On Reality and Appearance in Grounding-Based Metaphysics

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Abstract

Metaphysical views typically draw a distinction between reality and appearance. There are different conceptions of the reality-appearance distinction. This paper critically evaluates a recent conception of the reality-appearance distinction, according to which mere appearances consist in genuine facts and reality consists in a privileged collection of facts. I will argue that such a framework faces a range of interrelated problems. First, I will show that the framework seems to either require a non-factive conception of reality, which has implausible consequences, or else require a ban on the reality of negative facts, which comes with awkward restrictions on expressive power. Second, the framework is unable to cope with conflicts that arise across the various ‘levels’ of appearances, such as between the world of atoms and the world of macroscopic objects. Third, the framework is unable to cope with conflicts that arise due to the possible perspectivalness of appearances, such as when different but equally good observers see incompatible colours. And fourth, the framework does not answer to a central motivation behind antirealist views, namely the perceived need to undermine insoluble questions and trim explanatory burdens. I will conclude with a discussion of the consequences of abandoning this framework, for our understanding of the notion of grounding and for the prospect of a Moorean methodology in metaphysics.
Consider this passage from Fine:

The idea of a realist or anti-realist metaphysics involves a fundamental distinction between what is real and what is mere appearance. Intuitively, there is nothing more to the metaphysician’s world than what he takes to be real. So, for example, on Democritus’s view there will be nothing more to the world than atoms in the void. But there might appear to be something more to the world than what he takes to be real – there might appear to be minds or morality, say, in addition to the atoms – and hence the distinction between appearance and reality. Once we accept this distinction between appearance and reality, the metaphysician must explain why what appears to be something more is not genuinely something more. (Fine 2007: 23).

This should be a relatively uncontroversial picture of metaphysics. Since the earliest beginnings of metaphysics, thinkers have offered radically different worldviews, which differ on where they draw the boundary between reality and appearance. It has been proposed that reality consists only of one seamless whole and that everything else is mere appearance (Parmenides), that reality consists only of atoms bouncing around in the void and that everything else is mere appearance (Democritus), that reality consists only of Forms and that everything else is mere appearance (Plato), and so on. The reality-appearance distinction does not just concern entities: in the view of such thinkers as Galileo, Descartes, Boyle and Locke for example, a ham sandwich has the matter and extension it appears to have in our measurements, but not the colour, temperature or taste.
that it appears to have in our experience. Here the reality-appearance distinction cuts across the properties of a single object. Not only are there different views on where to draw the distinction between reality and appearance however, there are also different views on how to think of the reality-appearance distinction itself. This essay aims to critically evaluate one recent view of the distinction.

First a word on terminology. I will sometimes use the notions of ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’ in a loose way, to identify the subject matter of discussion, namely the distinction that different frameworks conceptualize in different ways. At other times however, I use the notions of ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’ as exhibiting the specific formal features attributed to them by a specific framework. I trust it will be clear in contexts whether the notions of ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’ are used in a framework-neutral or framework-involving way. Also, the discussion of different frameworks is concerned with the formal properties attributed to the notions of appearance and reality – and not with their possibly different sources. Depending on one’s particular view, the world of appearance may include that which we experience (such as red roses), that which features in our ordinary talk (such as economic bubbles), and even that which is posited by non-fundamental sciences (such as ecosystems).

Imagine that we have a total description of the world consisting of two lists of sentences. The first list is intended to describe the way the world really is, what entities it really includes and what facts really obtain. The second list includes everything else that we assert, in ordinary contexts, in reporting what we experience, and so on. To mark the difference between these lists, we embed the sentences on the first list under an operator that signals that they are intended as describing the world as it merely appears to be in our ordinary conception of it: \( \text{it appears that } \varphi_1, \text{ it appears that } \varphi_2, \text{ it appears that } \varphi_3, \text{ and} \)
so on. We embed the sentences on the second list under an operator that mark them as describing the world as it really is: \( \text{in reality } \psi_1, \text{ in reality } \psi_2, \text{ in reality } \psi_3, \) and so on. The question of how we think of the reality-appearance distinction can now be discussed in terms of the way we would interpret these operators on the basis of our conception of the distinction.

Before introducing the framework that I like to discuss, let us first briefly look at what I take to be a fairly standard framework. According to this framework, for a fact to be real is just for the fact to obtain. That is to say, the framework at least accepts the following equivalence – which I will dub the Reality Schema:

\[
\text{in reality } \varphi \text{ if and only if } \varphi
\]

With this principle in place, the reality-appearance distinction is effectively between what obtains and what appears to obtain. In order for the appearances not to be automatically part of reality, the Reality Schema must be combined with a non-factive understanding of the appearances:

\[
\text{not: if it appears that } \varphi, \text{ then } \varphi
\]

To see why the non-factivity of appearance is required to keep appearance apart from reality, assume for the sake of argument that appearance is factive, that if \( \text{it appears that } \varphi, \) then \( \varphi. \) Combined with the right-to-left direction of the Reality Schema – that if \( \varphi, \) then \( \text{in reality } \varphi, \) – we would have the consequence that if \( \text{it appears that } \varphi, \) then \( \text{in reality } \varphi. \) Any appearance would be part of reality – and this conflicts with the theoretical work that
the reality-appearance distinction is meant to do for us, namely exclude certain facts from reality. So the Reality Schema must be combined with a non-factive understanding of apparent facts. Such non-factive conceptions of appearances are clearly found in fictionalist views (assuming that in the fiction φ, does not imply that φ) or error theories (where having the belief or experience that φ, does not imply that φ).

