

Colour, World and Archimedean Metaphysics:
Stroud and the Quest for Reality

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Barry Stroud's book *The Quest for Reality*¹ is, I think, the most substantial study of colour realism that has yet been written. It subjects to fundamental criticism a tradition that found its classic expression in Descartes and Locke and which in many ways remains standard today; it argues to be flawed not only the traditional rejection of colours as mere ideas or features of ideas in the mind, but also the view that colours are dispositions or powers in objects to produce ideas in us—which in other quarters sometimes passes as a form of colour realism. Stroud rejects subjectivism, dispositionalism, relativism, and reductionism; but he is deliberately reticent about offering any positive account of what we believe to exist when believe colours to exist (after all, he says, in quiet allusion to Butler, everything is what it is and not another thing). And he is resolute in denying that we can give a philosophical argument to establish such belief as true. Stroud's general conclusion can be seen as occupying a middle ground between what we might call dogmatic anti-realism and dogmatic realism. He argues (in Ch. 7) that anti-realism (or what Stroud calls the 'unmasking' of colours) is a view that cannot be affirmed without a kind of self-refutation—for 'no one could abandon all beliefs about the colours of things and still *understand* the colour terms' (168, my emphasis). On the other hand (in Ch. 9), it remains in some sense a 'possibility' (204) that everyday colour beliefs might actually all be false. Stroud's final judgment is not that we shall or should abandon the 'Quest for Reality', though he has expressed many reservations about it.² The

¹ Barry Stroud, *The Quest for Reality: Subjectivism and the Metaphysics of Colour* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For comments on an ancestor of this paper, I am grateful to Bill Brewer, John Campbell, David Charles, Imogen Dickie, Timothy Williamson and other members of David Charles's discussion group in Oxford, also to Marwan Rashed in Paris and to Pierre Jacob, Claudine Tiercelin, Pascal Engel and others at the Institut Jean Nicod. I have been helped by comments from Ralph Schumacher and conversation with James Pryor and Joshua Schechter. I am indebted to Alex Byrne for his 'Yes, Virginia, Lemons are yellow' (*Philosophical Studies*, 2003), and particularly to Naomi Eilan for her paper 'On the Metaphysical Reality of Colours' (*Philosophical Books*, vol. 42 (2001), 243-52). An earlier version of a portion of Section 4 appeared as 'Realism, Scepticism and the Lament for an Archimedean Point: Stroud and the Quest for Reality', *Phenomenology & Phenomenological Research*, 68 (2004), 417-24, together with Stroud's 'Reply to Justin Broackes', *ibid.*, 441-44.

² 'Even if each assault on the metaphysical nature of colour is found wanting ... that will not put an end to the quest' (209).

conclusion is, rather, that the quest is almost³ bound to disappoint us. Though we know in an ordinary way ('by observing the world around us', 205) that grass is green and tomatoes red, 'the metaphysical question about the reality of colour' (205) remains unsettled. It seems to be, for Stroud, permanently beyond us.

There are echoes at various points, I think, of Carnap and Thompson Clarke (on internal and external questions); and the central arguments of the book take up important ideas in Bernard Williams and Donald Davidson (on the absolute conception of reality and on interpretation). But the arguments and the conclusions are utterly distinctive. They bring together themes from decades of Stroud's work: the limitations of transcendental arguments (in the noted *J. Phil.* paper of 1968), the weakness of attempts to fit such things as *necessity* into the empiricist world-picture (in the book *Hume* (1977)), and the ineliminability of an element of scepticism from an objectivist realism (in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (1984)).⁴ The transposition of such themes into the domain of colour, however, raises, I think, new issues. My main questions will be these. Is an interpreter, if she attributes to others beliefs about colours, actually bound (as Stroud argues in Ch. 7) to accept the existence of colours? And if she is, and the 'unmasking' of colours is (as Stroud believes) in some way self-defeating, then is the remaining 'possibility' of error really 'no threat' (203) to everyday colour beliefs? My suspicion is that conditions on 'interpretation' yield much less than Stroud wants in the way of an escape from scepticism. But I shall go on to raise questions about Stroud's conviction that the

³ Only *almost* bound: Stroud adds that 'any convincing proof [that the search was bound to disappoint us] would give us finality and so a kind of metaphysical satisfaction after all, *and so* it could not be sound.' (209, my italics) I am not sure why Stroud rules out *a priori* any 'metaphysical satisfaction' even at a higher level. The surrounding text gives no particular support to the exclusion.

⁴ 'I believe ... that the only answer to the question [posed by the sceptic] as it is meant to be understood is that *we can know nothing* about the world around us' (*The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (SPS), 3, my emphasis). In general, the whole book can be seen as an investigation of a sceptical argument that runs: 'I do not know that I am not dreaming; if I do not know that I am not dreaming then I do not know (e.g.) that I am now sitting by the fire; hence I do not know that I am now sitting by the fire.' The option of rejecting the first premiss Stroud calls 'a total failure' (SPS 19)—a conclusion that I think should not be allowed to pass unchallenged. We shall be arguing later (in sect. 4) that Stroud underestimates the philosophical mileage in non-sceptical and (as I shall say) non-Archimedean attempts to give a general account of the world and our place in it—which might in fact conclude that our overall best and reasonable theory of the world and our place in it included that (e.g.) we are not now dreaming and that we know that we are not dreaming.

