[2]](#footnote-2) If so, philosophers’ characterisation of the argument as resting on an ‘appeal to intuition’ (Robinson 2001, 54) is also psychologically accurate: Phenomenal judgments then are what cognitive psychologists call *intuitions*:[[3]](#footnote-3) non-perceptual judgments which are based on largely automatic inferences (Kahneman and Frederick 2005, 268; cp. Evans 2010, 314) and immediately strike the thinkers inclined to make them as plausible (regardless of whether or not these thinkers accept those judgments upon further reflection).[[4]](#footnote-4) These *phenomenal intuitions* are powerful and hard to avoid (Robinson 2001, 54, cp. Smith 2002, 35ff).

The need to justify these judgments is obscured by the fact that they are often expressed in the same terms as actual truisms about the situations at issue: The argument is most frequently developed from cases where something looks a shape or size F it is not, from a certain perspective or distance (e.g. Russell 1912, 2-3; Broad 1923, 239ff; Price 1932, 28; Ayer 1940, 3; Ayer 1956, 86; Robinson 2001, 53, Smith 2002, 53). Before introducing technical terms, many philosophers express phenomenal judgments about such and related situations by saying subjects are ‘aware’ or ‘conscious of’ an ‘F patch’ (e.g. Price 1932, 3) or ‘F speck’ (e.g. Ayer 1940, 22f).

In such situations and, more generally, in familiar situations of non-veridical perception, we ordinarily use expressions of the form ‘F patch’ or ‘F speck’ in two kinds of cases, and without implying that anything actually is that shape, size, or colour: We use those expressions

1. when we cannot tell what we are looking at, so we can only pick it out by a description of its looks (from here, now), as when a rambler points into a valley and asks, ‘Do you see that small red patch? Might that be our car?’
2. when we seek to convey economically how something looks for a particular protagonist, as in this passage from a novel: ‘Who was the person at the bottom of the pool? Morini could see him or her, a tiny speck trying to climb the rock that had now become a mountain, and the sight of this person, so far away, filled his eyes with tears’ (Bolaño 2009, 47).

The small red patch may turn out to *be* our car; and ‘tiny speck’ refers to a climber (whether man or woman the protagonist cannot tell). There is no suggestion that the thing (vehicle, person) we talk about *is* small or tiny (a Mini or a dwarf), merely that it *looks* small (looks the size of a small patch or tiny speck), from here, now. On this *Reading R*, it is perfectly true and uncontroversial to say that a subject ‘is aware of’ or at any rate ‘sees’ an ‘elliptical speck’ when looking sideways at a coin – which then looks elliptical.

This reading is consistent with a familiar – metaphorical (cp. Gipps and Colston 2012, 48-54) – usage which has us describe things in terms of others that look similar, in a particular respect: Except in tales of the supernatural, ‘A ghost opened the door’ means the door was opened by someone looking in some way like a ghost (pale as a ghost, or dressed up as a ghost, etc.). This usage allows us to say that S is aware of ‘an elliptical patch’ when viewing a coin sideways: This means that S is aware of something that looks elliptical (the shape of an elliptical patch) to her (from there, now).

This usage stems from basic principles of linguistic communication pinned down by pragmatic maxims, such as Grice’s (1989) Maxim of Manner: ‘Be as brief, precise, and clear as you can!’ When – unlike in case (1), but as in standard statements of arguments from illusion – we already know what a subject is looking at, this maxim obliges us to call a spade a spade, so that we may resort to ‘patch talk’ only if we want to convey economically what the object viewed looks like to the subject – as in case (2).[[5]](#footnote-5)

Pragmatic maxims can of course be defeated, e.g. by norms of politeness or stylistic conventions. But no such defeaters seem relevant in statements of arguments from illusion. These arguments tell us explicitly what object (coin etc.) is viewed. As competent speakers, philosophers should therefore spontaneously interpret their talk of, say, an ‘elliptical patch’ as referring to the round coin the subject is explicitly assumed to look at, and as conveying how that object looks to her, from there and then (Reading R). So they should balk at the phenomenal judgment that the subject then is aware of something that *is* elliptical, and should regard the further inference (with Leibniz’ Law) to ‘The subject is aware of something other than the coin, which is round’ as every bit as poor a joke as the remark: ‘At the fancy-dress party, a ghost opened the door. I don’t believe in ghosts and entered without greeting.’ Both turn on the literal interpretation of a well-established metaphorical usage.

