Experiences are Objects: Towards a Mind-Object Identity Theory

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Abstract

Mind-body identity theories tend to maintain that consciousness is identical to neural activity. Consider an alternative identity theory – namely, a mind-object identity theory of consciousness whereby consciousness is object-bound, identical to an external object, as opposed to being brain-bound, identical to neural activity. The hypothesis is that when I perceive, say, a banana, the thing that is one and the same with my consciousness of the banana is the actual yellow banana I can peel and eat, rather than the neural processes triggered by the banana. Simply put, one’s conscious experience of an object is the object one experiences. First, the main hypothesis and the relation between mind, body, and object are outlined. Then a series of standard objections from hallucinations, from illusions, and from commonsense assumptions are raised and countered.

Introduction

Traditional mind-body identity theories maintain that consciousness is identical either to neural processes or to their properties. However, the identity between brain and consciousness is hardly convincing due to the obvious difference between neural activity and conscious experience. As a result, alternative second-best notions have been taken into consideration, such as emergence, supervenience, correlation, constituency, minimal sufficient conditions, and the like. From a scientific perspective however such efforts appear to be anomalous. In fact, most researchers in fields of scientific inquiry do not take such epistemic detours into consideration. They look for the real thing – be it a boson or a virus. Regarding consciousness, I revert back to the original and stronger notion of identity which I take to be the only solution compatible with physicalism.

To put forward a mind-object identity theory of consciousness is to be a die-hard physicalist; I assume that if consciousness is real it must be physical. By physical I mean material: energy and matter being two forms of the same stuff. In this regard, I share David Armstrong’s view that “a man is a certain sort of material object”. Yet, I disagree with his opinion that such an object is “his material body” – a man is surely an object, but not his body. Consciousness must abide by the rules of the physical world; no
nonphysical ontological allowances are permitted in physicalism. Like any other physical entity, from muons to raspberries, consciousness must be spatiotemporally located and causally related to its surroundings. The neural processes proposed by traditional identity theories are thus suitable candidates, but unfortunately thus far the properties of neural processes have not matched the properties of consciousness.

Consider instead another physical entity, namely the external object. The hypothesis is that when I perceive let’s say a yellow banana, the thing that is one and the same with my consciousness of the yellow banana is the actual banana itself that one can peel and eat, rather than the neural processes triggered by the banana – experience is physical but not necessarily neural. Simply put, one’s experience of an object is the object one experiences.

Neural activity remains relevant, but its suggested role is causal rather than constitutive. One’s body – sensorimotor apparatus combined with the nervous system – plays a contingent causal role as for instance the way a dam plays a contingent causal role in the existence of a lake. The dam though is not the lake. The dam is made of bricks and mortar while the lake is made of water. We can leave aside the question of the ontological status of the lake. The issue at stake is not the nature of lakes as opposed to water for instance but to stress the difference between a lake and a dam, whatever they are. Lakes and dams occupy different spatial locations and are different in countless other respects. Yet, clearly if the dam were destroyed, the lake would disappear. *Ceteris paribus*, the dam helps bring the lake into existence.

In this paper, first I will emphasize the key explanatory function of identity theories. Second, I will outline the main identity hypothesis and its bearing on relations between mind and body and object. Third, I will begin to sketch possible solutions to a series of objections to the view based on ontological assumptions, hallucinations, and illusions. Finally, I will reconsider some commonsense objections that might hinder the acceptance of what is being proposed, since otherwise it might seem too radical a departure from common intuitions.

**Identity Theories and Consciousness**

Many successful scientific theories are identity theories. In fact, such theories are key to understanding nature. For instance, evolution is an identity theory – it maintains that the process underlying species creation is a mixture of variation, transmission, and selection. Thermodynamics is an identity theory – temperature is average molecular speed. Newton’s gravitation theory is an identity theory – heavenly and earthly objects are inertial masses. And so on.

In the natural sciences, identity theories are popular because they provide an explanation of a phenomenon A in terms of a phenomenon B. Usually, the explanation consists in providing good reasons as to why A is identical with B. Normally, adopting a
naïve realist stance – as do most scientists – is sufficient to show that A’s properties and B’s properties are the same. Thus, by Ockham’s razor and Leibniz’s principle of indiscernibles, A is B, and vice versa. In science, whenever possible, an identity theory is sought for as granting the strongest result.

As regards to consciousness, identity theories have occasionally suffered from an undeservedly poor reputation. Traditional identity theories have suggested that consciousness is identical with neural processes or to the properties of such processes. Unfortunately, neural activity and consciousness do not constitute a good fit. Brains are gray and gooey, while experience is full of colors, sounds, textures, and smells, and is filled with all manner of objects. Experience is akin to one’s world. Because of such a mismatch, many authors have either rejected the identity between consciousness and physical processes or developed some form of representationalism.

Both options, though, take us beyond physicalism. On the one hand, dualism (of any sort) resorts to additional non-physical entities or properties. On the other hand, representationalism also alludes to properties that do not belong to the physical world, e.g., having content or being about something. In fact, thus far no naturalistic theory of representations has emerged.

The more scientifically oriented researchers have endorsed updated versions of traditional mind-brain identity theories although they have not always been keen to call them so. Most of these proposals are centered around the common premise that the physical processes producing experience are located inside the body, the nervous system, the brain. Ned Block reckons that such views constitute the current orthodoxy, i.e., “the brain is the minimal constitutive supervenience base for experience” – a view one might call ‘brain-bound’. Jessy Prinz also contends that, “a central plank of modern materialism [is] the supposition that consciousness supervenes on the brain.” Such a view is held by most neuroscientists too. Anil Seth states that, “Any scientific study of consciousness is based on the premise that phenomenal experience is entailed by neuronal activity in the brain,” and Christof Koch adds, “If there is one thing that scientists are reasonably sure of, it is that brain activity is both necessary and sufficient for biological sentience” and “the entire brain is sufficient for consciousness – it determines conscious sensations day in and day out […] likely a subset of brain matter will do”.

