

The apple has certain inherent properties such that when it interacts with our specific sensory system, the result is an awareness of the apple in a particular (red) form. The point is more easily grasped in regard to sweetness, which resides neither in the mind alone nor in the apple alone, neither “in here” nor “out there” but rather as the product of the interaction between the perceiver and the perceived. To clarify this point, Rand gave the analogy of a collision between a car and a truck.<sup>42</sup> The collision is in neither the car alone nor the truck alone, but in both — i.e., constitutes their interaction. We perceive every object in a certain form, resulting from the interaction of its identity with the identity of our sensory system.

## APPEARANCE AND REALITY

The understanding of perception given in the last two sections points the way to gaining a proper understanding of the traditional distinction between appearance and reality. We use this distinction to contrast what a thing appears to be versus what it really is. When does this contrast exist? When there are potentially *misleading* similarities: “The man appeared to be Jim, but it was really Bob.” Or, “The stick appears to be bent but in reality it is straight.” But the “really” or “in reality” here does not refer to something beyond or independent of perception. Rather, “in reality” refers to what is disclosed in *other* acts of perception. It is further *perceptual* information that shows us the need to correct the *judgment*, by concluding: “That is not Jim, but Bob” and “The stick is not bent, but straight.”

Nor does the new judgment throw out as “mistaken” the original perceptual data: one does not say “My eyes were deceiving me when I looked at Jim.” Jim *does* have an appearance similar to Bob’s; a photograph of the two of them would also display that similarity. The semi-submerged stick *does* look similar to the way bent objects look out of water. What gets revised in such cases is the *conceptual judgment* of what is perceived.

None of the perceptual data itself can be rejected or treated as invalid. The later judgment includes the initial perceptual appearance, rather than contradicting it or wiping it out. To be Jim *includes* the fact that he looks like Bob. To be a straight stick *includes* the fact that it will look like a bent stick when semi-submerged in water. To be yellow *includes* looking black under a blue light. How something appears under a given condition of perception (and of the perceiver) is a matter of ineluctable cause and effect (as studied

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42 Rand in personal conversation with Leonard Peikoff, circa 1972.

by the science of psychophysics). The judgment “This is X” integrates the thing’s perceived qualities here and now with its perceived qualities across all other conditions of perception.

Accordingly, there are two perfectly proper ways that we use the concept of “appearance.” The first express uncertainty, as when one says, “This appears to be gold, but I’m not sure.” (Or, when put into the past tense, it expresses a revision of one’s judgment: “It appeared to be gold, but it turned out to be iron pyrite.”)

The other correct use of “appearance” is one that is more relevant to the issue of perception. This use occurs when one distinguishes a thing’s sensory qualities — how it looks, feels, tastes — from its constituent physical properties. For instance, a surface will *appear* smooth to the touch when it has only very small irregularities. In this case, we are not saying that the surface isn’t “really” smooth; that idea makes no sense. Rather, we are saying that a certain physical state of affairs produces a certain sensory quality.

The wrong view of the distinction between appearance and reality occurs when philosophers claim that perception as such gives us “only” appearance, not reality. This is a disastrous error. Do I know only the appearance of the pen in my hand, not how the pen really is? One cannot make *that kind* of distinction between appearance and reality.

The claim that perception does not provide awareness of reality (or of reality “as it really is”) represents a massive stolen concept. If we perceived only appearances, never reality, we could not have the concept of “reality” (nor the concept of “appearance”).

*Every appearance is the appearance of reality.*

Reality appears to us in a certain form, and no form of perception can be treated as either invalid or privileged.

The form-object distinction puts an end to all these confusions and sophistries. It enables one to reject the hopeless attempt to *compare* appearance to reality — i.e., to compare form to object. One can compare forms of perception to each other, as in comparing how a house looks from here to how it looks from over there. Or, one can compare objects of perception to each other, as in comparing one house to another. What makes no sense, however, is trying to compare a form of perception to the object of perception, as if we could wonder whether the house’s appearance looks like the house, or whether sugar is *really* as sweet as it tastes.

Of course, it makes sense to wonder whether the house is as big as it looks (“Would that house measure as large as I would estimate it to measure, judging by how it looks from here?”). As noted earlier, that can be a valid