The alternative framework that I like to discuss takes a different approach to the distinction. It has been proposed in Fine (2001) and Schaffer (2009). Following Schaffer (2009), I will call it the neo-Aristotelian framework (though I think the label is not ideal). Here it is not reality that coincides with the facts, but rather the appearances. That is to say, the framework accepts the following equivalence – which I will call the Appearance Schema:

\[ \text{it appears that } \varphi \text{ if and only if } \varphi \]

Note in particular the left to right direction: if it appears that φ, then φ. The framework adopts a factive understanding of appearance. This forces us to adopt a different understanding of reality in order to keep appearance apart from reality, according to which being the case does not suffice for being case in reality:

\[ \text{not: if } \varphi, \text{ then in reality } \varphi. \]

To see why this principle is necessary to keep appearances apart from reality, assume for the sake of argument that if φ, then in reality φ. Given the left-to-right direction of the Appearance Schema – that if it appears that φ then φ – we would have the consequence
that if \( it \) appears that \( \varphi \) then \( in \) reality \( \varphi \), which would again undermine the point of the reality-appearance distinction. So we are forced to accept that it is not the case that, if \( \varphi \), then \( in \) reality \( \varphi \).

Within the neo Aristotelian framework, the reality-appearance distinction becomes a distinction between what is the case and what is \( in \) reality the case. Thus Fine: ‘I might accept that I am sitting and even accept that it is a fact that I am sitting, for example, but not accept that this fact is constitutive of how things really are’ (Fine 2005: 267; cf. Schaffer 2009: 362). Thus Schaffer: ‘[I]n the debate over metaphysical realism, both the realist and idealist accept the existence of rocks. There is no dispute about what exists. Rather, the dispute is over mind-dependence: are entities like rocks grounded in ideas, or independent of them?’ (Schaffer). To be an antirealist concerning a certain collections of facts is not to deny that these facts obtain, it is to deny that they \textit{fundamentally} or \( in \) reality obtain.\(^1\) One is for example an antirealist concerning numbers when one holds (1) that there are numbers but that (2), in fundamental reality, there are no numbers.

This understanding of the reality-appearance distinction goes hand-in-hand with a resort to the notion of grounding as the preferred way of explaining how the world of appearance is ultimately nothing over and above reality. To briefly introduce the notion of grounding, consider the fact that Sue is taller than Mary.\(^2\) It is natural to think that Sue is taller than Mary \( because \) Sue is 180cm tall and Marian is 170cm tall – where ‘\( because \)’

\(^1\) Just to flag: some will think that the relevant notion of reality is that of what is fundamental (Schaffer), and some will think that these are different notions (Fine). These differences do not matter here. More on this below.

\(^2\) See Correia and Schnieder (2012), and Bliss and Trogdon (2014) for general introductions.
stands for a sui generis metaphysical (non-causal) kind of explanation.\(^3\) These grounding facts may be chained, forming so-called grounding trees. For example, we might continue to say that Sue is 180cm tall because\(_g\) the atoms that compose her are where they are. This notion of grounding creates a stratified conception of the world of appearance, i.e. the world of mere facts.

Grounding is standardly assumed to be factive (see e.g. Fine 2012, Schaffer 2009, Rosen 2010, Correia and Schnier 2012, and Kelly and Trogdon 2014):

\[ \text{if } \varphi \text{ because}_g \Delta, \text{ then } \varphi \text{ and } \Delta \text{ (where } \Delta \text{ is a list of sentences)} \]

Factivity seems plausible given that grounding is commonly assumed to be a type of explanation and the latter is often taken to be factive (Kelly and Trogdon 2014: §4).\(^4\) Now if grounding is indeed factive, it is naturally suited to explain appearances in terms of reality when the appearances are understood as consisting in genuine facts. Vice versa, the neo-Aristotelian framework places the notion of grounding at the heart of metaphysics: when we know that the fact that \(\varphi\) is grounded, we thereby have (at least some) evidence that it is not part of reality. Sorting reality from appearance proceeds via considerations of what grounds what. It is therefore no surprise that the neo-Aristotelian

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\(^3\) Alternatively, they can be thought of as ‘backing relations’ that underwrite such explanations in the way that causal relations are said to underwrite causal explanations; see Audi (2012: 687–8).

\(^4\) For an additional reason of why we should prioritize a factive notion of grounding, see Fine (2012: 48-50). For an account of grounding that prioritizes a non-factive notion, see Litland (forthcoming).
framework has been introduced in papers that argue for a reorientation of metaphysics around the notion of grounding (namely, Fine 2001 and Schaffer 2009).\(^5\)

One might go further and suppose that an appearance just is a grounded fact and that a real fact just is a fact that is ungrounded or fundamental, as in Schaffer (2009: 373). There are all the facts, and some of the facts ground all other facts and thereby form the privileged set of facts that is of particular interest to metaphysicians. This provides a certain conceptual economy to the framework. But there are also reasons to resist the temptation to define the notion of reality in terms of ungroundedness. As Fine points out (2001: 22-24, 27-28), it might be that we believe that normative facts are not constitutive of reality, and yet that we also believe that any normative fact does not obtain in virtue of a non-normative fact. Perhaps we believe that stealing is wrong and that only our belief that stealing is wrong is grounded in certain facts (such as the emotions that stealing elicit in us), without the fact that stealing is wrong itself being grounded in any other fact. Similarly, one might accept that the fact that \(\varphi \& \psi\) is grounded in the fact that \(\varphi\) and the fact that \(\psi\), without thereby taking a stand on the (un)reality of conjunctive facts (Fine 2001: 15). To accommodate such possibilities, ungrounded facts should not be automatically part of reality, and grounded facts should not be automatically jettisoned from reality; our concept of reality must then be independent from our concept of ungroundedness or fundamentality. Fortunately, these and other differences in approach do not matter for the purpose of this paper. The target of this essay will be any framework that identifies appearances with mere facts and reality with some more restricted set of facts – no matter whether ‘reality’ is a defined notion or independent primitive.