Interestingly, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* itself talks of a 'quest' for the kind of understanding of ourselves and our position in the world that becomes central in *The Quest for Reality*: 'It is a quest for an objective and detached understanding and explanation of the position we are objectively in.' (SPS 81) What is remarkable, however, is that Stroud associates that quest not with epistemologists and philosophers in general, but with the 'sceptical philosopher' in particular: the sentence just quoted is introduced precisely under the phrase 'the sceptical philosopher's conception of our own position and of his quest for an understanding of it'.

possibility of general error with respect to colour is always with us. Stroud has—from his wider investigations of realism, scepticism and transcendental arguments—a resistance ever ‘to draw a nonpsychological conclusion about the world around us from certain psychological facts of belief’ (194). (Such inferences would be valid, he thinks (194-200), only if we could accept transcendental idealism or some equally mistaken views.) I suspect, however, that Stroud is too defeatist about the capacity of metaphysical argument to show sceptical doubts to be unreasonable: indeed, he may be in danger of promoting a sort of ‘hyperrealist’ conception of colour, which would give colours an ‘objective’ status but only at the cost of putting them beyond our ken. But of that I shall have to say more later.

1. In search of the Quest for Reality: Unfair to truth?

I would like to raise two preliminary issues, about the relation between Stroud’s attitude at the start of the book and at the end.

At the start, he insists that the ‘metaphysical question’ about the reality of colours is not broached as long as ‘I simply ask whether my beliefs are true’ (16). Even asking whether those beliefs are ‘really true’ (17) does not get us to the philosophical question.⁵ Stroud is reticent about specifying what ‘the philosophical question’ (18) amounts to—he clearly thinks it has often been entangled with confusion. But his most helpful characterization is that it asks whether our beliefs (e.g. about the colours of things) ‘represent reality as it is in itself’, and whether they ‘correspond to the way the world really is’ (18). (We must take care in that case, it seems, to prevent the ideas of ‘representation’ and ‘correspondence’ from collapsing back into the ordinary notion of truth (18-20).) However, at the end of the book, the truth of our colour beliefs seems after all to be precisely what Stroud requires for the metaphysical reality of colours. There are everyday beliefs, like ‘Lemons are yellow, tomatoes are red’ and so on; but the existence and even the inescapability of these beliefs is not enough to secure the reality of colour:

Even if we cannot abandon all those beliefs and still find that human beings perceive colours and believe that objects are coloured, *that does not imply that anyone’s beliefs about the colours of things are true.* (193, my emphasis)

⁵ Consider various of our beliefs: ‘that there is a number two between one and three’, ‘that a billiard ball about [to] be struck cannot fail to move’, ‘that the ripe tomato before me in bright sunlight is red’, and ‘that in general it is better to comfort someone than to kill him’ (17). ‘When I ask myself whether all these beliefs ... are really true, I answer “Yes”. But still the metaphysical questions about colours, numbers, necessity, and value presumably remain unsettled. ... This could be put by saying that the philosophical question is not merely a question of the truth or acceptability of our beliefs.’ (17-18)

The mistake common to transcendental idealism, Davidson in the 1980s and dispositionalism is the mistake of taking *what we think* in some way to guarantee *what is true* (194). For Stroud, on the other hand, our holding colour beliefs is quite independent of their being true. And on the latter issue, Stroud will reserve judgement. The unmasker is now characterized as saying of ordinary colour beliefs: ‘those beliefs are all false; things are not coloured’ (203).

This raises a number of questions. Why was truth at the start of the book precisely what we had to get beyond in order to raise philosophical questions, while at the end of the book, truth is precisely what defines Stroud’s outstanding philosophical question? Is it that a traditional Quest for Reality always asked for something more than truth, whereas by the end of the book Stroud has committed himself to a purer conception of the Quest, which requires strict truth and nothing more? Or is it just that in Ch. 1 Stroud was really just saying that the metaphysical question isn’t settled by questions of *what passes ordinary tests for being true*; while he all along was ready to allow it to be settled by *strict truth* (which I suppose would then, after all, be allowed to coincide with correspondence and (correct) representation)?⁶ If so, was it misleading of him to say that what is distinctive of the philosophical question ‘is not *what* it asks about, but rather *how* it asks it’ (15, my emphasis)—as if it were in some way ultimately a stylistic or pragmatic issue rather than a cognitive one?⁷ (Echoes of Carnap here.)

A second issue concerns Stroud’s attitude to what he calls the Quest for Reality. He begins by introducing what sounds like a project engaged in only by others, hard to characterize, and with a history of confusion running from Parmenides, through Descartes, to Quine. Stroud will be investigating ‘whether we can make the project intelligible to ourselves’ and will be bringing out ‘how strange’ it really is (3). However, by the end of the book, Stroud does not say that the project has been finally discredited and can now be abandoned; nor, on the other hand, does he announce a purified version of the project upon which he would

⁶ In his ‘Reply to Bill Brewer’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 68 (2004), 437-41, Stroud claims (in response to a query from Brewer similar to my own) that ‘plain truth’ is actually all that his metaphysical question involves: ‘I do not think a different *notion* of correspondence or of truth is what accounts for the difference we recognize between the philosophical and the more everyday question’ (437).

I must admit I am still puzzled. Stroud insists, in the same Reply, that the ‘metaphysical question’ of the reality of colour is to be distinguished from the ‘everyday’ question of whether things are coloured. Both can be expressed in the words: ‘do our perceptions and beliefs involving the colors of things represent anything that is part of the world independently of us?’ But, says Stroud, the metaphysical question ‘appears to require a *different understanding* of the expression “the world independently of us”’ (‘Reply to Bill Brewer’, 442, my emphasis). But is that not tantamount to abandoning strict and plain truth: could we not say that, instead of just asking (of e.g. ‘grass is green’) whether it is strictly but ordinarily true, Stroud’s metaphysician replaces *plain truth* with *truth-in-a-specially-narrowly-conceived-world*?