On the traditional conception outlined at the outset, philosophical ordinary language analysis would have us infer from this finding that phenomenal judgments are plainly wrong: ‘In the situations at issue, subjects simply see nothing that actually is elliptical.’ The epistemic approach to problem-dissolution has us draw different conclusions that are clearly not open to charges of dogmatism: Phenomenal judgments about familiar situations of non-veridical perception are distinct from actual truisms that may be expressed by the same words (on Reading R), and in conflict with common sense (as implicit in that reading). According to the ‘default and challenge model’ of justification (e.g. Williams 2001, 25) which Austin, too, seems to employ (Leite 2011), endorsement by common sense makes acceptance the – appropriate – default response to a claim, namely, in the absence of positive reasons for doubt. By contrast, claims in conflict with common sense require positive reasons in support. Hence, proponents of arguments from illusion are only justified in accepting phenomenal judgments if they are able to provide such reasons.

**2. Psychology for Philosophy**

These philosophers generally develop no arguments to support their phenomenal judgments.[[6]](#footnote-6) Rather, they appeal to their intuition (Robinson 2001, 54). Such an appeal provides a suitable reason just in case the mere fact that the given thinker has the intuitions at issue, as and when he has them, speaks for their truth. When an intuitive judgment at odds with common sense is accepted in the absence of supporting argument, we can thus determine whether proponents have the right to accept the judgment as true by determining whether this intuition has such ‘probative force’. It has such force, e.g., in case the thinker has the intuition due to a cognitive process that reliably generates true judgments about the subject matter at hand (cp. Sosa 2007), at least under the relevant conditions. An intuition has no probative force if it is due to a process that is unreliable, in general or under the circumstances (cp. Leben 2012). When an intuition in need of justification is accepted in the absence of argument, a psychological explanation which identifies the cognitive processes generating the intuition can hence help us assess the thinker’s right to accept the intuition as true – without naturalistic fallacy.

Currently this approach is prominently advocated by some experimental philosophers:

First we use ... experimental results to develop a theory about the underlying psychological processes that generate people’s intuitions; then we use our theory about the psychological processes to determine whether or not those intuitions are warranted.’ (Knobe and Nichols 2008, 8)[[7]](#footnote-7)

Experimental work in psycholinguistics has shown that those ‘underlying psychological processes’ crucially include processes of automatic inference shaped by dominant uses of words – which ordinary language analysis helps uncover. Such analysis can contribute to explanations of philosophically relevant intuitions, which are verifiable by psychological experiment. We will now engage in such ‘psychologically enhanced ordinary language analysis’, in developing an explanation of phenomenal intuitions.

In psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology, automatic inferences – about which thinkers need not be able to tell us anything – are studied through experiments including reading time measurements: Subjects read texts where sentences (“Steve threw the fragile vase against the wall”) which imply predictions (the vase will have broken) are followed a little later by statements inconsistent with those predictions (“Steve picked up the vase and dusted it off”). Experimenters interpret longer reading times for such ‘inconsistent’ statements or their immediate sequels as evidence of automatic predictive inferences which engender comprehension difficulties (Klin et al. 1999, Harmon-Vukic et al. 2009).

Social (cp. Uleman et al. 2008) and cognitive psychologists (e.g. Sloman 1996, Morewedge and Kahneman 2010), seek to explain such and other automatic inferences as the result of simple associative processes in semantic memory that can duplicate even complex inferences. Such simple processes are postulated on the basis of priming-experiments which reveal that some concepts are ‘*activated’* (made more readily available for use) when we encounter verbal stimuli: Subjects are presented first with a stimulus or ‘*prime’* (word, sentence, short text) and then a ‘*probe’* word or string of letters, and have to either read out the word or decide whether the string forms a proper word. When subjects need less time for such ‘naming’ or ‘lexical decision tasks’ where probe and prime are related (“bank”-“money” rather than “bank”-“honey”), researchers infer that the prime activated the probe concept (e.g. Peleg and Giora 2011).