\(^5\) These stand in contrast to those who merely argue for the intelligibility of grounding and its possible utility in expressing metaphysical dependence, as e.g. in Rosen (2010).
What drives this conception of the reality-appearance distinction? The main reason concerns Moorean considerations that threaten to trivialize the realism-antirealism debates and the possibility of substantive metaphysical views (see Fine 2001: 2; and Schaffer 2009: §2.1). Say that one has an antirealist view of numbers. One might think that one does not want to be thereby forced to deny that there are prime numbers between 1 and 9. This is a mathematical truism, as Schaffer puts it (2009: 257), which is demonstrated by mathematicians, using mathematical proofs. It is established beyond reasonable doubt. But if there are prime numbers between 1 and 9, it follows straightaway that there are numbers. And this suggests that even a nominalist should think that there are numbers. The reasons we have for believing that there are prime numbers between 1 and 9 are surely much more forceful than our philosophical reasons for believing in nominalism. Similarly, if one is a naturalist about normative claims, then one does not want to be thereby forced to deny that killing babies for fun is wrong (Fine 2001: 2). Of course it is wrong, we would all say this and we would all act accordingly. But then what can it mean to still deny the reality of moral facts? The neo-Aristotelian framework undermines the threat of trivialization. Even though one refuses to admit a given fact to one’s metaphysical conception of the world, this does not mean that one can no longer assert that these things are the case; that there are prime numbers between 1 and 9, or that killing babies for fun is wrong. A plausible antirealism, one might think, cannot concern the obtaining of these matters, lest it denies the obvious for non-obvious reasons. The denial must concern a certain status over and above their obtaining, their being in reality the case. And this leads to the Appearance-Schema. An antirealist about numbers no longer denies that there are numbers, but rather denies that it is the case in reality that there are numbers. An antirealist about normative facts does not deny that they obtain,
only that they obtain in reality. Moorean modesty thus motivates a factive understanding of the way the world appears in our ordinary talk and ordinary experience.

Given the way in which Moorean considerations so naturally give rise to the neo-Aristotelian framework, any problems for the framework are likely to be reasons to resist the Moorean considerations that lead to it. And indeed this is what we will see. I will return to this in the concluding remarks.

2. Conflicts between reality and appearance

Thus far, the neo-Aristotelian framework has been minimally defined by the following two principles:

1. it appears that φ if and only if φ
2. not: if φ, then in reality φ

This does not yet tell us anything about the factivity of reality, that is, whether we have it that: if in reality φ, then φ. As it turns out, it seems that the framework either has to deny the factivity of reality, or else introduce certain restrictions in expressive power.

If I were an atomist, I would intuitively be committed to the following: (1) in reality there are no tables and (2) there are tables. My conception of the world is not just one on which there is this and that atom, but – crucially – it is a conception on which the atoms are all there is. It is a conception on which there is an absence of macroscopic objects such as tables. But note that we now seem to require a non-factive conception of reality: that in reality there are no tables better not imply that there are no tables, as this
contradicts the fact that there are tables. In more abstract terms: if we accept a conjunction of the form in reality \( \neg \varphi \) and \( \varphi \), then it cannot be the case that in reality \( \neg \varphi \) implies that \( \neg \varphi \), on pain of incoherence. This suggests that the required notion of reality must be non-factive.\(^6\)

Now certain metaphysicians believe that there are no negative facts in reality (famously Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*). But even if one believes that there no negative facts in reality, one might still believe that there is some totality fact – a that’s all clause – that plays the role of the negative facts in a given worldview (see e.g. Armstrong 1997: §2.4.2 and Fine 2012: §1.7). Thus the atomist may believe that there are such and such atoms, interacting in such and such ways, and that in reality, that is all there is. If the fact that in reality there are only atoms implied that there are only atoms, this still conflicts with the ordinary fact that there are also tables, entities that are distinct from atoms. Though I will discuss negative facts from here on, it should be clear then that the same issue arises for totality facts.

So we have some reason to think that the notion of reality must be non-factive, that not: if in reality \( \varphi \), then \( \varphi \). The framework would in that case employ a factive understanding of appearance and a non-factive understanding of reality. This seems topsy-turvy. And it implies that reality does not simply consist in a restriction on what is the case, it rather consists in something other than what is the case. It will also have consequences for the connection between truth and reality. One would imagine that: if in reality \( \varphi \), then ‘\( \varphi \)’ is true. But if reality is not factive, we obviously cannot accept this, at

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\(^6\) In Fine (2005), the notion of reality is employed in the formulation of a fragmentalists metaphysics that requires the non-factivity of reality for reasons that are particular to this metaphysical view; see Fine (2005: 297–298).
least not if we accept the Truth Schema: ‘φ’ is true if and only if φ. To see this, assume that if in reality φ, then ‘φ’ is true. This principle, in combination with the left-to-right direction of the Truth Schema – if ‘φ’ is true, then φ – implies the factivity of reality, that if in reality φ, then φ. So the contents of reality are not in general truthmakers for the sentences that state that those contents are the case. We hold, for instance, that in reality there are no tables, and yet that the sentence ‘there are no tables’ is false and the sentence ‘there are tables’ is true. Reality does not suffice for the truth of sentences that describe reality, and indeed the contents of reality would be (at least sometimes) stated by falsehoods. There seems to be no independent motivation for these surprising revisions.