Yet the notion of being brain-bound, although extremely popular, has never been supported by conclusive evidence. Block himself admits that he has never heard anyone stating, “that if a fusiform face area were kept alive in a bottle, the activation of it would determine face-experience – or any experience at all.” In other words, there is no definitive proof that a chunk of neurons carrying on certain chemical processes could, by itself, produce consciousness, let alone be identical to consciousness. Neurons do not look like conscious experience at all. Does this mean that we have to give up the
I do not think so. In fact, being brain-bound is neither essential to physicalism nor to identity theories. Mind-body identity theories are based on two key claims: 1) consciousness is identical to a physical phenomenon (being physical) and 2) such a phenomenon is inside the body or the brain (being brain-bound). But these claims are completely independent. One can conceive possible scenarios in which one of them is true and the other is false. Only the denial of being physical is incompatible with physicalism because it entails that there is something — namely consciousness — that is not physical. The two issues have been confused to such an extent that the philosopher Jaegwon Kim finds it plausible to state that, “if you are a physicalist of any stripe, […] qualia are supervenient on the internal physical/biological states of the subject.” But this seems to be a non sequitur. Pace Kim, only being physical is required for physicalism. Being brain-bound can be either true or false. No analytical, nomological, or metaphysical laws bind what’s physical with being brain-bound. Furthermore, experience being brain-bound has never been empirically confirmed.

Mind-body identity theories have not failed because being physical proved to be false; mind-body identity theories have failed because being brain-bound has not been empirically confirmed since no physical phenomenon has ever shown any of the properties of consciousness inside the body. As a result, traditional mind-body identity theories have failed since they required both physical and brain-bound to be the case.

Luckily, since being brain-bound is not essential to physicalism, an alternative identity theory is available — namely, a mind-object identity theory. I propose to consider the hypothesis that experience just is the external object itself, thus being ‘object-bound’. We can thus reject being brain-bound while we retain being physical.

A Mind-Object Identity Theory

Without further ado, here is an outline of a tentative mind-object identity theory. The key hypothesis is that consciousness is identical to the object one experiences. Physicalism still holds while being brain-bound does not. In this section, for the sake of clarity, I consider only cases of standard perception in which what one perceives is actually there, i.e., one perceives say a banana and there happens to actually be a banana.

Suppose you perceive the banana. Your body and the banana before you are all that our example requires. No additional entities are needed to model what goes on. Your body is numerically different from the banana. Two physical entities with different properties — the banana and your body — face each other. The problem arises when your experience of the banana, as a third entity, is added to such a picture. What and where is this experience; what and where is the thing that your experience of the banana is?
Either we assume that experience is somewhere inside your body, as brain-bound theorists have done, or we look elsewhere. Why not in the object itself?

If we assume that the experience is the body or the brain or some property of either or inside of either, we face an explanatory failure, since the experience thus conceived is utterly and hopelessly different from one’s actual experience. The experience thus conceived is utterly different from the object as well. Yet, we can still consider an alternative candidate right in front of us, the external object itself, the banana in the above example. If neural activity is a suitably physical entity, surely the banana is too. Only narrow anthropocentric prejudices would attribute special properties to the former and deny them to the latter. Henceforth our alternative hypothesis, being object-bound, is that experience is the object of perception itself – your experience of the object is the external object. In this way the brain is the brain, the body is the body, the object is the object, and crucially the experience is the object. If the experience were identical with the object, it would no longer be a mystery that the experience had the object’s properties. In fact, if the identity between object and experience held, one’s experience and the object would be one. Given Ockham’s razor and Leibniz’s law of indiscernibles, the object and one’s experience would be one and the same.

After all, your experience of the object in our example is yellow, long and curved, basically it’s banana-ish one might say. The banana in front of you is yellow, long and curved, and banana-ish too. The fact that your experience has the same properties of the object you perceive is a promising start. Most of us have observed that our experience is not really different from the surrounding world, for it too is made of objects: people, cars, buildings, trees, clouds, the sun and stars, and so on. The physical properties of the body and those of the objects are known, and they match. The brain is a bloody, pink and grey, gooey object. Both the banana and your experience of the banana are yellow, long and curved, basically banana-ish. What is our best candidate for being the thing that is yellow, long and curved, and banana-ish: the brain or the banana? The answer is obvious. What more do we need to establish such a straightforward identity?

Whenever you perceive – and thus experience – a banana then, something has exactly the properties you experience, namely the banana. Experience is identical with its object. The difference between neural activity and experience is no longer a reason to reject physicalism because consciousness is no longer inside the brain. The object triggers neural processes in one’s body, but both the object and one’s experience are numerically different from the body. However the body allows the object to be the experience just the way the dam allows the lake to exist. This body-object relationship will be outlined in detail in the next section.

At this stage, a likely objection is whether the object – the banana before me – is truly like my experience when I perceive the banana. Do the banana and my experience have all the same properties? It is obvious that since Galileo’s time the standard reply has
been negative. However, I believe a positive answer can be defended. My approach has two parts: I will address the properties of the object and the properties of the experience. As regards the object, one should distinguish an ‘ideal’ object from the actual object one experiences. An ideal object is an abstraction that is highly useful in science but something that no one ever has direct acquaintance with. Such an object is like the notion of a center of gravity, useful but immaterial. Conversely, the actual object is the object one sees, smells, peels and eats. It is something that always begins and ends inside actual causal interactions.

To probe the connection between existence and causation is beyond our current scope, but note that the objects one perceives are made of those properties that are causally coupled with one’s body. For instance, the banana before me is undoubtedly emitting infrared light. Yet, I am completely unaware of such additional radiation regarding the banana I see since the infrared light for me is immaterial. In other words, the object I summon is the object made of those physical properties that my body picks out. Other physical properties (infrared light, atomic particles, caloric content, etc.) are simply not part of the actual object I experience.

Actual objects are all the objects we need and the only objects we interact with. It is the object that is singled out by the particular causal interaction our body allows. Therefore, the traditional objection that the banana and the experience of the banana surely share many properties – yellow, long and curved, banana-ish – but that the banana has at least some properties that the experience of a banana lacks – being edible, having mass, coming into existence at a certain point – is irrelevant, given that such an alleged banana is an ideal banana. It is neither the actual object nor our experience; it is not the banana we deal with.

For practical reasons of course it is useful to lump together several actual objects into an ideal bundle of properties. But the bundle is neither necessary nor always possible. Consider the Mona Lisa. The painting clearly has a certain mass and weight. Yet no one other than Leonardo then and museum employees now has ever experienced Mona Lisa’s mass or weight, for which the object every visitor sees at the Louvre is utterly immaterial. The same goes for the absence of mass or weight of a cartoon character like Mickey Mouse – it’s likewise immaterial.