Several psycholinguistic studies (reviewed by Giora 2003) have investigated in this way how two different kinds of processes contribute to utterance understanding: *Stimulus-driven processes* are wholly determined by current and immediately preceding verbal input. *Expectation-driven processes* are influenced also by previously processed stimuli and the deliverances of other cognitive processes. One crucial finding, articulated by the well supported *graded salience hypothesis* (Giora 2003, Peleg and Giora 2011), is that, as each verbal stimulus (word or idiomatic expression) is encountered, a stimulus-driven process activates *all* the concepts constitutive of the expression’s different meanings or senses, or representing key semantic and prototypical features associated with that expression,[[8]](#footnote-8) and does so irrespective of linguistic or other context. The more frequently the subject uses or encounters a sense, or the more prototypical she deems a property for a term, the more rapidly and strongly the relevant property- or other concept is activated – sometimes so strongly that it cannot be subsequently suppressed even by inconsistent outputs of parallel expectation-driven processes. E.g.:

1. The ambiguous stimulus ‘mint’ activates semantic properties associated with its most frequently used sense (probe: ‘candy’), even where this is contextually irrelevant (prime: ‘All buildings collapsed except the mint.’)
2. Stimulus expressions that, in their most frequent use, are associated with stereotypes (stand for prototype-concepts) activate the relevant stereotypical features irrepressibly strongly even in clearly inappropriate contexts, as in this notoriously difficult riddle (Giora 2013, 13):

A young man and his father had a severe car accident. The father died, and the young man was rushed to hospital. The surgeon at the emergency room refused to operate on him, saying, ‘I can’t. He’s my son.’ – How is this possible?

The difficulty subjects typically experience at this point results from the automatic inference to the conclusion that the speaker possesses all the prototypical properties of surgeons – including the stereotypical gender – and illustrates how such conclusions may prevail over those of expectation-driven inferences which take context into account: Since the father is dead, the speaker must clearly be the only remaining parent, the mother. Like nouns (‘surgeon’), also verbs can be associated with stereotypical features, namely of actions (‘sewing’-‘needle’), agents (‘arrest’-‘police’), and direct objects or ‘patients’ (‘manipulate’-‘naïve’) (McRae et al. 1997, Ferretti et al 2001), which are then activated particularly swiftly and strongly. Crucially, activation of dominant senses and stereotypical features occurs not only in language comprehension but – as some ingenious studies (overview: Giora 2003, 134-6) have shown – also in text production.

By activating stereotypical features of dominant application-situations of words, these stimulus-driven processes can duplicate not only semantic but also pragmatic inferences: Where, say, a verb is most frequently used in situations in which its preference over others licenses pragmatic inferences to attributions of properties, e.g., to the patient affected by the action or event, these ‘patient-properties’ may become stereotypically associated with the verb. Where this happens, the processes outlined will lead to preferential activation of the relevant property-concepts whenever the verb is used, and facilitate *‘stereotype-based inferences’*, namely, automatic attributions of the stereotypical properties to given patients.

These psycholinguistic findings reveal that some ordinary language is privileged – not normatively but psychologically: The uses of words a subject employs and encounters most frequently shape associative memory processes that duplicate semantic and pragmatic inferences. This gives empirical content to Austin’s observation that philosophers’ ‘tampering with words’ can have ‘unforeseen repercussions’ (cp. Austin 1962, 63): In many cases, philosophers will use and encounter well-established terms most frequently in certain familiar senses. When they give *such* terms a new use without realising its novelty, they will hence unwittingly continue to make leaps of thought which duplicate semantic and pragmatic inferences licensed by the terms’ familiar use. Where a word can be applied only in the new sense, such inferences will engender paradoxical intuitions. This is particularly consequential where the new use is motivated not by any individual thinker’s idiosyncrasies but by features characteristic of philosophical reflection quite generally, like the desire to argue at a very general or abstract level.

**3. From Linguistic Analysis to Psychological Explanation**

Philosophers who wish to argue, in general and simultaneously, about all of our five different senses tend to use the familiar verb “to perceive” as shorthand for the cumbersome disjunction “to see or hear or smell or taste or feel”. To talk about how things then look or sound or smell or taste or feel to the perceiver, early analytic and current philosophers alike make a *generic use* of the verbs “seem” or “appear” – e.g., in setting out the cases inspiring arguments from illusion.[[9]](#footnote-9) Already Austin pointed out, however, that in their most frequent ordinary uses, both words are used with different implications than the supposedly merely more specific term “looks” is in its intended ‘phenomenal’ use: In contrast with “looks F”, “seems F” is typically used with implicit reference to specific evidence (which may be inconclusive), while “appears F” is used with reference to special circumstances (in which appearances may deceive us) (Austin 1962, 36-7):

1. ‘She looks *chic*’ – straightforward enough;
2. ‘She seems (to be) *chic*’ – from these photographs, etc.;
3. ‘She appears to be *chic*’ – […] in unsophisticated, provincial circles.