There is a way of maintaining the factivity of reality. One might think that an atomistic worldview does not concern a real absence of tables, it rather concerns an absence of the reality of tables. On this conception we must be very careful about the scope of negations. As an atomist, I should be committed to (1*) it is not the case that in reality there are tables and (2) there are tables. In abstract terms, we do not accept that in reality ¬φ and φ, rather, we only accept that ¬(in reality φ) and φ, so that reality can remain factive without there being any threat of lapsing into incoherence.

But this solution requires artificial restrictions in expressive power. Consider a sentence of the form: ‘in reality ¬φ’. To maintain the wide-scope strategy, we must either believe that this is syntactically ill-formed, or that it is meaningful but false – even where a sentence of the form ‘¬(in reality φ)’ is true. There seems to be no good reason to believe that ‘in reality ¬φ’ is syntactically ill-formed, or not a candidate for truth or falsity. So let us say that it is false. Given that ‘¬(in reality φ)’ might nevertheless be true, we must deny that ¬(in reality φ) if and only if in reality ¬φ. There must be some difference in these sentences. Frankly – I fail to see what this difference could be. More
seriously however, note that, in our example, we would have that it is neither the case that there no tables (given that it is a fact that there are tables), nor the case that in reality there are no tables. This means that the fact that there no tables comes to have the same status as the fact that 2+2=5 or the fact that there are witches. We both deny that 2+2=5 and that in reality 2+2=5; and we both deny that there are witches and that in reality there are witches. These facts belong neither to reality, nor the world of appearance as it is understood here. To maintain the wide-scope strategy, the same needs to be the case for the fact that there are no tables: we both deny that there are no tables and that in reality there are no tables. But that does not seem right: as an atomist, I want to say that the sentence ‘there are no tables’ is descriptive of the world in some way that the sentences ‘2+2=5’ and ‘there are witches’ are not descriptive of the world. There is a crucial distinction between these and this gets lost. So on the one hand it seems to create distinctions where there are none (namely, a distinction between ‘¬(in reality φ)’ and ‘in reality ¬φ’) and on the other hand it collapses distinctions that are clearly there (namely, the distinction in alethic status for an atomist between the sentence ‘there are no tables’ and the sentence ‘there are witches’).

Thus it seems to me that the framework faces an awkward choice between rejecting the factivity of reality, or enforcing a wide-scope strategy, both of which have implausible consequences. The problem is however more general.

3. Vertical conflicts: conflicts across the ‘levels’ of appearance

The previous issue concerned a conflict that naturally arises between the contents of reality and the world of appearance. We could quarantine this particular conflict through
an appropriate modification of our concept of reality, taking it to be non-factive or free from negative (or totalising) content. There are however similar conflicts to be found within the world of appearance only and, since these do not concern reality, tinkering with the concept of reality is of no help here.

The neo-Aristotelian framework – when combined with a resort to grounding – imposes a layered structure on the world of appearance. Moving through this grounding structure, one encounters conceptions of the world that seem to me to be in conflict with each other. Imagine three descriptions of the world: (1) a description of the world in terms of sub-atomic fundamental particles of physics and their interaction, (2) a description in terms of atoms and their interaction, (3) and a description in terms of macroscopic objects and their interaction. Let us also imagine that we have a conception of the world in which, in reality, there are only the sub-atomic fundamental particles of physics (quarks, leptons, bosons, etc.), and neither atoms nor macroscopic objects. To the extent that it is natural to think of reality as being complete in the sense of not including anything but these fundamental sub-atomic particles when we have such a view, it is similarly natural to think of the other two descriptions as each being complete in the same way: as we move through the grounding structure we switch from a conception on which there are only fundamental particles, to one according to which there are only atoms, to one on which there are only macroscopic objects. In particular, insofar as I think of the world in terms of atoms, I do not also think of it as including tables and chairs as well, and insofar as I think of the world as including tables and chairs, I do not also think of the world as consisting of atoms. This gestalt switch is forced upon me by the sort of properties that we ascribe to things on the relevant conceptions. Think for example of solidity. Let $R$ be the spatial region carved out by the outer boundaries of the table at which I am writing.
When I think of the table as a macroscopic object, I think of a four-legged object whose material is a solid chunk of steel, entirely filling region \( R \). Here it seems to me right to say that region \( R \) is filled through and through by the table in the sense that there are no unoccupied sub-regions. But now when I think of region \( R \) as being occupied by the atoms that make up the table, I think of the very same region as being almost entirely unoccupied. Only a few specks of the region are occupied by the nuclei of the atoms; and the rest is empty – given that atoms consist for 99.9999999999999\% of empty space. So I now think of \( R \) as including mostly sub-regions that are unoccupied and I no longer think of \( R \) as filled through and through. The atomic facts and macroscopic facts conflict: it follows from them that \( R \) both is and is not fully occupied, which is not a coherent conception of the world. We either need to deny that \( R \)’s being occupied by a collection of atoms implies that it is not fully occupied, or we must deny that \( R \)’s being occupied by a table implies that it is fully occupied.