Even the most complete account of an object surely leaves out peculiar physical properties that only some esoteric causal circumstance might bring to life. However, nobody feels the need to go to such lengths to describe the object. The truth is that the alleged object is a standard list of the physical properties human environments usually allow. Such a list is never complete. The actual object, just sketched, is not a temporal part of an object, it is a physical object in its own right. It is not a subset of the ideal object. Rather, the notion of an ideal object is akin to that of a center of gravity or of a meridian.
A useful analogy is offered by the light in a refrigerator. Whenever we open a fridge door a switch is activated, electricity flows, a light appears; whenever we check the light is on. Of course, we understanding the fridge door mechanism and know that the light is not always on. In the case of the actual objects that compose our everyday world, the equivalent of an open fridge door is our own body. Whenever our body is in a specific location and under specific circumstances the physical world takes place in a certain way and thus a given actual object is singled out. The actual object, though, is neither a mental entity nor something inside our body.

The actual object is a real physical object, located in the external world. It triggers a process that happens to end in our brain and requires our body to complete. When the fridge door is open, the current flows and the light comes on. Likewise, when our body is in a certain place, a certain causal process flows, and its cause pops into existence as a distinguishable whole – the cause being the actual object. Since the object exists whenever our body is in the right situation, the object for us (as our experience) is always there, as with the fridge light.

The notion of actual objects does not endorse a form of idealism. On the contrary, it does not require any appeal to mentalistic notions whatsoever. The claim is that one’s experience is identical to the object that is the external physical cause of one’s physical neural activity. This does not mean that the banana comes to exist (or ceases to exist) together with the experience of a banana, apart from the trivial fact that they are identical and thus they cannot exist separately. The banana is not brought into existence by the experience. The banana, as with any other object, is brought into existence by a causal process. As it happens, the causal process takes place thanks to one’s body among other factors. Thus the actual object, which is at once the external object and the thing usually referred to as ‘an experience’ of it takes place whenever my body is situated in certain physical conditions. Extending the logic, the actual object does not exist unless the body is likewise at the right place. The lake does not exist without the dam, the light is not switched on unless the fridge door opens.

A banana seen is clearly a different object than a banana peeled or a banana tasted. Such objects are different causal objects singled out from the physical continuum by different processes. Molecules that are key causes for the somatosensory cortex are completely immaterial for the visual cortex. The atoms inside the banana are utterly immaterial for any human bodily structure, and so on. We lump together the visual, the tactile, and the gustatory bananas to keep things simple and local – alas a banana can be eaten only once.

As regards the properties of one’s experience, the widespread belief that the experience of the banana is different from the actual object can likewise be challenged. What are the properties of my experience that the banana does not share? One could argue that the banana lacks properties such as being experienced privately or of coming into existence and ceasing to exist at certain times. Yet, the notion of an actual object
overcomes such issues. First, the actual object is both private and physical. It is private in the same sense in which every rainbow is private because it is defined by the location from which it is seen. It is also physical since it is not inside the mind, but it is there, in the mist, made of only those raindrops that the sun’s position and the observer’s position single out.

Second, the actual object is the cause of one’s neural activity. Thus the actual object – as the fridge light analogy makes plain – is part of what my experience is at that exact space and time. The same actual object, though, might exist because of other causal circumstances of (nearly) identical effect. The human body is not special in this respect; it is just a structure that embodies the causal conditions that allow the world as we know it to take place. Of course, from our narrow perspective, our human bodies are paramount. Human bodies are the conditions that allow the objects, that our experience is identical with, to exist. Thus, in practice, we cannot exist without our bodies.

One might object that the experience of the banana in contrast to the banana itself has perspectival features, phenomenal character, intentionality, and qualia – in short, the standard set of conscious experience indicators found in the philosophical literature. Yet these properties have not been experienced as such; they have merely been conceived to back up the alleged gap between consciousness and the physical world. Once such a gap is set aside, they tend to disappear. This slightly truncated counter is admittedly in need of further subsequent discussion.

Consider Thomas Nagel’s notion that phenomenal character is mostly a reaction to the mind-body problem in terms of identity between mental states and brain states. His claim that, “an organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism [...] We may call this the subjective character of experience,” is an offshoot of the idea that experience must be inside the body, or a property of what takes place inside the body. Once this assumption is set aside, the mind-object identity reboots the whole discussion.

A tenable account of an identity between experience and external objects has no need of an ineffable subjective character. Subjective phenomenal character was required to overcome the limitations of traditional mind-brain identity theories. In contrast, if experience and objects are one and the same – exactly the same – no subjective character is required.

Moreover, mind-object identity puts forward a solution to the problem of intentionality, i.e., the fact that conscious states seem to somehow be about things beyond them. It renders any purported ‘aboutness’ unnecessary. Experience is no longer about the banana or of the banana; experience is the banana. Experience no longer accesses the external world; experience is the external world. In fact, the appeal to aboutness has always been a case of obscurum per obscurius. Franz Brentano had the
latitude to appeal to intentionality since he was a sort of dualist in his day. But in the physical world, aboutness among objects has never been discovered; semantics has never been part of a list of physical properties. Objects are just what they are. Bananas are bananas. Human bodies are human bodies. Neurons are neurons.

One caveat is in order: to be object-bound does not entail a form of panpsychism. The claim is not that the external object has phenomenal properties smeared over it. After all, many forms of panpsychism are forms of a prodigal dualism. Note that we have little reason to posit any phenomenal properties in addition to the properties the physical world already has. Physical properties are both the familiar properties of the world we experience and the properties of our experience, the two being one and the same. There is no need for an additional, obscure, phenomenal layer.

By way of summary, for experience to be object-bound is to fully accept that the properties of the object and the properties of the experience are the same. The argument is that once the object is seen under scrutiny to be the actual object, the two sets of properties are identical. There is nothing in one’s experience of an object that does not partake of the object and, vice versa, there is no need to conceive of the object as anything but what one experiences. Philosophical intuitions might have been different if people had compared experience with external objects at the outset rather than with neural activity. If one looks for experience in the wrong place, given various misconceptions, it’s likely one will conclude that nothing physical is like one’s experience. The fact of the matter is that though neural activity is not, the external object just might be – brain-bound does not hold but object-bound might.

**Mind, Body and World**

Three standard concepts – mind (aka experience), body, and object – can thus be revisited. The body is an observable part of the physical world. It is spatiotemporally located and has causal properties. It is a physical entity with properties that are measurable and quantifiable. The external object is likewise amenable to observation and measurement. It too is physical and has causal properties that are measurable and quantifiable. Thus far everything is physically observable and causally efficacious and nothing is ontologically problematic. Then comes the mind or experience. What and where is it then? The proposal is that the mind is physical but not inside the body. At any given time, the mind is the object, or the collection of objects, that one experiences.