⁷ ‘The philosophical question about the reality of colours or numbers or goodness or whatever it might be is asked *in a special way*.’ (16, my emphasis)

like to see progress; rather, he says the failures ‘will not put an end to the quest’: ‘The most we will do, and continue to do, is keep trying.’ (209) It looks as though the old question ‘Are our colour perceptions and beliefs in general true?’ is one that makes sense, but can be answered firmly by us neither Yes nor No. It reminds me slightly of Hume at the end of Book I of the *Treatise*: Hume had begun his treatment ‘Of the sceptical and other systems of philosophy’ (in Book I Part iv) as if scepticism were a malady to be studied only in other people, but by the final section (I.iv.7), he is clearly suffering from it himself and only the strongest instincts of human nature can save him from it. Stroud, more stoically, invokes no saviour.

Can we bring Stroud’s various characterizations of the Quest for Reality together, and answer the question, whether Stroud himself is engaged in the Quest? There is no easy answer. In various successive approximations, Stroud characterizes ‘the quest’ or ‘project’ (4) as follows. It is ‘the attempt to discover how things are, or what the world is like’ (4). More precisely, it is:

(a) the attempt to answer ‘whether what we perceive or believe or come to think about the world represents it as it really is’ (6).

Thus characterized, the Quest is something that many non-reductive realists could count themselves as engaged in (answering the question, indeed, with ‘in many central cases, Yes’). But Stroud soon narrows the ‘Quest’ to apply only to reductive accounts which actually exclude whole areas of what we ordinarily take to be the case:

(b) ‘The quest for reality is the process of reflection by which we arrive at a determinate view of such an independent world and see it as adequately represented by many *but not all* of our beliefs and experiences.’ (12, my emphasis)

It quickly turns out, however, that Stroud’s interest is not in reductive accounts in general—though he does at one point treat idealism, no less than physicalism, as a contribution to the ‘philosophical question’ that he is trying to characterize (14). His interest is, specifically, in *scientifically* reductive accounts:

(c) ‘the metaphysical part of the project says not just that science gives the truth about the world but that it gives the whole truth’ (11).

(It is worth noting how this now counts out Berkeleian idealism as not a contribution to the Quest.) Later in the chapter, however, Stroud makes a further change, saying that *truth* does not mark out the issue after all. Thus:

(d) ‘the philosophical question ... asks which of our beliefs *represent* reality as it is in itself, or which of them *correspond* to the way the world really is’ (18)—though here *correspondence* must not just collapse into *truth*.⁸

At that point (Ch. 2) a new can of worms is opened: what is the world, correspondence to which is here required? Two options come to mind:⁹

(A) *whatever is the case* (‘whatever is so’, 25),

and

(B) *whatever we think is the case* (‘everything we believe’, 25).

However, neither of these gives us ‘a way of formulating the philosophical quest’ (25). (A) is useless, since it would leave questers asking merely whether their beliefs are true; and ‘we have seen that that is not what is at stake in the philosophical question’ (25). (B) is no better, since it would leave questers asking whether their beliefs correspond to what they *think* is the case—to which the answer, trivially, would be Yes (26). To escape the dilemma, we need a subset of our beliefs, reached by ‘carving out of that immense totality ... after philosophical scrutiny, ... a portion’ (27). Following Williams’s version of this idea,¹⁰ we need an absolute conception of the world: a conception of

(C) ‘the world that is there *anyway*, independent of our experience’;¹¹ and which is capable of explaining our various more local representations—the experiences of humans and other animals, from their various perspectives and positions.

The clause following the semi-colon is elaborated and investigated in Ch. 4. (I would actually be interested in an absolute conception that had more modest claims: not to *explain* all our experiences and more local representations—a claim which Stroud successfully discredits¹² in Ch. 4—; but merely to be a *supervenience base* for those things, indeed for all that is the case.)

⁸ ‘To find in the special philosophical way that there is nothing in reality corresponding to a particular belief is not simply to find the belief false or epistemically wanting ...’ (20).

⁹ The dilemma resembles that of Bernard Williams in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) Ch. 8, 138, where in turn it is derived from Richard Rorty and Donald Davidson.

¹⁰ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* Ch. 8.

¹¹ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 138, quoted by Stroud, 31.

¹² Cp. also John McDowell, ‘Aesthetic value, objectivity, and the fabric of the world’, in E. Schaper, ed., *Pleasure, Preference and Value* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987).

The question now arises, which of the various ideas here (a)-(d) (the last of these being combined with conception (C) of the world) really marks out 'The Quest for Reality'? One might think this a silly question: surely all of those ideas are, in different but sometimes overlapping ways, Quests for Reality, and there is no need to choose between them. But curiously enough, though in tone and comment Stroud expresses huge reserve about the coherence of any such Quest, he also seems to talk as if there is *one* proper 'Quest for Reality' which it is his task to identify. 'My aim is to develop from the inside a rich sense of what it takes to engage in the enterprise *in the right way ...*' (3, my emphasis); 'it gets closer to say ...' (6); 'this ... is the heart of the philosophical theory' (10); 'innocuous talk of correspondence ... does not explain *the philosophical question* about the correspondence between our beliefs and reality' (19, my emphasis).

The question is important because we need to know how much of the Quest actually remains operational at the end of the book, and how much of it Stroud wishes to remain. Is Stroud ultimately in favour of The Quest or not?¹³ If there is one single dominant conception, treated as the result of an increasingly close search, then I think it has to be conception (d), combined with Williams's absolute conception of reality, and with some looseness on whether 'correspondence' can or cannot be understood as *strict truth*.¹⁴ But if that is

¹³ Suggesting suspicion of the Quest: it is 'strange' (14), dubiously 'intelligible' (3) and 'not well enough understood' (3, cp. 14); it 'distorts and so leads us away from our everyday conception of the world, and so away from an accurate understanding of ourselves' (191). Suggesting an ultimate commitment to the Quest: Stroud wants to explain how to engage in the enterprise 'in the right way' (3); the quest is 'perhaps even definitive of philosophy' (3); even philosophical questions about knowledge 'turn out to be questions about what is so in reality' (5).