One might think we should have never thought that we can accept just any common sense judgment. We only accept the world of ordinary talk as corrected by science. But corrected in what sense, and to what extent? Say that we reject that \( R \)’s being filled by a table implies that it is fully occupied – after all, one might think – we have all learned about the atomic model, and have long known that a table’s being solid does not consist in its being solid in the naïve sense of occupying any sub-regions that lie within its boundaries. There just is not any kind of solidity as we naïvely thought of, indeed, we have learned that something’s being solid just means that there are atoms forming certain bonds that render the material relatively impenetrable (cf. Sider 2013: §4).

But this is really no reply. We are just switching to the conception of things in terms of atoms, to then make the trivial claim that there is no solidity on that conception.
We cannot think of solidity as consisting in the bonds and interactions of atoms *whilst* thinking of solidity as a property of an ordinary macroscopic table as it features in our everyday conception of the world – they are precisely the bonds and interactions of *atoms*. When I think of a macroscopic object occupying region $R$, I thereby do not think of $R$ as being $99.9999999999999\%$ empty space. To remind myself that there is no solid material there is to remind myself of the fact that the table consists of atoms and that atoms are almost entirely empty space – but that does not answer the worry, which concerns the conflict between my ordinary concept of the macroscopic object and *its* apparent solidity. The reply requires that we not even say that tables appear solid in the naïve sense. The problem concerns a conflict between two levels of appearance, between the atomistic and macroscopic worlds (remember that we assumed that only the sub-atomic particles were real). Thus we now need to hold that the naïve notion of solidity is an empty notion, not even applicable to tables *as ordinarily understood*. Only atoms would be part of the world of appearance, not macroscopic tables. That seems ad hoc to me. Insofar as the world of appearance includes the world of ordinary talk and ideas, it seems to concern naïvely solid tables – and that is in conflict with what we learn from the atomistic conception of matter. There is a conflict here, and the framework is unable to handle it.

Solidity is just one example. There are many other kinds of conflicts. Think for example of one of popular science’s favourite: on the atomistic conception of things, it turns out that nothing is ever in contact with anything else – due to electron repulsion. This seems just false when I think of the world of ordinary macroscopic objects. Or perhaps a simpler example: when I think of the world in terms of atoms, it seems right to say that nothing is larger than 0.5 nanometres. This is just false when I think of the world in terms of macroscopic objects. Depending on which side of the conflict between atoms
and macroscopic objects I wish to privilege, I am either forced to think of tables as mere collections of atoms (since collections do not clearly have sizes, it is then indeed true that nothing is larger than 0.5 nanometres) or, alternatively, I am forced to think of the atoms as somehow sitting in larger objects distinct from the atoms (since tables are larger than 0.5 nanometres, it is then indeed true that something is larger than 0.5 nanometres). Either picture involves double-think, the first has no claim to being an ordinary conception, the second has no claim to being an atomistic conception of the world. And, again, whatever revision we opt for, we cannot now claim that it merely appears that nothing is larger than 0.5 nanometres, or that it merely appears that something is larger than 0.5 nanometres (my table being an example). With the Appearance Schema in place, this throws us back to the incoherence that our revisions were meant to avoid. We must deny that these things even appear to be the case, which is just not so.

A different example. If I maintain a naturalistic worldview, I hold that intentional facts and normative facts are grounded in non-intentional facts and non-normative facts (Rosen 2010: 111). As a naturalist, I think of the world as consisting only of lumps of matter, in which nothing happens that is right or wrong, and in which no event has a ‘not-to-be-doneness somehow built into it’ (Mackie 1977: 5). On this conception, I take the assassination of an innocent person to be an event consisting only of various material goings-on, of the triggering of a gun, of arteries that are ruptured, and so on. When I think of this event as an agglomeration of material goings-on, I do not just refrain from thinking of it as governed by norms, I think of it as not governed by norms, as being neither right or wrong. I abandon this conception of the world when I switch (for example in ordinary contexts) to a norm-involving conception on which the assassination of an innocent person is clearly wrong. On one conception the assassination is neither right nor wrong,
on the ordinary conception it is wrong. Something has to go. And the key issue here is that, whatever goes, it cannot even be mere appearance – given the Appearance Schema. But this is just not so.

This issue also raises some further suspicions to the solutions we saw in the first section in response to the problem of the conflict between reality and appearance. The absences that we need to make room for in our conception of reality are the very kinds of absences that also occur at the various ‘levels’ of appearance, which – when understood as genuine facts – similarly threaten to lead to incoherence. In retrospect, then, it seems that we were tinkering with our concept of reality in order to avoid incoherence, only to find similar threats of incoherence higher up the grounding tree.

4. Horizontal conflicts: the perspectivalness of appearances

The previous section concerned conflicts that exist across the ‘levels’ of the grounding structures that order the appearances. There are however also conflicts that do not occur across levels of appearance but that are rather due to a perspectival variance of apparent facts. It is well-known that the contents of ordinary experience can conflict: when two observers have a different constitution, location, orientation, etc. there arises the possibility of incompatible facts being equally apparent. Throughout history, arguments from the perspectival variance of a given subject matter have been an important motivation for holding antirealist views about that subject matter.\footnote{To name just a few examples, perspectival variance plays a key role in motivating Plato’s theory of Forms (see *Phaedo*: 74A9–C6), Democritus’ atomism (see Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*)} But, within the neo-
Aristotelian framework, conflicting appearances give rise to conflicting facts. The problem is straightforward: if it appears that \( \varphi \) and it appears that \( \neg \varphi \), then – by the Appearance Schema – this implies that it is the case that \( \varphi \) and that \( \neg \varphi \).