Standard formulations of the argument from illusion proceed from explicit assumptions about how things look *to others or to unspecified subjects*, in *familiar* situations of *non-veridical* perception (e.g. Russell 1912, 2; Broad 1923, 240-41, 246; Ayer 1940, 3; Robinson 2001, 57-8; Crane 2011). In *such* situations, pragmatic maxims have us make different inferences from those different expressions:[[10]](#footnote-10) We take for granted that adults and school children alike know how familiar medium-sized objects look from different distances and angles, and in different lighting. Accordingly, when we apply “looks F to S” to familiar situations of non-veridical perception, we merely describe what something looks like to the subject, without implying that the subject is inclined to judge or believe this thing is F.

But we implicate just this when, in talk about such situations, we use “seems F” (with its implicit reference to evidence supporting judgment) and “appears F” (with its implicit reference to circumstances affecting judgment): “X seems F to S” and “X appears F to S”, respectively, offer the most economical way to convey that the subject is inclined to judge or believe that x is F on the basis of some evidence (which may be afforded by the way x looks to S) or that the subject is so inclined under certain circumstances (which may be those under which she now views x), respectively. Taking speakers to abide by the Maxim of Manner – ‘Be as brief, precise, and clear as you can!’ (Grice 1989) – we thus take their preference of either of these two expressions over “X looks F to S” to show that they do not just mean to characterise how x looks to S but mean to convey that S is inclined to judge or believe that x is F.

The same maxim licenses inferences from the preference of “seems” and “appears F to S” over verbs and expressions like “S sees/perceives x to be F” or “S sees/perceives that x is F” which imply the subject makes a (i) definite and (ii) true judgment: The pragmatic implication from “seems” and “appears” is that either (i) S is merely inclined to judge that x is F or (ii) makes a judgment that is not true. Either way, S does not know whether x is F, whether it has the size, shape, or colour it seems or appears. (The evidence is inconclusive, or the circumstances deceptive.) Philosophers’ stock examples invoke objects like pennies which are a standard or characteristic size, shape, and colour (cp. Broad 1923, 239ff; Ayer 1940, 3; Ayer 1956, 86; and Robinson 2001, 53). In such cases, the subject’s ignorance of these properties implies she does not know what object (penny, pound, weight) she faces.

Pragmatic inferences are of course defeasible. But if in most situations of the expression’s most frequent use they are not defeated, inferable properties of the verb’s stated or tacit subject or object will become stereotypical of the application-situations of the expression. Where this happens, automatic processes will facilitate leaps from those verbal stimuli to attributions of the pertinent property, akin to our above leap from the surgeon-vignette to the conclusion that the speaker is male. In the same way, we will leap from sentences of the form ‘X seems/appears F to S’, to the conclusion that the patient S is inclined to judge that X is F, and is ignorant of the (different) true size, shape, or colour of X, or even of its nature. Stimulus-driven processes will prompt such stereotype-based inferences, regardless of contextual cues – even when such cues suggest the falsity of the conclusion, as the father’s death did in the surgeon-vignette, and the familiarity of philosophical stock examples of ‘illusions’ does now. These automatic processes thus have speakers reared on ordinary English leap from philosophers’ common descriptions of their stock scenarios of non-veridical perception to intuitive attributions of misguided doxastic inclinations and ignorance.

The outputs of such automatic processes can be suppressed or modified in more effortful conscious reflection (Kahneman and Frederick 2005, Evans 2010, Morewedge and Kahneman 2010). But when thinkers make the new generic use of “appear” and “seem”, without realising the novelty, they will, even upon reflection, find it perfectly correct to say that the coin appears elliptical – and fail to realise that this does not carry the same implications as when these words are employed in their dominant use. The fact that those terms do not even defeasibly imply ignorance, in their presently relevant generic use, is hence not available for conscious reflection, while no pragmatic defeaters (social conventions, etc.) are salient. The conflict with common-sense attributions of knowledge in the philosophical stock cases, finally, will be deemed irrelevant by philosophers who believe our everyday epistemic practices inadequate (such as Russell 1912, 1-2; cp. Austin 1962, 9 on Ayer 1940, 1-2). As a result those intuitive attributions of ignorance are liable to go through unchallenged.

Elementary deductive inferences lead from such attributions to the conclusion that the viewer is not aware of the object she is viewing – neither in the ordinary sense of “is aware of”, nor in the technical sense of ‘directly aware’: The *Oxford English Dictionary* explains the former as follows:

(OED) be aware of = to have cognizance, know, viz. have knowledge as obtained by observation or information.