¹⁴ I actually have doubts that science was the fundamental touchstone of reality for either Descartes or Locke—though this is not the place to develop the idea. Descartes did not, I think, reject colours *on the ground that they failed to fit into his science*: in some sense they did fit in (he gave accounts of the supposed difference between the particles composing light of different colours, for example); the operative point was that he took it to be obscure what kinds of things colours might be if taken to be real qualities of things (cp. *Principia philosophiae*, i.66-68). The puzzle was in making sense of the very existence of a colour in the world—not directly, I think, in building a science that talked of such things. At some level there is no doubt a connection between the two issues, but I think it was the conviction that reality is intelligible, and that all that exists operates according to intelligible principles, that motivated Descartes first. For that reason, I am not at all sure that (d) really captures Descartes's motivation. Interestingly, Williams tends to emphasize the perspective-free character of concepts in the absolute conception, rather than their scientific character; the former idea, I think, captures more of Descartes's motivation than the latter. That is not to say that I don't think (d) a good characterization of some Quests for Reality; but I'm less committed than Stroud is to there being one best characterization of the Quest. One might also reflect upon Hume and moral qualities: it was not, I think, that moral qualities were hard to fit into *science* that made Hume place them in some sense 'in the mind'; it was the fact that they seemed hard to fit into *the world* at all (the world, that is, of 'things as they are in themselves'). Of course the conception of that 'world' needs further investigation; but it was motivated, I think, only very partially by the hopes or achievements of science.

what Stroud means The Quest for Reality definitively to be, then it seems to me puzzling that he treats this quest at the end of the book as something that can and will continue despite assaults upon it. For Stroud has argued (in Ch. 4) that that conception definitely fails: in particular, the absolute conception contains no psychological terms, hence it cannot explain the occurrence of psychological states as such. If Stroud is talking at the end of the book about a Quest in a looser sense—perhaps one of the earlier senses I’ve identified—then I think that is all to the good. He is surely right that (a) and (b) contain good philosophical material, and are not brought to an end by his own conclusions in this book. But then it is odd that he should say quite generally of the Quest that it ‘distorts and so leads us ... away from an accurate understanding of ourselves’ (191). If there is a remaining puzzle, then, it is that Stroud should have talked so firmly as if there were a single right and proper form of the Quest—and why he should have voiced such serious suspicion of ‘the Quest’ in undifferentiated terms, without distinguishing a narrower version he was rejecting from a broader version which he would be allowing. Given a broader characterization of the Quest, Stroud could have included among Questers some quite different figures—Berkeley on the one hand, and non-reductivists in the line of McDowell and Wiggins on the other. And perhaps then more attention could also have been given to questions of content—of what we say or think is in the world if we say or think that colours are in the world—which (as I shall argue later) are more important to Stroud’s interests than his treatment of them suggests.¹⁵

There may, I think, be an additional suspicion in Stroud’s evaluation of the Quest: that the Quest is specifically a matter of claiming knowledge, so to speak, on both sides of a veil of perception. Stroud believes that anyone who does not simply compare representations with other representations (as we are supposed to compare our beliefs in general with that subset which composes the ‘absolute conception’) is in danger of engaging in ‘the unintelligible task of trying to peel our perceptions and beliefs off the world, as it were, and compare them in some direct way with what they are about’ (27). His reply to the problem is not to deny a veil of perception, but to accept it and recommend us to accept the limitations of our knowledge of what is beyond.¹⁶ We can in philosophical theory affirm the reality of colour no more than we can its non-reality. The realist answer just as much as the anti-realist answer ‘would seem to require ... [us] to be able to consider all human perceptions and beliefs concerning the colours of things, on the one hand, and the world as it is independently of us, on the other, and manage to ask a still-open question about the relation between them.’

¹⁵ One additional question: how does the talk of truth in Ch. 9 feed back into the dialectic of Ch. 2? When Stroud in Ch. 9 raises the possibility that our colour beliefs may not after all be strictly true—that is, may not represent the world—, which, if any, of the earlier conceptions of the world (A)-(C) is in play? Surely Stroud in some sense rejects all of them: (A) and (B) in different ways both trivialize the metaphysical question, and (C) aims to give a substantive answer to it, but (given Ch. 4) actually proves to be incoherent. So is there, after all, another way out of the dilemma besides Williams’s absolute conception? I am not sure how Stroud wants to answer this question; but I try to give the beginnings of an answer in fn. 38 below.

¹⁶ Cp. also *SPS*32-33 for the case of perception in general (rather than particularly of colour).

(192) And Stroud believes ‘we can never achieve the kind of detachment from our beliefs that the metaphysical question seems to require’ (193).

We shall have to consider later what the idea of ‘peeling’ really amounts to and what are its problems. For now I shall just say that if ‘the metaphysical question’—and presumably therefore The Quest—really requires unintelligible peeling, then Stroud should finally dismiss it (subject only to the usual modesty arising from the fallibility of philosophical arguments). Once again, I suspect that when, at the end of the book, Stroud leaves open the idea that the Quest can and should continue, it is only because he is unofficially keeping in play looser conceptions of the Quest than his formal policy seems to suggest.