What is the role of the body? The body allows the external object to exist and to interact with other objects. The body is a sort of causal enabler. It enables the world we experience to have the very causal properties we experience. The body brings into existence the objects our world is made of. The world we live in and our experience of the world are, as thus conceived, one and the same.

Recall the dam and lake previously considered. A dam is among the necessary conditions for the formation of a lake but the lake is not the dam. If a drought occurred
the dam would not create a lake. The lake takes place and thus exists thanks to many conditions: the rainfall, the terrain, the dam, etc. For the weatherman the precipitation is key for the existence of the lake whereas from a builder’s perspective the dam is key. Yet, the lake is neither identical with nor constituted by the dam. The dam plays a contingent causal role and a dam-lake identity theory would fail. Likewise, the body plays a contingent causal role insofar as the object one experiences takes place. The body singles out a certain object among the many that are possible.

To return to the object, you see a banana from a certain angle and with certain properties – color, texture, smell – among the infinite that are possible. Such a banana, which is outside your body, is a subset of the physical world; it acquires causal relevance thanks to the interaction with your body that has certain sensorimotor and cognitive skills. The body allows such a banana to exist. The banana you perceive lacks many physical features an ideal object would have – it is not God’s banana so to speak, it’s not the universal banana. For instance, you do not perceive the inside of the object or its hidden backside, nor its chemical composition or its infrared light. But you perceive an actual banana. The banana is a subset of the physical continuum in front of your body. The object you perceive is the one your body selected among the many available. The banana remains outside the body and it is not a property of the body, as the lake remains outside of the dam. Experiences are not inside bodies, but bodies are necessary for the physical things one’s experience is made of to exist. We are such things.

Note that in this case language can be misleading. The ordinary claim “I have an experience of an object” is confusing because it suggests that there are three separate entities, i.e., the experiencing subject, the experience, and the external object. Our hypothesis is much simpler: there is only one thing – the object – which is our own experience. We are our experiences; we are thus physical. Not only does the external object have the same properties as the experience, but it is also there when we have an experience. To leave aside memory, dreams, misperception, illusions, and hallucinations for the time being, the external object is an obvious physical candidate for consciousness.

The body, or some part of it, is clearly necessary, but it is neither sufficient to having nor identical with conscious experience. The body has a contingent causal dependence that coheres with the wealth of data from neuroscience. But the neuroscientific evidence has never provided a single case in which neural experience is absolutely sufficient for consciousness. Neuroscience has only shown that neural activity is contingently necessary for consciousness. By contingently necessary I mean something weaker than being necessary. For instance, thus far no scientists have been able to rule out machine consciousness. No scientist has ever been able to suggest any kind of necessary link between the carbon-based molecules crucial to living organisms and the presence of consciousness. Thus many respected theorists consider machine
consciousness a real possibility\(^{37}\), and if machine consciousness were possible, neural activity would obviously not be necessary. The bottom line is that, at best, neuroscientists have provided evidence only for very weak forms of necessity.

To summarize, without the body conscious experience cannot occur because the object does not take place. Yet, consciousness is not a property of the body. Neither is it something additional to the object. One’s experience is the object and the object is one’s experience. The body allows a collection of objects to act together. In other words, the body allows a subset of the world – i.e., a collection of objects – to take place as a composite spatiotemporally ‘super-object’ so to speak, which is an object nonetheless. At any given time, such a super-object is what we call one’s mind (or one’s consciousness) – which is nothing but a collection of objects.

Can the solution to the mind-body problem be so simple? Can changing the physical candidate for experience from the body to the external object be enough? I suspect that it is. I am also aware that such a hypothesis will face both understandable confusion and formidable skepticism. Aren’t they supposed to be different, aren’t there classical philosophical arguments in support of a chasm between experience and physical objects? Isn’t there a general consensus that consciousness and objects are different and even incommensurable? Yes, but most of the traditional thinking on mind and world has been cast in terms of brain-bound philosophical commitments. In other words, many philosophers and scientists have held that experience and world are fundamentally different because they assumed brain-bound consciousness to be true\(^{38}\).

Commonly, the widespread consensus that experience does not fit with reality has thrived on two alleged gaps\(^{39}\). On the one hand, it has meant that our experience does not fit in well with reality. I perceive a yellow and tasty banana and there seems to be a yellow and tasty banana, yet the physical banana is not really yellow nor tasty like the mental banana I experience. For instance, neuroscientists are keen to point out that objects are not really colored and that colors are really in the head\(^{40}\). On the other hand, it has meant that what we experience does not fit in with reality. I perceive a tasty yellow banana yet there is no tasty yellow banana – e.g., I hallucinate the banana\(^{39}\).

Historically, such gaps have been further articulated via four recurrent issues: 1) Experience is different from physical processes (the so called Hard Problem), 2) Experience is different from what experience is about (intentionality and the container/content distinction), 3) What experience is about is different from what is actually there (hallucination), and 4) What the experience is in fact about is different from what the experience is supposed to be about (illusions). Let us address such issues one at a time.

**The So Called Hard Problem**

The notion that a gap keeps mental and physical properties apart is a sort of dogma that goes all the way back to Galileo\(^{32}\) and it has recently been rebranded as the so-called
Hard Problem of consciousness. The main point has not really changed: the mental properties we experience are different from the physical properties of the world. But has such a dogma ever been observed rather than assumed?

In fact, how could anyone check whether phenomenal properties are different from physical ones if physical properties are taken to be, by definition, impossible to experience? How do we know that physical properties are not like the properties we experience in our daily lives? We can assume it is so of course but it is a self-defeating assumption. Indeed, if physical properties were really hidden by phenomenal properties, we could not check what they are like. Conversely, if we experienced physical properties directly, we could not check whether they are akin to phenomenal properties. However, if this were the case, the premise would be false.

The ‘hardness’ of the Hard Problem might not be as indisputable as it has often been taken to be. We could not compare experience to the world, if experience and world were in a sort of metaphysical opposition. On the one hand, if experience was ontologically separate from the world, how could we compare conscious experience with physical entities to verify to what extent they match? On the other hand, if experience were not physical, we would not be able to compare it with the physical world, because as mentioned above it would be completely incommensurable. Yet, we routinely compare experience and world.

When we look at our experience, we see the world – we see trees, chairs, and people. In contrast, if we look inside our bodies, nothing matches our experience – we discover neurons, blood, and bones. Obviously the properties of our experience are different from the properties of our brains and bodies. The difference between brain and experience does not mean that no physical entity has the properties of our experience; it only means that our brains are not the right entity. External objects might be the things our brains are not.