In this standard use, the verb marks the possession of knowledge, acquired through observation or otherwise (being told, etc.). Either way, ‘awareness’ implies knowledge. When used with direct object (S is aware of x / an F’), it entails that S knows that it is x / an F she is aware of.[[11]](#footnote-11) The classical technical terms ‘directly’ and ‘immediately aware’ then impose the further requirement that the subject acquire this knowledge without – conscious – inference or other intellectual process (Russell 1912, 4; Price 1932, 3; cp. Fischer 2011, 114-16).[[12]](#footnote-12) Hence, if S does not know what she is viewing, then, by *modus tollens*, she is not aware of that object – neither in the plain sense, nor ‘directly’. This inference is largely effortless.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Spontaneous protest against this negative conclusion then leads to the phenomenal judgments we seek to explain, in a way our above analysis of ‘patch-talk’ can explain:

When I look at a penny from the side I am certainly aware of *something*; and it is certainly plausible to hold that this something is elliptical in the same plain [!] sense in which a suitably bent piece of wire, looked at from straight above, is elliptical. (Broad 1923, 240)

The negative conclusion that we are not aware of the coin makes us protest that we are ‘aware of *something’* but feel unsure what this ‘something’ is (if it is not the penny we look at). When we cannot tell, and don’t know, what it is we are seeing, we often resort to ‘patch-talk’ (section 1). In line with this well-established usage, philosophers informally characterise the object of awareness as ‘an elliptical patch’ (ibid.). The prior negative conclusion explains not only this choice of words but also its literal application: The conclusion that the subject is not aware of the object she is looking at prevents the ordinary metaphorical interpretation of ‘elliptical patch’ as referring to an object looked at which looks elliptical (from there and then), and thus leads to the default literal interpretation of the expression as equivalent to ‘a patch that is elliptical’. Whence the phenomenal judgment: ‘The subject is aware of something that is elliptical.’

Intuitive judgments can be spontaneous responses to previous intuitions; they may be largely automatically inferred from premises that were themselves inferred thus. In efforts to provide *ex-post facto* rationalisations of intuitions which belong to such a sequence, thinkers may seize on other intuitions in it, but the resulting arguments need not reflect the order of the relevant judgments in the initial intuitive reasoning. The present account explains phenomenal judgments as part of such a sequence of intuitions – which gets reversed in current standard formulations of arguments from illusion (Robinson 2001, Smith 2002, Crane 2011) but is preserved in key passages from Russell (1912, 1-3), Broad (1923, 236, 240), Price (1932, 3), and Ayer (1940, 1-4).

This explanation supports various predictions, also about philosophical texts, and can be confirmed (or disconfirmed) by text analysis, by ‘offline’ experiments (sentence-completion, listing, and plausibility rating tasks) to elicit agent- and patient-properties stereotypically associated with “appears” and “seems” (cp. McRae et al. 1997), and by ‘online’ sentence-by-sentence reading-time measurements for texts where stereotype-based predictions are first facilitated and then contradicted (‘To the viewer, the thing seemed to be elliptical. He immediately knew it wasn’t’). These studies remain to be done (but cp. Fischer, forthcoming).

**4. Conclusion**

On the conventional conception of ordinary language analysis as contributing to semantic problem-dissolution, we should infer from the elicited difference in pragmatic implications that we can describe familiar cases of non-veridical perception by saying that the object ‘looks F’ to the subject but not by saying that it ‘seems’ or ‘appears F’ to her: ‘The latter expressions’, the conventional conception would have us complain, ‘implicate that the subject does not know what size, shape, or colour the object is, but common sense tells us that she does. Hence already the very first premise of arguments from illusion is wrong.’ This conclusion seems open to the charge of dogmatism: Why should we go along with common sense and its perhaps low epistemic standards? It also seems open to the objection that claims may be true when their pragmatic implications are defeated (when pragmatically inferable ‘doubt or denial conditions’ are not satisfied, cp. Grice 1961).