Consider for example two space shuttles that pass each other by. I am in one shuttle, and take myself to be moving at a constant speed of 200 km/hr in a certain direction. To me, the other shuttle appears to be at rest. However, the pilot of the other shuttle takes herself to be moving at a constant speed of 200 km/hr in the opposite direction. To her, my shuttle appears to be at rest. It seems that my shuttle appears to be at rest, and appears to be moving. There seems be no good way of privileging either of our perspectives. They are equally good. If we accept that my shuttle appears to be at rest and appears not to be at rest, then – given the Appearance Schema – this implies that the shuttle both is and is not at rest. That is, if we accept that there are at least conflicting appearances, we are thereby accepting conflicting facts. Again it seems we must deny that things even appear in incompatible ways here. But they do.

The sensible properties, such as colours, taste, temperature, etc. provide further stock examples. A certain colour chip may be greenish to you and more blueish to me, simply because of the way we are constituted (see Cohen 2009 for a detailed treatment of conflict cases involving colours). It has been found, for example, that two normal random human subjects will typically differ in what looks unique green to them. The wavelengths that normally sighted people report as unique green varies from 490 to 520nm and this is a significant variation, as differences of 15nm either way make for a distinctly bluish or yellowish look (Byrne and Hilbert 2003: 16; and Block 2003: 188). So we ask: does the

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I.213–14), Berkeley’s idealism (see his Three Dialogues: first dialogue) and Russell’s sense-data view (1912: Ch. 1).
colour chip in front of us appear unique green or not? Surely we should say that the colour chip appears to be of some particular shade of colour. But if it appears to have any shade of colour, we should say that it appears unique green and appears to be blueish green. That is, if it appears in any way at all, it reasonably appears in both these ways. But on the current framework, this means that the chip is unique green and blueish green. This cannot be. Something that is unique green is ipso facto not blueish green, and something that is blueish green is ipso facto not unique green, or so we commonly think.

To avoid the problem, we could either (1) admit one of the conflicting appearances and deny all others, or (2) we deny all the conflicting appearances. Consider (1), and say that we admit that the chip is unique green, and hence not blueish green or yellowish green, or any other colour (Byrne and Hilbert 2003: 17). In the context of the Appearance Schema, we are forced to deny not just that the chip is blueish green but even that it appears that the colour chip is blueish green. But that is just wrong. A substantive percentage of normally sighted people sees the chip being blueish green, and this should suffice for it appearing to be the case that the chip is blueish green. One could reply that the relevant concept of appearance must in this case be such that what colour the chip appears to have is determined by what the highest percentage of normally sighted subjects see; by majority vote, as it were. But this renders the appearances of colour, and hence the colours of objects, oddly dependent on numbers. If it were to happen that the population is split exactly 50:50, do we then say that the chip suddenly has no colour? Do we say that all objects change their colour the moment the majority switches due to population dynamics? This is all awkward, and ad hoc. It also cannot be a general solution to the problem of conflicting appearances. It is for instance unclear how majority votes are in any way relevant to the case of conflicting constant velocities mentioned above.
The other option of equally denying all the conflicting appearances is even less convincing. Consider the following line of thought: given that the chip cannot be both unique green and blueish green, and given that there are equally good reasons to say that the chip is unique green and to say that it is blueish green, it must be neither colour. This line of thought could be paired with a paraphrase strategy. One might add that there is no such thing as objects simply appearing a certain colour; perhaps the chip appears only to be such as to give rise to this kind of experience in this type of subject, and to be such as to give rise to that kind of experience in that other type of subject. But the denial that there are conflicting appearances seems dubious. We are dealing with the way things appear to be – the data that metaphysicians need to account for and here there is not much room for paraphrase, or re-description. Objects at least appear to have intrinsic properties when they look to have a certain colour, and objects at least appear to have incompatible intrinsic properties when they look to have different colours.

Cases could be multiplied. It is considerations like these that have motivated generations of philosophers to think that any properties involved in perspectival conflicts must in some sense be excluded from our conception of reality, given that things cannot have incompatible properties and hence that things must merely appear these ways. Secondary properties are arguably the paradigm cases of the relevant notion of appearance in traditional metaphysics – one by which many define the relevant notion of appearance – but the current framework is simply unable to deal with conflicting appearances. The factive understanding of appearances requires that there are never any conflicting appearances, but there are, the world of appearance is shot through with such conflicts.
5. Untrimmed explanatory burdens

Cases of perspectival variance can be seen as introducing insoluble explanatory burdens: two incompatible facts seem equally apparent, and favouring one of them is to introduce arbitrariness in one’s conception of things – a choice which cannot be backed by a satisfactory rationale. The neo-Aristotelian framework leaves the antirealist unable to undermine the forced choice. It turns out that this is again a more general problem. Often, the point of holding that certain matters are mere appearances is to undermine certain kinds of questions. In the context of the Appearance Schema however, antirealist views no longer undermine insoluble questions, leaving the relevant explanatory burdens as they are. This undermines what is perhaps the central motivation for antirealist views.