2. Interpretation and Error

The most notable argument of the whole book, occupying the main body of Ch. 7, concludes that a person who abandoned belief in colours would also be incapable of so much as understanding the colour terms in attributions to other people of colour perceptions and beliefs (cp. p. 168). Given some Davidsonian requirements on interpreting or understanding our fellows, Stroud argues, we can see that if an interpreter did not himself believe there were yellow things, he would be unable to identify the content of anyone else’s (or even his own) perceptions and beliefs concerning the yellowness of things. ‘To ascribe perceptions of a certain kind, we have to have some idea of what such perceptions are perceptions of and how having one kind of perception differs from having another’ (159).¹⁷ As things are,

I know what perceptions of yellow are because I know what yellow is. ... We ascribe a perception of yellow to someone whom we believe to be a competent perceiver, facing ... what we know to be a yellow lemon, and a perception of red to someone face to face with a red tomato. (159-60)

However, if an interpreter abandoned all belief in the yellowness of things, he could not ‘identify perceptions of yellow in that way’—for he would ‘acknowledge no yellow objects in the world’ (160). How then could he identify such perceptions, and characterize their content—that is, say *what* they were apparently perceptions of? Stroud argues that it is no good resorting to definite descriptions here. To characterize yellow as ‘that property that people believe to belong to objects that are yellow’ (160) will obviously be no help to an interpreter who believes there are no yellow objects. Also, ‘That property that people believe to belong to objects that they believe to be yellow’ is not unique (since there are too many such properties). Finally, ‘that property that people believe to belong to an object in believing that it is yellow’ is correct—but ‘it serves to identify perceptions of yellow only if the content of the belief that an object is yellow can be specified independently’ (160).

¹⁷ Cp. ‘Perceptions understood as “intentional” perceptions of something are identified and distinguished from one another only in terms of what they are perceptions of.’ (160)

What can the interpreter do? Stroud considers two main options: ‘To understand [perceptions of yellow] as perceptions of properties at all, we would have to take them to be perceptions of [i] properties of other things, not physical objects. Or perhaps as [ii] properties, but not properties of anything at all.’ (161, with my numbering) And both of those options leads to failure: [i] becomes the view that yellow is a property of ‘patches’ in the visual field, and succumbs to the kind of criticism Wittgenstein raised in the Private Language Argument (161-66); I’m not sure that [ii] gets a direct rebuttal, but it is clearly rejected by Stroud too.¹⁸ His conclusion, stated with a combination of modesty and ambition is:

The difficulties we have found ... strongly suggest that no one could abandon all beliefs about the colours of things and still *understand* the colour terms essentially involved in ascribing perceptions and beliefs about the colours of things. (168, my emphasis)

And in that case the ‘unmasking view’ is simply unassertible—namely, the conjunctive view that

(1) people have many beliefs about the colours of things, and

(2) those beliefs are all false (203).

For, by the argument of Ch. 7, anyone who asserts (2)—and thus fails to believe there are colours—will be in no position to assert (1), since he will be unable to identify the content of the beliefs in question.

There is much in Stroud’s argument that I am immediately sympathetic to: the treatment of colour perceptions as perceptions *of* the very same properties as are attributed to things in colour beliefs; and the idea that the content of these states is given by what they are *of*. It might even be tempting to go further, using the latter idea as the basis of a strongly externalist theory of content, perhaps in the mould of Evans or McDowell¹⁹—treating thoughts and perceptions of colours as essentially defined in content by their external

¹⁸ It is interesting that Stroud does not consider what I think is a more attractive third option: that the interpreter might conclude ‘perceptions of yellow’ to be *merely apparently perceptions* of a property of things: that is, take them to be, not veridical perceptions of a genuine property instantiated [i] in non-physical things or [ii] not at all, but merely apparent perceptions of a property without there in fact being any such property. (The apparent perception might turn out to point only, for example, to an inconsistently-conceived, uninstanciatable property.) After all, an illusion of the presence of a person is not the perception of a real person in (i) a non-physical realm or instead (ii) nowhere, but simply the merely apparent perception of a physical person. (The nearest Stroud comes to recognizing this option is a footnote (161) mentioning Barry Maund’s view of colours as ‘virtual properties’; but he treats that suggestion as equivalent to characterization [ii] above.) But let us leave this aside for now.

¹⁹ See e.g. Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed. J. H. McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Naomi Eilan (in *Philosophical Books*, 2001) treats Stroud as having the ‘materials’ of such a strongly externalist account, even if he

objects. In that case, perhaps, the colour-thoughts of people in a world with colours would be strictly unthinkable in a world without colours; rather as the thoughts about Bertrand Russell that are available and had in a world which contains (or contained) him would be literally unavailable in a world that didn't—though no doubt similar and perhaps 'internally indistinguishable' thoughts might be. Of course such an externalist theory is both debatable and debated. I suspect that Stroud himself would not accept it. (It might seem too close to the full Davidsonianism he rejects in Ch. 9—and it would be incompatible with what seems to be his view there, that it is strictly logically possible for us to have the colour-thoughts we actually have whether or not colours exist.) But it is worth noting that even that strengthened externalism doesn't provide a simple route to the kind of conclusion Stroud wants.

The difficulty is this: even if thoughts involving singular reference are essentially tied to their objects, that doesn't rule out the possibility of reference-failure. For there can be cases where there is an appearance of singular reference without the fact of it:²⁰ cases where a person thinks they can refer to an individual yet there is no such individual for them to refer to. And of course Gareth Evans also gives an account of that: after nine chapters developing the theory of world-dependent referential thought, there is a tenth chapter on Existential Statements, explaining (*inter alia*) how names can fail to refer, and how statements like 'That little green man does not exist' can be used in reply to someone who believes, wrongly, that there is a little green man in front of him. Many of the worries Stroud raises also arise with such cases: how can an interpreter who doesn't believe in the existence of a little green man so much as understand what is said by someone who does? How can he understand *which* little green man is in question? The basis of Evans's answer is a development of Kendall Walton's analysis of games of make-believe. And when we are dealing not with make-believe or pretence, but with perceptual illusion, the story can be quite similar. (Evans considers a case of shared perceptual illusion, at pp. 360-62.) The theory certainly needs further development, but the primary idea is that in a context of shared pretence or shared apparent information, people can share 'quasi-understanding' (v. Evans, p. 370). Suppose a man and a woman are sharing an illusion of a little green man (produced perhaps with holograms) and the man is taken in, while the woman knows the truth of the situation. She can surely understand (or quasi-understand) his statement 'That man is now moving towards us', even if she is herself convinced there is no such man—even though demonstrative thoughts expressed using 'that man' are

would reject the full implications of it. Some people would support this kind of view while resisting the label 'externalist' for it: the objects of thought are on this view, after all, not external to the mind, though they may be external to the body.