In the present pursuit of an epistemic dissolution, by contrast, we regard the initial premises of arguments from illusion as involving an unacknowledged but entirely legitimate new generic use of those terms, as shorthand for “looks or sounds, etc.”, and do not quarrel with the truth of these premises. Rather, we use the explanatory account obtained, to assess the probative force of the phenomenal intuitions they prompt. This account traces these intuitions ultimately back to automatic attributions of patient-properties which are stereotypically associated with the verbs “seems” and “appears”, in their dominant uses. Such automatic attributions are generally reliable to the extent to which stereotypes are accurate (as verb-related stereotypes mostly are) and relevant. Stereotypical attributes are associated with the verbs’ dominant use, however, and stereotypes are irrelevant where words are given a non-dominant use, such as the new generic use we identified. Where words are given such a use, as in the initial premises of arguments from illusion, stereotype-based inferences will systematically lead to predictable wrong attributions. Where we fail to notice the deviation from the dominant use, as authors and readers of those arguments typically do, the conclusions of these particularly effortless inferences will strike us as plausible.[[14]](#footnote-14) They are *cognitive illusions*: subjectively plausible but wrong intuitions due to processes of automatic cognition that are generally reliable but predictably generate wrong judgments under specific conditions (cp. Pohl 2004). The stereotype-based intuitions we have when considering standard formulations of the initial premises of arguments from illusion are cognitive illusions. These illusions prompt the phenomenal intuitions to be assessed. The fact that we have the latter in response to cognitive illusions does not speak for their truth. Lack of probative force is thus inferred from the provenance of these intuitions – and not from their conflict with common sense or from the violation of defeasible pragmatic rules (cp. section 1).

For such argumentatively unsupported but paradoxical intuitions (section 1), lack of probative force implies we lack the right to accept them (section 2). By uncovering this lack, we show the argument from illusion unsound and contribute to showing the problem of perception ill-motivated (introduction). We have thus explored how a classic philosophical problem can be dissolved by developing psychological explanations of intuitions that let us assess their probative force. This approach is relevant more generally to the extent to which philosophical problems are ultimately engendered by paradoxical intuitions philosophers accept in the absence of argument. Recent case-studies suggest that this extent is significant (Fischer 2011).

Analyses of what we would ordinarily say and infer when can contribute to this enterprise at least where paradoxical intuitions are generated by stereotype-based inferences and, more generally, stimulus-driven association processes that are shaped by the verbal stimuli’s most frequent use. We considered one kind of case in which this is liable to happen: When philosophers give new uses to established terms, without realising the novelty, they are prone to make and accept stereotype-based inferences licensed only by the still dominant established use, from premises employing the new use. This is bound to generate paradoxical intuitions. Such unwitting ‘crossing of uses’ could be described as a ‘seductive verbal fallacy’. We have thus traced paradoxical intuitions back to seductive verbal fallacies. But we have not invoked any normative privilege for common sense or ordinary language in deriving lack of probative force. When embedded in the fresh approach, ordinary language analysis is not open to the key objections we considered. Ordinary language matters to philosophy even if it is not normatively but only psychologically privileged: when it determines not the bounds of sense but our leaps of thought.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**References**

Alter, A.L. and Oppenheimer, D.M. 2009: Uniting the tribes of fluency to form a metacognitive nation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review 13*, 219-235

Austin, J.L. 1962: *Sense and Sensibilia*. Oxford: OUP

––– 1979: *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford: OUP

Ayer, A.J. 1940: *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*. London: Macmillan

Bargh, J.A. 1994: The Four Horsemen of Automaticity. In R. Wyer and T. Srull (eds.), *Handbook of Social Cognition, vol.1*, Hillsdale: Earlbaum, pp. 1-40

Bolaño, R. 2009: *2666.* London: Picador

Broad, C.D. 1923: *Scientific Thought*. Repr. 2000, Abingdon: Routledge

Brogaard, B. forthcoming: The Phenomenal Use of “Looks”. In P. Pagin (ed.), *Philosophy Compass*, final draft version downloaded 13.3.2013 from: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B0GEjtSycjTKRGptMUl1TFdoWms/edit?pli=1>

Cappelen, H. 2012: *Philosophy without Intuitions*. Oxford: OUP

Crane, T. 2011: The Problem of Perception. In N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring 2011 version.