Consider for example antirealism about abstract objects, such as numbers. A central motivation for thinking that there are no numbers is that the existence of numbers raises questions that seem either unanswerable, or only answerable in ad hoc ways. The most well-known question in this case is an epistemological one (see e.g. Field 1989: 25-30). Numbers are not in space or time, and do not stand in causal relations to us or interact with anything we can observe. This gives rise to the question: what explains the gradual emergence of knowledge about, say, the natural number series? The transition from being ignorant about a mathematical fact to possessing knowledge of that fact cannot be explained through the kinds of interaction that typically explain how a subject can come to know things about worldly facts. So what does explain this? If there are no numbers, then we do not face the question of how we can make epistemic contact with them. Similar considerations apply to the moral case – if moral facts genuinely obtain, this raises the
question as to how we know that they obtain.\footnote{Thus Mackie: ‘When we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity, of the truth of these distinctively ethical premises or of the cogency of this distinctively ethical pattern of reasoning, none of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these, will provide a satisfactory answer; “a special sort of intuition” is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clear-headed objectivist is compelled to resort’ (Mackie 1977: 39).} Within the standard framework, to deny that it is the case that $\phi$ bars our belief that $\phi$ from being knowledge, and hence undermines any need to explain knowledge concerning the alleged fact that $\phi$. On the current framework, in contrast, an antirealist still accepts that it is the case that $\phi$, which means that antirealism is of no help in avoiding or undermining questions of epistemic contact.

There are other kinds of awkward questions. If abstract objects exist, then for any two abstract objects, they are either identical or distinct. Our arithmetic knowledge consists of arithmetical relations amongst numbers. If one believes that there are numbers however, it seems that one faces the questions what numbers are, what intrinsic properties make for the structural facts. The problem is that there multiple, equally good answers can be given. As Benacerraf pointed out, the sets $\emptyset$, $\{\emptyset\}$ and $\{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$ can play the theoretical roles of the numbers 0, 1 and 2, respectively, but so can the sets: $\emptyset$, $\{\emptyset\}$, $\{\{\emptyset\}\}$. This gives rise to a question of identification: do we have it that $2 = \{\emptyset, \{\emptyset\}\}$ or that $2 = \{\{\emptyset\}\}$, or if neither of these, what distinguishes the sets from the numbers? It seems that there is no fact of the matter here: we can identify the number 2 with one set or the other and it seems odd to think there is some one answer to this written in the fabric of things. If one accepts abstract objects however, it seems the logic of identity forces
there to be an answer written in the fabric of things. This motivates nominalists not to accept numbers in their ontology. As Field explains:

[C]an a platonist also find a way to grant that there is no fact of the matter as to the truth of cross-theory identities in mathematics? There seems to be an obstacle to so doing: after all, if the number 2 is a definite object, and the set \{Ø, \{Ø\}\} is a definite object, doesn’t there have to be a definite question as to whether the former is the latter? (Field 1989: 22).

We can generalize this point: if an object \(a\) exists, then for any open formula \(\varphi(x)\), \(a\) satisfies it or not. And so there arises the question whether \(a\) satisfies the open formula or not. In this case, does the number 2 satisfy ‘\(= \{Ø, \{Ø\}\}\)’ or not? The point of taking the existence of abstract objects to be a mere appearance is to ensure that the principle of excluded middle no longer forces us to believe that there is an answer to these questions. Given the factivity of appearance however, the fact that it appears that there is the number 2, implies that there is the number, in which case, it must either satisfy ‘\(= \{Ø, \{Ø\}\}\)’ or not. Antirealism offers no longer any way of capturing the idea that there is no fact of the matter.

To give another example, consider the case of mereological nihilism, the view that parts do not compose wholes (see e.g. Unger 1979 and Sider 2013). Again, one central motivation for such a view is its ability to undermine awkward questions, such as for example the question concerning the exact boundaries of macroscopic entities. If there is a mountain, then for any location in space, we can ask whether the mountain is located there or not, and for any part, we can ask whether it is part of the mountain or not. The
principle of excluded middle forces there to be facts of the matter, given that the apparent existence of the mountain suffices for its existence, and that in turn forces the conclusion that the object must somehow have sharp boundaries.

Antirealism is only warranted — indeed it is only philosophically interesting, one might think — if it shifts or undermines the awkward explanatory questions that arise from ordinary talk and ordinary experience. With the Appearance Schema in place, delegating certain facts to the realm of mere appearances does no such work for us, because appearances are genuine facts. In many cases, this alone will seem to undermine the point of being an antirealist about the relevant subject matter.

6. Concluding remarks

Facts are under the province of logic, whereas appearances are not. The world of appearances is a deeply messy world and does not exhibit the logical order that it would have to if the world of appearances consisted in genuine facts. There are conflicts between reality and appearance and there are various kinds of mutually conflicting appearances, cases where it appears that $\varphi$ and it appears that $\neg\varphi$. There are vertical conflicts across the various levels of appearance, and there are conflicting appearances due to perspectival variance. We want our metaphysical worldview to straighten things out. But, against the backdrop of the Appearance Schema, taking certain conflicting matters to be mere appearances leaves the threat to coherence in place. Besides this, there is also a more explanatory sense in which one may want to straighten things out, but the neo-Aristotelian framework does not allow us to undermine the awkward questions and explanatory challenges that antirealists are out to avoid by having an antirealist view of the matter.
The problems discussed are closely related, yet independent of each other. Solving one issue will not atomically solve the other (as we saw in §1 and §2). It seems to me that the most straightforward lesson to draw from the above discussion is that the Appearance Schema is mistaken. And this brings us back to the standard framework mentioned in the introductory section, minimally defined by the following two principles:

\[
\text{in reality } \varphi \text{ iff } \varphi
\]
\[
\text{not: if it appears that } \varphi, \text{ then } \varphi
\]