The Hard Problem stems from considerations of the sort: “I see green peas but nothing in my visual cortex is like green peas” or “I smell a rose but nothing in my orbito-frontal cortex smells like a rose”. The claims are correct of course. Yet, they do not rule out the possibility that something else might look like peas or smell like roses. Since we experience peas and roses, as we do bananas, there must be something in the physical world that is identical with our experiences. Peas, roses, and bananas are a nice option that is fully compatible with physicalism. To conclude, the Hard Problem appears to result from the conceptual trappings of mind-body identity theories.

**Intentionality**

Another traditional conceptual crutch that has kept experience and world apart without having to pay too high an ontological price is the representational stance, which is the notion that representations have the convenient feature of being physically different from what they represent. Such a notion works fine with conventional representations
that benefit from the agreement of a community of users simply stipulating whatever associations between symbols and their meanings they choose to follow\textsuperscript{34}. Tet, it does not work in the case of mental representations insofar as they lack any intrinsic ‘aboutness’ or what philosophers refer to as intentionality. Such a power would be very handy, if only it were real. Unfortunately, apart from the mind, there is no evidence that anything else has ever had any intentionality. Pebbles and stars are just pebbles and stars. Physical entities are not about something else; they are what they are.

In like manner, it is unreasonable to hope or demand that neural processes are anything but neural processes. Why should they allow in an exotic emergent property such as aboutness that physical laws neither allow nor foresee? The elusive trait of intrinsic intentionality has never popped out of any other physical system. Postulating the mental at the outset and hoping to find such a property in the physical world – as philosophers since at least Brentano have done\textsuperscript{35} – cannot help but collapse back into a form of dualism.

As regards conscious experience, we can step back from the whole aboutness business. Aboutness or intentionality – in a word, semantics – can be left to more epistemological levels of explanation. The issue at stake here is whether our experience of a banana is a biological activity that, by virtue of being about the banana, gives us the experience of a banana, or whether our experience is straightforwardly yellow and banana-ish. This latter option, being defended here, has never been taken seriously into consideration because of an obvious setback – the purported physical phenomenon of neural activity, which has never had any serious possibility of being yellow and banana-ish. A different option – the external object – extinguishes the need for intentionality.

It is not obvious what the distinction between a container and its contents should amount to in the physical world. Conceptually of course the distinction is crystal clear. Yet what does it amount to physically? I understand the difference between the length and the mass of an object. But no one claims to have observed the content of a physical entity as opposed to that physical entity as such. If we observe a computer’s memory chip, we do not see its content, we see the electrical and chemical circuitry. We can see the content only if that circuitry drives a graphic card or a printer. In fact, such devices are designed to build physical replica of objects by conventional means of either varied colors on a screen or ink pigments on a sheet of paper. Colored screens and stained pages are further physical objects – they are not content. In the brain there are neither colors nor pigments; there are no screens nor sheets of paper. Thus, from a physical perspective, the distinction between container and content is once more a costly addition to the physical world.

Our hypothesis thus suggests that experience, too, is like everything else in nature, that is, something that is only what it in fact is. However, since experiences are objects, both the container/content distinction and the intentionality are no longer required. They arose because it was held that experience is physically realized by brains in bodies and if
brains are not the object then brains had to somehow reach out for the object. Accepting experience as object-bound sets the matter differently. If experience is the object experienced, intentionality arrows reaching out for it are no longer needed. Experience is already where it should be; it is already there. Identity is much stronger than intentionality. Moreover, identity is compatible with a physical world.

**Hallucinations and Dreams**

Another crucial class of objections concerns cases of misperception. The obvious empirical reason why many have gone to such lengths to keep experience and world apart has been that experience often seems to take place without any object, namely in cases of hallucinations or dreams. Macbeth sees a dagger but there is no dagger. Alternatively, one often experiences the object differently from what the object is, namely in cases of illusions. Hamlet is caught in a mist but encounters a ghost. Can an object-bound theory survive such cases?

Hallucinations have been so influential with philosophers of mind that they have become the standard reference for any model of experience, even when it comes to ordinary perception. Fair enough, but it is puzzling that in science and philosophy it has become customary to explain perception in terms of hallucinations rather than the other way around. It would appear to be reasonable to start from perception and to then proceed towards abnormal cases. After all, from an evolutionary perspective, perception is surely more fundamental than hallucinations. And explanation of experience via hallucinations does not provide any solution _per se_ as to why experience should take place and be what it is. Postulating that experience is a form of environment-driven hallucination does not provide any clarification about the nature, the cause, and the role of experience. It rather adds mystery to an already obscure matter.

The dreaming brain is often presented as the paradigmatic case of an isolated physical system allegedly capable of producing consciousness. According to Atti Revonsuo,

>[the] dreaming brain shows us that sensory input and motor output are not necessary… The dreaming brain creates the phenomenal level and […] provides us with insights into the processes that are sufficient for producing the phenomenal level.\(^3\)

Revonsuo is unambiguous. If the dreaming brain were sufficient to create a fully blown phenomenal world regardless of the world, sensorimotor input and output would no longer be necessary. Yet, is the dreaming brain truly disconnected from the environment? Many neuroscientists and philosophers believe so. Giulio Tononi and Christof Koch take it as obvious that,

when we dream, we are virtually disconnected from the environment. We acknowledge almost nothing of what happens around us, and our muscles are largely paralyzed. Nevertheless, we are conscious, sometimes vividly and grippingly so.\(^7\)
Yet, neuroscientists often underestimate two important facts: first, that the brain is always the outcome of previous interactions with the world, regardless of how far in the past; and second, that there is no evidence one could dream anything whose constituents are not part of one’s world.

When we hallucinate a banana and no bananas are available in the proximal surroundings, we conclude that we experience something that does not exist. It is easy to see the logical steps that lead from such an alleged empirical fact – experiencing something that does not exist – to an experience/world dividing line. Experiencing a banana that does not exist tempts one into thinking that experience is indeed independent from the world.

Moreover, since neural processes do not resemble bananas, the widespread but troublesome view that there are three items – container (the neural process), content (the banana as experienced), and object (the banana one peels and eats) – appears to be convincing. Still, such a view is based on the assumption that we know what our experience is and, crucially, we know what our experience is about. Only if we assume we know both can we conclude that they are different. But the whole chain of inferences is based on the following assumptions: that a subject experiences an object, and that the object does not exist38.