Deutsch, R., Kordts-Freudinger, R., Gawronski, B. und Strack. F. 2009: Fast and Fragile. A New Look at the Automaticity of Negation Processing. *Experimental Psychology 56*, 434-46

Evans, J.S.B.T. 2010: Intuition and Reasoning: a Dual-process Perspective. *Psychological Inquiry 21*, 313-326

Ferretti, T., McRae, K. and Hatherell, A. 2001: Integrating Verbs, Situation Schemas, and Thematic Role Concepts. *Journal of Memory and Language 44*, 516-547

Fischer, E. 2011: *Philosophical Delusion and its Therapy*. New York: Routledge

Fischer, E. forthcoming: Intuitions’ Sources. Psycholinguistics for Philosophy of Perception. In E. Fischer and J. Collins (eds.): *Method, Rationalism and Naturalism. The Impact of Experimental Philosophy.* Oxford: OUP

Fish, W. 2009: *Perception, Hallucination, and Illusion*, Oxford: OUP

Giora, R. 2003: *On Our Mind. Salience, Context, and Figurative Language.* Oxford: OUP

Gibbs, R.W. and Colston, H.L. 2012: *Interpreting Figurative Meaning*. Cambridge: CUP

Grice, H.P. 1961: The Causal Theory of Perception. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl. Vol. 35*, 121-52

––– 1989: Logic and Conversation. In his: *Studies in the Ways of Words*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, pp. 22-40

Gustafsson, M. 2011: Inheriting Austin. In M. Gustafsson and R. Sørli (eds.): *The Philosophy of J.L. Austin*, New York: OUP, pp. 1-31

Hanfling, O. 2000: *Philosophy and Ordinary Language*. London: Routledge

Harmon-Vukić, M., Guéraud, S., Lassonde, K.A. and O’Brien, E.J. 2009: The Activation and Instantiation of Instrumental Inferences. *Discourse Processes 46*, 467-90

Horn, L.R. 2004: Implicature. In L.R. Horn and G. Ward (eds.), *The Handbook of Pragmatics,* Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 3-28

Jackson, F. 1977: *Perception*. Cambridge: CUP

Kahneman, D. and Frederick, S. 2005: A Model of Heuristic Judgment. In K.J. Holyoak and R. Morrison (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*. Cambridge: CUP, pp. 67-293

Klin, C. M., Guzman, A. E. and Levine, W. H. 1999: Prevalence and Persistence of Predictive Inferences. *Journal of Memory and Language 40*, 593–604.

Knobe, J. and Nichols, S. 2008: An Experimental Philosophy Manifesto. In their (eds.), *Experimental Philosophy*. Oxford: OUP, pp. 3-14

Leben, D. 2012: When Psychology Undermines Beliefs. *Philosophical Psychology*, DOI:10.1080/09515089.2012.731579

Leite, A. 2011: Austin, Dreams, and Scepticism. In M. Gustafsson and R. Sørli (eds.): *The Philosophy of J.L. Austin*, New York: OUP, pp. 78-113

Martin, M.G.F. 2003: Sensible Appearances. In T. Baldwin (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Philosophy*, Cambridge: CUP

McRae, K., Ferretti, T.R., and Amyote, I. 1997: Thematic Roles as Verb-specific Concepts. *Language and Cognitive Processes 12*, 137-176

Moors, A. and De Houwer, J. 2006: Automaticity: a Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin 132*, 297-326

Morewedge, C.K. and Kahneman, D. 2010: Associative Processes in Intuitive Judgment. *Trends in Cognitive Science 14*, 435-440

Oppenheimer, D.M. 2004: Spontaneous Discounting of Availability in Frequency Judgment Tasks. *Psychological Science 15*, 100-105

Peleg, O. and Giora, R. 2011: Salient Meanings: the Whens and Wheres. In K.M. Jaszczolt and K. Allan (eds.), *Salience and Defaults in Utterance Processing*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 32-52

Pohl, R.F. 2004: *Cognitive Illusions*. New York: Psychology Press

Price, H.H. 1932: *Perception*. 2nd ed., repr. 1961, London: Methuen

Recanati, F. 2004: *Literal Meaning*, Cambridge: CUP

Reverberi, C., Pischedda, D., Burigo, M. and Cherubini, P. 2012: Deduction without Awareness. *Acta Psychologica 139*, 244-253

Robinson, H. 2001: *Perception*. London: Routledge

Rosch, E. and Mervis, C.B. 1975: Family Resemblances: Studies in the Internal Structure of Categories. *Cognitive Psychology 7*, 573-605

Russell, B. 1912/1980: *The Problems of Philosophy*, Oxford: OUP

Sloman, S.A. 1996: The Empirical Case for Two Systems of Reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin 119*, 3-22

Smith, A.D. 2002: *The Problem of Perception*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP

Snowdon, P. 2013: Austin on the Philosophy of Perception. In B. Garvey (ed.): *Austin on Language*, Basingstoke: Palgrave

Sosa, E. 2007: Intuitions: their Nature and Epistemic Efficacy. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 74, 51-67