The standard framework is able to handle all the mentioned issues. An antirealist view concerning the fact stated by $\varphi$ accepts that \textit{it appears that }$\varphi$ and yet that $\neg \varphi$. For example, an atomist view formulated within the standard framework holds that there are no tables but that \textit{it appears that there are tables}. There is now no threat that this implies that there are and are not any tables – the problem of the conflict between reality and appearance does not arise. And we can now fully accept that there may arise conflicting appearances, cases where \textit{it appears that }$\varphi$ and \textit{it appears that }$\neg \varphi$, without this implying that $\varphi$ and that $\neg \varphi$. We can accept that \textit{it appears that region R is occupied by atoms and almost entirely empty}, and we can accept that \textit{it appears that region R is occupied by a solid table and hence entirely filled}. We can accept that \textit{it appears that the shuttle is at rest} and that \textit{it appears that the shuttle is moving at a constant speed}, and so on. Reality is under the province of logic, not the world of appearance, and drawing the boundary between reality and appearances in different ways directly affects what sort of explanatory challenges we face, given that the content of appearance fails to attain the status of a fact. We only need to explain what is the case.
The discussed issues do not undermine the use of the notion of grounding as such. We are free to employ the notion of grounding within the standard framework, and ground appearances – qua appearances – in facts.\textsuperscript{9} As an atomist, for example, I might say: \textit{it appears that} there is a table in \textit{R because} there are atoms arranged table-wise in \textit{R} and certain other facts obtain. Note that \textit{the fact that it appears that there is a table in R} is part of reality just as much as \textit{the fact that there are atoms arranged table-wise in R}.

That said, abandoning the neo-Aristotelian conception of the reality-appearance distinction has various implications for our understanding of the notion of grounding and its role in metaphysics. The standard framework leaves little room to think of the grounded facts as ‘less real’ than the grounding facts. If \textit{the fact that it appears that φ} obtains, it is thereby as real as any other fact that obtains, given that to be real just is to obtain. The grounded-ungrounded distinction cuts across the reality-appearance distinction on the standard approach, and this undercuts the centrality of grounding in metaphysics. Assuming that metaphysics is centrally concerned with drawing some distinction between reality and appearance, this is – according to the standard framework – just to figure out what the facts are and we need to do this before we can consider any grounding claims, given that grounding claims only relate facts. Metaphysics – on this view – is not centrally concerned with what grounds what (contrary to Schaffer 2009: 347; cf. Fine 2001: 28), it is centrally concerned with what obtains and what merely appears to. May there nevertheless be a role for grounding in relating appearance to

\textsuperscript{9} Alternatively, if one would still want to define an apparent fact as an ungrounded fact within the standard framework, this now requires that the notion of grounding is non-factive (such that, if \(φ \because_ε Δ\), this does not imply that \(φ\) and that \(Δ\)). If we say that \textit{it appears that} \(φ\) \(\iff_α\) there is a \(Δ\) such that \(φ \because_ε Δ\), then the notion of appearance is only non-factive if grounding is non-factive.
reality in order to ‘explain why what appears to be something more is not genuinely something more’ (Fine 2007: 23)? I have trouble seeing how. On the one hand, when the appearance that $\phi$ is a genuine fact, it is thereby real, and so there is no need to explain how it is somehow less than real – because it isn’t. On the other hand, when the appearance that $\phi$ is a genuine fact but $\phi$ does not express a fact, there is no need to explain how the content of $\phi$ is less than real, because this is already explained by the fact that it just doesn’t obtain. Again, this is not to deny that the appearance that $\phi$ may be grounded in certain facts (concerning experience, ordinary talk, and so on). The point is just that, even if this were so, the fact that this is so does not bear on debates between realists and antirealists about a given subject matter. The grounding claim does not gain its importance or interest from the debate between realists and antirealists, just as the question of what causes a given appearance does not gain its importance or interest from the realism-antirealism debates.\(^\text{10}\)

What then are the consequences for the post-Moorean modesty that Fine and Schaffer appeal to in motivating the neo-Aristotelian framework? As construed within the standard framework, antirealist views still clash with Moorean considerations, and so substantive metaphysical views can still seem like quixotic attempts at changing common sense views whilst being vulnerable to simple tollensing arguments on the basis of them. But the Moorean considerations are far too simple. It may be as intuitive to say that we

\(^{10}\) The interest in grounding derives then solely from an independent interest in signalling metaphysical dependence. Wilson (2014) has recently argued that a resort to grounding is not an illuminating way of satisfying that interest given the many existent notions of metaphysical dependence that are more specific (such as the determinate-determinable relations, functional realization, parthood, etc.). The grounding theorist needs a good answer to this worry.
cannot have knowledge of what is not in space and time, as it is to say that we know that there are prime numbers between 1 and 10, as it is to say that numbers are not objects that are found in space in time. Clearly, in such a case, something’s got to go. And the denial of whatever it is that goes will indeed be vulnerable to a tollensing argument on the basis of accepting that what is denied. But the solution to this cannot be that we just refrain from revision to our overall view, and formulate our metaphysical views in such a way that they do not conflict with our common sense understanding of things, given the internal tensions found in the latter. How we should deal with our common sense beliefs is of course a difficult methodological question, but sheltering it wholesale – by taking our metaphysics not to undermine what we ordinarily take to be facts – does not seem to me to be a way forward.

References


Fine, K (forthcoming). Comments on ‘Ontology: What’s the (Real) Question?’