While there has been a lot of debate about the first claim – e.g., disjunctivism is based on its refutation39 – few have challenged the second claim. Why not accept the first but challenge the second? The alleged absence of the physical object might have been overestimated40. Whenever one hallucinates a banana arguably a banana exists. The refutation of the second claim – that the object does not exist – comes in two steps. First, note that to the best of our knowledge everything we dream or hallucinate is made of elements we have encountered previously; dreams consist of objects and properties dreamers come across when they’re awake. Dreams and hallucinations provide new combinations, but they do not concoct new elements. For instance, congenitally blind subjects neither dream nor hallucinate colors41. Charles Bonnett Syndrome patients hallucinate replicas of their previous lives, albeit reshuffled42. Penfield’s subjects hallucinate previous life episodes43. In short, it appears that dreams and hallucinations are literally made of pieces of the physical world one has lived. Hallucinations are essentially chimeric.

The traditional philosophical notion of hallucination develops a phenomenon with no necessary connection to the actual physical world one lives in. Actual hallucinations are different. If the scientific evidence and hallucinators’ reports are carefully analyzed, a different picture emerges. Hallucinations are not arbitrary concoctions but rather constrained, reshuffled material from the world subjects live in.

One might object that such previous (but actual) objects, events, and their properties no longer exist at the time of one’s dream or hallucination. You dream of a banana
today, but you ate the banana yesterday. Thus the banana no longer exists at the time of your dream. But due to nomological speed limits, everything we perceive to some extent is in the past. Thus the present is not what takes place at a given time, but rather it is the set of events that causes neural activity at any given time. In the case of standard perception, we assume that the object we perceive is there at the time and the place where we are. But this picture is merely an approximation. The object we perceive is never in the exact same place we are. It might vary from being a few inches or thousands of miles away. I can look at a banana right here or I can look at the sun millions of miles away. There are no ontological gaps between such cases; they are all points on a continuum. Thus, from a spatial perspective the notion that the object is there can be stretched at will. The term ‘there’ can in fact refer to something spatially stretched over light years.

Moreover, the notion of ‘there’ can be stretched temporally as well as spatially. Given nomological speed limits, we know that every phenomenon extended in space is also extended in time. Thus, although the time delay of ordinary events is negligible, none are ever exactly synchronous. In some cases the time delay is huge. The familiar gaze up at the moon is an experience of an object as it was over a second prior to any corresponding neural activity that takes place in seeing it. Seeing the sun is seeing it as it was eight minutes ago; seeing stars can be seeing them as they were decades ago. Thus a temporal continuum – a ‘spread now’ so to speak – can also be envisioned, given that a proximal notion of the now does not make any sense. In short, refuting the second claim is straightforward: whenever someone experiences an object, the object is actually there, provided that the notions of ‘there’ and ‘now’ have been revised, have been stretched and shaped, as it were. Whenever we experience something – be it a standard perception, a dream, or an hallucination – to the extent that what we perceive has occurred at some place and time, the object is still the cause of one’s neural activity. Thus the object may well be the thing that is identical with one’s experience, no matter when or where it occurred.

Bear in mind that the standard view – albeit more reassuring for some – is not without its problems. The notion that one perceives only nearby objects is narrow and vague. How near should an object be to be near enough? Neither in time nor in space are valid thresholds available. All objects and events occur at an earlier time than one’s corresponding neural activity. By nomological necessity the external cause of everything that takes place in our brain is in the past. Such past occurrences can be relatively near (the fan across the room) or extremely remote (the star across the universe). Either way, though, perception is never instantaneous. And thus any object is always at the beginning of a process spread over a time span and across a spatial extension. If stars and other events of long ago – such as those causing memories, dreams, and hallucinations – were to be rejected, by the same token, all ordinary objects here and now ought to be rejected too.
In essence, the traditional view absurdly limits one’s world to the proximal shell that surrounds one’s skin and other sense receptors. We do not perceive the world by means of a thin layer of events enveloping our bodies. We perceive external objects wherever and whenever they are. Importantly, between perception and other forms of experience – such as memory, dreams and hallucinations – there is only a quantitative difference. To put the point in concrete terms of example, if one suffers from the complex visual hallucinations of Charles Bonnet Syndrome for instance, and thus experiences, say, multiple copies of people of abnormal size in their visual field, the traditional explanation is that the brain concocts such images. This reflects the original second claim – the object does not exist – presently under scrutiny. The alternative explanation is that past actual people are still the object of the current experience and thus are still experienced.

**Illusions**

Sometimes the object is there, yet it does not appear as we expect it should. You look at the two lines in a Muller-Lyer illusion (ending with arrows pointing inward or outward) and one line appears longer though they are of equal length. Illusions present another formidable empirical case for a separation between what one experiences and the properties of external objects.

Yet, once more, the traditional account assumes that we know what we perceive. In the Muller-Lyer illusion one assumes there is a property – length – and that such a property is the very property you perceive. In everyday life, the property one perceives and length generally match quite well. Yet, in the case of the Muller-Lyer illusion they do not. Given the mismatch, one assumes experience is to be blamed. Such an epistemic habit is so common that most theorists promptly draw the conclusion that one perceives an incorrect length. A popular model of illusion is that one perceives a mental length that does not match the physical length. But it is based on two critical assumptions: 1) one experiences a mental property that should somehow match the physical property; 2) one knows exactly what the physical property is that one perceives.

Both assumptions are flawed and once we set them right a much simpler explanation becomes available. The former assumption begs the question since the existence of mental properties is precisely what requires proof. The latter assumption can also be challenged since arguably we do not know exactly what we perceive. It is often difficult to directly measure a physical property and it is much easier and more efficient to perceive some other readily accessible property instead.

Once more consider the Muller-Lyer illusion. Due to the structure of our sensory apparatus, we lack the means to directly perceive the lengths of the two lines. We cope with a rather deficient visual system; human eyes are not equipped with lasers. However, thanks to natural selection, we have acquired the useful skill of indirectly
estimating lengths by means of perceiving other, more easily accessible, geometrical projections that reliably correlate with length to some degree. It is significant that such a skill does not pick up length, but another property which is a complex cluster of geometrical properties. We might call such an approximate but optically available property the proxy property and call the absolute physical length the alleged property. Under abnormal conditions though, as in the Muller-Lyer illusion, the proxy length differs noticeably from the alleged length. As a result, one perceives the two lines as having different lengths when they merely differ in proxy lengths.

Yet, both proxy and alleged lengths are external physical properties. There is no need to resort to any mental length. There are no misperceptions or mis-experiences, but only mistaken beliefs resulting from conceptual error. The experience is correct; it is the belief about what one perceives – that we know what we perceive in perceiving length – that is mistaken. One of the Muller-Lyer lines has a greater proxy length than the other and so one perceives a different proxy length. No perceptual error occurs, the mistake is a matter of mistaken belief. We believe we perceive the absolute length of objects, while we perceive something else that usually matches the absolute length. This shift in perspectives allows us to reconceive all cases of illusion as cases of mistaken perceptual beliefs.