Travis, C. 1991: Annals of Analysis. *Mind 100,* 237-64

Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. 1983: Extensional versus Intuitive Reasoning: the Conjunction Fallacy in Probability Judgment. *Psychological Review 90*, 293-315

Uleman, J.S., Sairbay, S.A. and Gonzales, C.M. 2008: Spontaneous Inferences, Implicit Impressions, and Implicit Theories. *Annual Review of Psychology 59*, 329-60

Williams, M. 2001: *Problems of Knowledge*. Oxford: OUP

1. E.g., Travis (1991) and Recanati (2004, 146ff) have argued that the way Grice draws the semantics-pragmatics distinction is inconsistent with a – correct – Austinian view of the scope of context-sensitivity in natural language. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Inferences and other cognitive processes are *automatic* – rather than controlled – to the extent to which they possess these operationally defined properties (Bargh 1994, Moors and De Houwer 2006): A process is *effortless* iff it requires no attention, so that performance is not impaired by multi-tasking, *unconscious* to the extent to which the subject is unable to report its course as opposed to express its outcome (judgment, decision, etc.), *non-intentional* iff it is initiated regardless of the aims or goals the subject pursues, and *autonomous* iff, once it is initiated, the subject cannot end it or alter its course. Cognitive processes may possess some but not all of these properties, and each property to different degrees. The automatic/controlled distinction is no neat dichotomy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cappelen (2012) discusses the different uses of ‘intuition’ in ordinary English and philosophy, respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Kahneman and Frederick (2005) develop this condition within the influential framework of dual process theories of cognition (Evans 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This point can also be developed with neo-Gricean theories (e.g. Horn 2004) and assumes only that the statements at issue are advanced and interpreted in a manner consistent with pragmatic maxims or heuristics, not that these are actually deployed in controlled or automatic cognition. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The one exception is a circular argument mooted by Broad (1923, 240f) and developed by Smith (2002, 36-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Despite this manifesto statement, the movement’s mainstream conducts rather different survey work which I cannot discuss here, though it has been repeatedly linked to ordinary language philosophy. Conversely, the project outlined has been actually pursued by philosophers reluctant to style themselves ‘experimental’. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Many classificatory nouns (‘bird’, ‘bank-teller’) (Rosch and Mervis 1976, Tversky and Kahneman 1983) and verbs (‘accuse’) (McRae et al. 1997) stand for ‘prototype-style concepts’ under which things and events get automatically subsumed in virtue of possessing *prototypical* features: Individuals (and sub-categories) with more of these features are judged more rapidly to belong to the category at issue, and to be better examples of the category; subjects rate the features as more typical for members of the category and name them sooner and more frequently when asked for such typical features. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. E.g. Broad (1923, 236, my italics): ‘When I judge a penny *looks* elliptical…’ but ‘This *seems* to me elliptical, or red, *or hot*’ when covering different sense-modalities. Or Brogaard (forthcoming, 8): ‘… the appear words “look”, “feel”, “taste”, “smell”, or “sound” are…’ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For this reason, the debates about the pragmatic implications and semantics of “looks F” initiated, respectively, by Grice (1961) and Jackson (1977, cp. Brogaard, forthcoming) – are tangential to the presently decisive issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. By contrast, ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, etc. require no recognition (Fischer 2011, 114-16) and are hence compatible with lack of awareness – ordinary and ‘direct’ (below). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Some authors exclude inferences by admitting as objects of ‘direct awareness’ only things to which the appearance/reality-distinction does not apply (e.g. Ayer 1940, 59, 61, 69), so that no inference is required to find out whether they merely appear or actually are F (cp. Broad 1923, 239-40, 248). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The precise extent to which these elementary inferences display this and other features of automaticity is as yet unclear, however, as the automaticity of deductive inferences has been studied almost exclusively through priming studies, which have established automaticity for *modus ponens* (Reverberi et al. 2012) and negation within verbal oppositions (here: ‘aware’-‘unaware’, ‘knowledge’-’ignorance’) (Deutsch et al. 2009), but which do not identify all effortless processes detected through other experimental paradigms. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Stereotype-based inferences are effortless, such ‘fluency’ is a metacognitive consensus and accuracy cue (Alter and Oppenheimer 2009), and this cue is not spontaneously discounted (Oppenheimer 2004) where we fail to notice the deviation that renders the stereotype irrelevant. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. I thank Peter Hacker, Michael Hymers, Adam Leite, and Kevin Reuter for helpful comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)