²⁰ Our interest is initially with singular reference—that is, with reference (rather than definite description) picking out a single item or individual thing (rather than a kind or various things severally). Later, when we move to the colour case, we will be thinking of reference to a kind or property. Stroud is of course clear that there would be no special difficulty if colour terms had a complex sense explicable entirely in non-colour terms (just as there is no special difficulty in understanding complex expressions like 'unicorn' and 'golden mountain' though there exist no such items, 146-7; cp. also 152, 157); but colour terms seem something a grasp of which could not be 'built up from simpler ingredients' (199).

standardly essentially tied to their reference. For she will know how, if only they had been able to take their experience at face value, then it would have been giving them information about a little green man at such and such a position, with such and such characteristics, etc., and it would have enabled them to make successful demonstrative reference to him. There is (on this strong externalist line) in the actual situation no thought expressed by ‘That man is now moving towards us’: there is no truth-condition actually specified by that sentence as uttered by the man suffering the illusion; but that does not prevent the woman in the situation from knowing perfectly well how—if only circumstances had been different—there would have been a truth-condition expressed. And that is quite enough for quasi-understanding—that is, for what we ordinarily call *understanding* in such cases.

These cases need more exploration, but there is nothing particularly strange about them, and they are quite well integrable within a strong externalism of the kind I have been envisaging. I shall take just a couple of steps along the path. There are cases where there is a shared illusion of not an object but a property. Suppose a piece of clever perceptual apparatus puts people in a position where there seems to be a certain phenomenon F; yet in fact there is no such phenomenon. (Suppose perhaps that, using a computer monitor and contextual stimulation with contrasting colours, we can make it look as though there are external surfaces with a strange super-saturated red colour; yet we also persuade ourselves that it is impossible for any actual surface by interaction with ordinary incident light to produce the kind of stimulation that the monitor produces in our subjects. We don’t tell the subjects this, and they end up thinking they have seen a new kind of surface colour; while we ourselves insist that there is no such property.) We can perfectly well say ‘They think there is a colour F; but in fact there is no such thing.’ *Which* colour? How can we identify it? Precisely by knowing the kind of stimulation and informational state that makes people think—when they take their experience at face value—that they are seeing a new property. We do not need to believe in such a property ourselves, or to pretend to refer to such a thing ourselves, in order to (quasi-)understand the subject’s apparent reference to F. Our understanding depends on our use of just the same cues (perceptual stimulation, etc.) as the subjects make use of; but additional information and theoretical reflection have led us to refuse to take our experience at face value in the way that the subjects do.²¹

A different kind of case occurs where there is radical theoretical change, for example, in science. How, given that we employ the conceptual apparatus of a new theory, can we so much as state what was previously

²¹ Another case: where a person rejects an employment of a ‘paradigm case argument’. She says ‘People tell me that a free action (a solid object, a red thing etc.) is just *that* kind of action (*that* kind of object) pointing at samples. But there is some theoretical accretion beyond what is obviously apparent in the samples: e.g. when they call an action free, people are ready also to conclude, that the agent *could have done otherwise*. But I myself believe this theoretical accretion simply to be false; so I reject their claims that the actions they cite as paradigms are free actions.’ It might even be the case that the word ‘free’, as intended, had a reference essentially tied to samples; yet the theoretician here could perfectly well ‘understand’ it while denying that the ‘paradigms’ actually had any such property as was intended.

believed—and say of it, that it was false or confused? There are several helps here. Crudely, we might go via the old linguistic expressions: ‘What people used to express by saying $S_1, S_2, S_3 \dots$ ’ Of course, if we are strong externalists, then by our new lights, we may conclude that strictly nothing was expressed by those sentences; but we still can manifest quasi-understanding, and can attribute quasi-understanding to people who were in the grip of the earlier theory. Perhaps the problem with the earlier theory was that it employed terms $T_1 \dots T_n$, which would only refer if a certain presupposition P were true. And perhaps P proved false. (Take ‘phlogiston’, which perhaps would refer to something only if there were a certain substance given off by substances undergoing the change we now call oxidization.) Then we can set out the presupposition, and explain how, though there is in fact no truth-condition expressed by S_1 , none the less, if P had been the case, then there would have been a truth-condition expressed by it—a truth-condition that we can indeed paraphrase. Correspondingly, we can say that T_1 doesn’t in fact express a concept, but it would have done if only P had been true. And in talking like this, we may show quite clearly that we in the ordinary sense *understand* T_1 (even if strictly, in Evans’s language, this is quasi-understanding).

It is a mistake in general to think that understanding what a person says requires *having the same thoughts* as she expresses. Sometimes it requires, rather, simply *knowing which thought* the person expresses. (When Jane says ‘I’m hungry’ and John understands what she’s said, it is not by his having the same thought as she has.) What is needed is some way for the hearer to specify or indicate a thought that he doesn’t (and in this case cannot) himself have. In the case of theory change, the problem is one stage worse: if the superseded theory is strictly false, then there isn’t even a thought expressed by the users of the old vocabulary. But still, we may be able to *specify*, so to speak, a region of logical space where there *would* have been a thought if only some presupposition P had been true. And this is something we do in much more mundane cases. Suppose I say, ‘If my parents had had one more child and it had grown up thinking “I don’t like being the fourth child”, then ...’ Here ‘I’ does not have a referent, or (in neo-Fregean terms) a sense; yet the word is perfectly comprehensible thanks to our ability to specify the kind of sense it would have had if only the relevant presupposition had been fulfilled. Of course in many such cases the ‘thought’ may be underspecified, vague or indeterminate. But those surely are orthogonal issues, not directly an obstacle to *understanding* or quasi-understanding such terms.