Apply this notion to the common illusion of desert mirages, when one sees water where there is no water. By means of vision we have no way to know whether a substance is made of water. So what do we do? We perceive another proxy property, in this case the mirror-like reflection of light. Such a property, in a natural environment, is often instantiated by pools of water. Thus, we get used to believing the mirror-like reflection of light as being watery. Being made of water is the property we are interested in because we need it to survive, but a mirror-like reflection of light is often a sufficient indicator. However, sometimes unusual circumstances arise that puzzle us. To wit, being made of water is the alleged property, while mirror-like reflection of light is the proxy property.

As a last example, consider weight and mass. Human beings estimate mass by means of weight. Here on Earth people pick up something and perceive the force that such an object exerts on their arms. However, an astronaut on the moon feels a much weaker force from the substantially weaker pull of lunar gravity. Objects on the moon weigh roughly one sixth of their weight on earth. However, the mass of an object we know remains the same. Thus, an astronaut feels as though objects weigh less. If one applied the same logic used in cases of illusions, one ought to conclude that the astronaut has the illusion that objects have less mass on the moon than they do on the earth.

In fact, nobody explains what happens to astronauts in terms of illusory perception; it would be pointless to claim that the astronaut has the illusion that object masses are diminished. For example, one may weigh a bag to know how many bananas are inside, weigh a child to sense how they’re growing up, or weigh a medallion to know how
much gold is in it. Since we know the property which is perceived to estimate mass, that is, its weight, it is obvious that on the moon such a property is smaller than on the earth. However, weight is neither an illusory mass nor a mental mass. Weight is just the physical property that earthlings use to conveniently estimate mass. Using the suggested terminology, weight is the proxy property, while mass is the alleged property.

The conceptual shift allows us to avoid any added illusory mental properties; it allows us to deal only in the relevant physical properties. Everything we perceive is a physical property in the external world. Again, illusions are not misperceptions but erroneous beliefs about the nature of the physical properties one perceives. Illusions so understood fail to make a convincing case against our object-bound theory.47

Commonsense and Skepticism

I suspect that most of the reactions against the proposed object-bound identity theory are not of a conceptual nature, but are rather more a matter of habit. In other words, the possibility that the thing we are – insofar as we are our experience – is the external object is just considered too bizarre to possibly be true. The point is not whether a hypothesis seems unlikely, however, but whether such a hypothesis is supported by available evidence and whether it is logically consistent.

A great many big ideas have previously been taken to be completely convincing: the earth without orbit, its continents unshifted and its species unevolved, all surrounded by an ether and absolute space. Although such ideas have led us astray time and again, it has taken ages to finally call them into question. I suspect that the widely held notion that experience is brain-bound belongs to a similar group of ideas. They are thought to be true despite the lack of evidence in their support, due to conceptual commitments that at the time go unchallenged. In addition, an assumption that experience is brain-bound has encouraged many theorists and researchers to introduce all kinds of mysterious conceptual crutches, in order to prop-up the main concept, as we have seen with intentionality, container/content distinctions, qualia, phenomenal character, and the like.

Consider an analogy with the notions of absolute and relative velocity. Until a certain stage of scientific development, velocity was taken to be an absolute property. Either you were moving or you were not. Under such a conception, it would have been crazy to claim that the Rockefeller Center moves. Yet, once a notion of relative velocity had been developed and accepted, there was no longer a contradiction in claiming that the complex is both motionless in the center of Manhattan and hurtling at high speed around the sun.

Likewise, one might feel bemused at first by the notion that one’s experience is outside one’s body. Yet, the point is not the extent to which an hypothesis matches our familiar prejudices about the world, but whether it is compatible with existing empirical evidence. Also, we need to determine if it provides a more parsimonious explanation of
the facts. If these conditions are met, I believe any hypothesis – no matter how bizarre it initially appears – deserves to be taken seriously. If the notion of relative velocity does not contradict any empirical evidence and it is more parsimonious than other commonsense conceptual alternatives, then experience being object-bound may turn out just as decisive in a similar fashion.

As a matter of fact, there are no a priori reasons to locate experience inside the body. Nor do we contradict empirical evidence if we do so. Experience tells us where our body is rather than where experience itself is. It tells us where the center of our perceptual apparatus is, but it does not tell us anything about what and where the thing we are is. If experience is real and thus physical, the nature of experience will tell us something about the nature of the physical world. More specifically, our experience tells us something about what our experience is and thus, indirectly, about where such an experience is.

Thus, whenever one perceives something, our banana say, one’s perception is simply the banana lying before the perceiver. A series of commonsense counterexamples arise with intuition almost automatically. Isn’t the banana there before and after one experiences it? Isn’t the banana outside one’s body and thus outside one’s mind? Isn’t the banana different from one’s experience? Isn’t the banana a physical object while one’s experience is something mental? We’ll take these on one at a time.

Isn’t the banana there before and after one experiences it? Well, on the one hand, even if the banana existed before and after the time span during which one’s experience occurs, this would be acceptable because the banana can belong to the bundle which is one’s experience only for a limited time period. Likewise, the same molecule of H2O can be part of my body for a limited amount of time. Beforehand and afterwards, the same molecule exists. It is not inconceivable that the same object is part of my body only for a limited time span. The same rationale holds for one’s experience. If one’s experience is made of objects, such objects belong to such a bundle only for a limited time span.

On the other hand, we need to take into account the causal nature of objects. They exist if and when what an object is made of has the right conditions for it to take place. In the case of most of the objects of our lives, such causal conditions are realized by our bodies. The objects we perceive do not happen to be there when our bodies are not around. For many objects their causal nature is clearly revealed, e.g., with rainbows, with keys fitting locks, and with constellations of stars. Other objects depend in less obvious ways on their causal conditions, but I argue elsewhere that the connection between objects and causal relevance is a general principle.

Isn’t the banana outside my body? Yes, of course it is, but so what? From the fact that the banana is outside my body it does not follow that the banana is outside my experience. Why must our experience be located inside our body?
Phenomenologically, I do not perceive my experiences as being inside my body, unless I experience something taking place inside my body, proprioceptively, such as with an ache in the joints. There are no reasons to believe either that I am my body or that my experience is my body. I know that, whatever I am, I am physical since I assume I am real. But I do not know a priori that I am either my body or a part of it. Thus, I have no reason to postulate that I am my body.