The theory of such thoughts or quasi-thoughts has only begun to be sketched. But there should already be enough of it for us to see a way to escape Stroud’s main argument. One might mention the preliminary objection of someone who said: even if Stroud is right that the interpreter cannot *understand* our colour terms without acknowledging the existence of colours, an interpreter could still assert an error theory—for he could simply make metalinguistic mention of such words as ‘red’ and ‘yellow’ and say that those terms on people’s lips have no reference, without pretending in the strictest sense to understand them.²² But though metalinguistic

²² This means, I think, that we have to reject as inconclusive Stroud’s objections to any recourse to definite descriptions, which I reported in the first paragraph of the present section. Stroud admits as correct the description ‘that property that

modes of reference will be available, it is utterly implausible that a normal human perceiver theorizing about the human colour system should be restricted to such descriptions.

How could an interpreter so much as understand ‘yellow’ while denying there is any such property? Answer: by recognizing that it does at least *look as though* there is such a property. He not only knows the words ‘red’ and ‘yellow’ but also the kind of meaning they are meant to have—and indeed the kind of difference supposed to hold between them. How? Rather in the way that, when a group of people are looking at a mirage, enlightened onlookers can understand talk of ‘this oasis’ (on the right) and ‘that oasis’ (on the left)—and understand perfectly well the difference between them. After all, the *appearances* that ground a belief in the first oasis and in the second are very different. If only it had been right to take the experiences at face value, then there would have been two oases for these people to refer to; but there aren’t. There are special cases where removal of an error may make it almost impossible later to get back into the frame of mind where an earlier illusion had seemed attractive; it may take what we call a real effort of imagination to rebuild the earlier world-picture. (When you’ve trained your eye on Vermeer, perhaps, it may become almost impossible to see how van Meegerens could ever have looked like the work of the master.) But with the mirage case it isn’t hard at all: one can be perfectly aware that it’s only a mirage, and still easily understand how people unaware of the illusion (or playing along with it) can act as if there were two oases, each available to be referred to and individuated. And so also, for our interpreter, with the colours: after all, the *appearance* of red is obviously different from that of yellow. But why then should this interpreter be rejecting the existence of these properties? Well, my own sympathies are in fact with a colour realism that is, I suspect, similar to what Stroud himself would like; so I myself prefer interpreters who do not deny the reality of colour. But I do not believe that what deniers say is self-defeating in the way Stroud suggests. For the denying interpreter may surely reply that he has *reasons to step back* from, or refuse to accept, the appearances: perhaps, for example, he thinks that when people describe things as red, they commit themselves to theoretical claims that are strictly false (e.g. claims about how those things would appear to other beings and in other circumstances; or claims about a crude ‘resemblance’ between the objects and our experiences of them). The reasons cited may in fact be mistaken (and I believe that in the history of the subject they actually have been); but the existence of such reasons is surely enough to make it to some extent rational—and, at the very least, *comprehensible*—that certain philosophers should have wished both to acknowledge the existence of perceptions and beliefs that apparently refer to colours, and to argue that such claims are in fact false.

people believe to belong to an object in believing that it is yellow’—saying that ‘it serves to identify perceptions of yellow only if the content of the belief that an object is yellow can be specified independently’ (160). Even if Stroud is absolutely right on that, the error theorist can still say simply: ‘what they (try to) mean by “yellow” does not exist’ or ““Yellow” on their lips is a term with no reference’.

This is enough for us to have reason, I think, to doubt Stroud's argument, whether or not we espouse the kind of strong externalism that he himself would resist. There are some further reasons, however, to look back in more detail directly at Stroud's argument and its conclusion. But since the issues are in some ways incidental—and can be passed over without much loss to the main argument—I present them in smaller print.

Perhaps the strangest thing about Stroud's argument is the remoteness of the consequences he is prepared to draw from it, given its extremely abstract and complex character. He admits that the argument is in some degree inconclusive and provisional.²³ But the actual content of his conclusions is strikingly ambitious. Let us apply them to theorists—like, I suppose, C. L. Hardin or J. L. Mackie—who aim to defend the pair of views that Stroud makes definitive of 'unmasking': that

(1) people have many beliefs about the colours of things, and

(2) those beliefs are all false (203).

Stroud seems to make some remarkably strong claims:

(A) The theorists *do in fact believe* that objects are coloured.²⁴

(B) The theorists *no longer understand* the meaning of colour terms.²⁵

It is hard to know how seriously to take these claims. (Note incidentally, that they are incompatible.) Suppose Stroud were right, and an *interpreter* were only able to attribute perceptions of yellow if he were ready to identify objects as yellow. What would that tell us about other people? Why shouldn't ordinary members of the public—or even philosophers while not engaged in 'interpretation'—just *trade upon their received understanding* of the colour-terms, and attribute perceptions of yellow to people in the same way as ordinary people do, never adopting that special philosophical stance of 'interpretation' at all? After all: these theorists still go among us, using colour terms pretty much like anyone else—even if they sometimes pretend it is in only an inverted-commas sense. Surely they understand them. Maybe they did once believe that objects were coloured; but why—in order to retain their understanding of such terms now—should they be required still

²³ 'This huge question probably cannot be settled once and for all by abstract general argument.' (168) 'A conclusive proof one way or the other is difficult to envisage' (157).