Of course, some will say that they have the feeling of being inside their bodies. But such a feeling is of little consequence insofar as they have no feeling as to where their experience is; they have feelings about where their bodies are, and their bodies are of course located where they bodies are. Thus, one should not expect to have any mismatch between where one feels to be and where one’s body is, because one’s feelings are not about where one’s experience is, but about where one’s body is. This is nothing new; Daniel Dennett has argued at length about the difference between feeling where the mind is and feeling where the body is§.

Of course, if my body – or a part of it – had the same properties of my experience, I could draw the conclusion that I am my body. This is not the case though. Despite the Sisyphean efforts of neuroscience, neural processes in the brain – the most likely candidate within the body – have shown none of the properties of experience as of yet.

Thus one is entitled to look elsewhere. I look for something physical akin to my experience of the banana and the banana lies right there on the table. Thus, the banana is outside my body but is decidedly not outside the physical thing which is my experience.

Isn’t the banana different from one’s experience? We are back to square one with Descartes. We have no a priori knowledge or beliefs about what one’s experience is. We need to find it. Traditionally, philosophers have pitted notions of experience against notions of bananas. Since the notions haven’t matched, they conclude that experience must be different from the banana. Take a different angle. Rather than contrasting the concept of experience against the concept of objects, it is more fruitful to contrast experience and objects. We do not know a priori whether experiences are different from bananas.

As a matter of fact, they look the same to me. They look so much the same that I dare say I have never experienced a banana without – this comes as no surprise – an experience of a banana. Thus, why should they be different? Only because philosophers and scientists have continually attributed aboutness, subjectivity, privacy, first-person perspective to the former and quantity, matter, causal powers to the latter. Such metaphysical border guarding has always been a byproduct of wrong assumptions rather than empirical facts. For me, there has always been only one banana, which has been both my experience and the banana I could peel and eat.

Isn’t the yellow banana a physical object while one’s experience is something mental? Once again, such a gap is not something we know a priori. The Galilean divide (aka the Hard
Problem) has been introduced to justify our prejudices about bananas and experience. Once such prejudices are set aside, the whole distinction between physical objects and mental entities collapses. There are just objects. Some of such objects are part of what we are. When an object is part of one’s experience, it is not different from the object it was before. It exists, if it does, without being part of anyone’s experience. There are no objects and experiences. There are only objects. Sometimes, an object is part of a bundle and that bundle is the thing that is someone’s experience. Sometimes, it is not.

Conclusion

The mismatch is not between experience and reality, the mismatch is between what we believe experience and reality to be; or to put it differently, between our alleged knowledge of what experience is and our alleged knowledge of what reality is. The mismatch, in short, is not between experience and reality, but between beliefs about them.

If you are a physicalist of any sort, you ought to assume that whenever you have an experience $E$, a physical phenomenon $X$ should exist such that $E$ is $X$. Of course, we do not know a priori what $X$ is. Neuroscientists have based their work on the assumption that, whatever $X$ is, $X$ must be inside the brain. In contrast, here the hypothesis is that $X$ is the object experienced rather than something brain-bound as it has often been assumed. A radically different yet physicalist hypothesis is thus put forward: The experience is object-bound. I suggest that one’s experience is identical with an object outside the body.

If we have entertained the hypothesis that one’s experience of a banana is the neural activity inside the cortex, why should we resist the hypothesis that one’s experience of the banana is the banana itself? Why should neural processes be taken to be a more respectable choice than external objects? The banana has a long list of advantages. It is yellow, long and curved, banana-ish in so many ways. Neural processes have none of such properties.

In this paper, I outlined a mind-object identity theory. Scientists have devoted enormous time and effort to looking for the right process inside the body to support an identity theory without having satisfactory results. I believe it is just fair to spend some time and effort on the object side of the equation. There is no metaphysical reason to privilege physical phenomena on the inner side of the skin rather than the physical phenomena on the outer side. As David Armstrong once wrote, “man is nothing but a material object having none but physical properties.” I couldn’t agree more. Yet, I take into consideration the external object rather than the brain or the body.

Notes
I use the terms consciousness, experience, phenomenal experience, conscious experience, conscious mind as synonyms.

2


3

e=mc². After all, energy can always be converted into matter and vice versa. They appear to be two manifestations of the same underlying principle. Furthermore, they are both spatiotemporally located and they both have an actual causal role. This is not to say that I dare to provide a definition of the nature of the physical. As a physicalist, I start from the assumption that, whatever it is, experience must be physical as matter and energy are.

4

D. ARMSTRONG, A Materialist Theory of Mind, cit., p.1

5


6

I skip here all the connected issues of reduction and emergence.

7


8


9

More about this later.

10


11

Choose your favorite notion here – e.g., is identical with, supervenes, let emerge, causes, etc.

12


13


14


17 Ivi, p. 87.


19 T. NAGEL, What is it like to be a Bat?, cit.


21 Here, I refer to physical properties like those I have in mind when I compare the yellow of the banana with the gray-bluish of neurons. I do not assume a priori the traditional alleged ontological gap between objective and subjective, mental and physical, primary and secondary, and so forth. Such a gap should be proved rather than assumed.


24 T.NAGEL, What is it like to be a Bat?, cit., p. 436.

25 Here, the notion of absolute sufficiency is akin to local supervenience. For instance, being materially identical with a certain painting at the Louvre is not enough for that painting to be Monna Lisa. Material identity is not absolutely sufficient to be an original artwork. Historical whereabouts matter too.

26 For instance, at a meeting sponsored in 2001 at the Cold Spring Harbour Laboratories addressing the question “Could Machines Be Conscious?”, the participants agreed on the fact that no known law of nature forbids the existence of subjective feelings in artifacts designed or evolved by humans.


28 In this section, I do not even try to address all possible prejudices about a gap between experience and world, yet I outline the main reasons why experience and object have been kept apart. My hope is that, by revealing such reasons, the strength of such prejudices will be reduced and the reader will be tempted to consider the new approach.


33 D.J. CHALMERS, The Conscious Mind, cit. 34


35 F. BRENTANO, Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt, Hahn, Leipzig 1874.


40 To avoid misunderstandings, my claim – that whenever we perceive or hallucinate something, there is an object – is a claim about the existence of a physical object and not about Meinongian or intentional objects.


47 Of course, due to space limitations, I cannot even begin to address all cases of illusions such as complementary afterimages, Benham Disks, Lilac, Evian, Ponzo, Ebbinghaus, and so forth. However, I hope the readers will consider to apply the proxy/alleged distinction to their favorite illusion.