²⁴ 'Anyone who finds the first conjunct to be true *will believe* that objects are coloured, so he cannot consistently believe the second conjunct to be true.' (203, my emphasis)

²⁵ 'The difficulties we have found ... strongly suggest that no one could abandon all beliefs about the colours of things and still *understand* the colour terms essentially involved in ascribing perceptions and beliefs about the colours of things.' (168, my emphasis)

to maintain that same belief? Is linguistic understanding (especially on a *use* conception of meaning) the sort of thing to be lost, merely by the acceptance of some unfortunate philosophical theory?

It would be wrong to press this kind of challenge too far. There is something important—to cite a parallel case—about Wittgenstein’s worries in *On Certainty*, for example, that a person with certain extreme doubts would put in question their mastery of the very terms in which they spoke; and it is not a complete settling of those worries simply to reply that it can’t be that easy to give up the fruits of a life-long induction into one’s native tongue. Perhaps, instead, the relevant implication of these kinds of challenge to scepticism is the contrapositive one: that, since these ‘sceptics’ can’t really have lost their grasp of their own language, they also can’t really have doubted all that they pretend to—and similarly, in Stroud’s case, the ‘unmasker’ can’t really have abandoned *all* colour beliefs. (B) might then be proposed only as what *would* be true of theorists who really abandoned all beliefs about colours of things—while Mackie and Hardin would be counted as having failed in the latter task. But in that case, mightn’t that be good enough for the unmaskers? They would at least be articulating a motivated, expressible and challenging philosophical view, even if it were at the cost of sometimes, when off duty, acting and talking as if it weren’t true. And surely, even the contrapositive view has its implausibilities: can it really be true that past upbringing with colour language is insufficient to secure a theorist’s continuing linguistic competence even while he is denying quite generally (even if not ultimately coherently) the existence of colours?

A supporter of Stroud might fall back on the view that the commitments of an interpreter are things which everyone at least *ought* to admit—on the ground, perhaps, that anything necessary to the identification of a semantic fact must also be necessary to the fact itself. But it is surely going too far to suggest, as (A) does, that anything acknowledged by an interpreter *actually is* in fact acknowledged by everyone else. I shall come back to the fall-back position soon.

Stroud draws a further conclusion:

(C) The theorists ‘should in consistency’ give up claim (1), that people believe that objects are coloured.²⁶

But would that help? Consistency is a virtue, but it is not the only or even the principal virtue in epistemic systems: a person may have reason to think that p, reason to think that q, and reason to think that p is incompatible with q, without having reason yet to abandon or modify either p or q. Even greater uncertainty may attach to the reasons for thinking p and q incompatible. The process of attaining reflective equilibrium is endless, perfect consistency is a distant regulative ideal, and in many cases the right thing is to hang on to inconsistent beliefs with a certain modesty while looking out for suitable improvements. (Of course in other cases, we see an inconsistency and see how to remove it instantly. But that is obviously not the commonest kind of case in developed philosophy.) In any case, Stroud’s suggestion—that unmaskers should actually *give up* their view that people believe that objects are coloured (in the way that rejecters of folk psychology do, 207n.)—would hardly restore consistency. What about the unmaskers’ *memories*? Are they to abandon them too—saying ‘I’m under the impression that I used to believe that things were coloured, but now I have to conclude that I never thought that at all’? (And remember, on Stroud’s current suggestion, these people are supposed not even to have concepts of colour.)

²⁶ ‘... philosophers who claim that objects are not really coloured should in consistency also give up the idea that people believe that objects are coloured.’ (207)

Or are they to deny that they are even under the impression that they used to think things to be coloured? This hardly seems a prescription to restore philosophical mental health. I am puzzled also, how to reconcile Stroud's proposal here with his suggestion earlier that we may in fact 'inevitably' have to hold colour beliefs (180).

Perhaps this is unfair. From inconsistent views anything can be concluded. If the unmasking view is incoherent, it is hardly Stroud's fault that consequences drawn from it should themselves prove unpalatable. But we need to reconsider the ground for thinking the view incoherent in the first place. Stroud's main claim is that attributing colour beliefs to others commits the theorist to the recognizing colours in the world. Is this correct?

- (D1) Theorists *should* believe that objects are really coloured, because
- (D2) only on that assumption can colour language be interpreted.

We have already seen reasons to doubt (D2). In a case of shared illusion, an interpreter can understand (or quasi-understand) 'that green man' without committing himself to the actual existence of any such thing. So why should he not similarly understand (or quasi-understand) 'yellow'? There are clearly times when it looks as though there's something yellow in front of him, and in front of the speakers who he is interpreting. From such occasions, he can attribute perceptions and beliefs apparently about yellow to others. Perhaps the standard initial condition is that one takes experience at face value, including colour experience; but that doesn't exclude that one might reflect later and decide that some aspects of the experience (including shared experience) are illusory. 'How, if there is no such thing as yellowness, can anything ever *look yellow*?' Answer: In the same way as, while there is no little green man, still it can look as though there is. When something looks to be yellow, it does indeed look to be qualified-in-a-certain-way; there is an intentionality to the appearance. But that does not guarantee external reference. And there is no need for mutual understanding (or quasi-understanding) to be dependent directly upon the *fact* of external reference, or upon the external referent itself: in cases of illusion, it is enough for it to be grounded, for example, in the mutual experience of a certain kind of *appearance*—the appearance of the oasis, or the appearance of colour. On other occasions the grounding may lie in the mutual experience of certain external signs or cues for the illusion: perhaps it is a certain layout of branches and leaves that makes it look as though there's a monster in the bushes.

Some strong externalists might resist some of my main argument, though I don't think they need to. But Stroud really cannot resist it, I think, given what he says in Ch. 9. It is, he there insists, in some sense 'a genuine possibility' that colour beliefs be all false, and things not be coloured (204). Let us therefore consider what for Stroud should be an epistemically possible situation: one very much like our own, except that there are no colours, though it looks as though there are. In that situation, there are people using colour language, and teaching it to children; and let us also include some Davidsonian 'interpreters', attempting to make sense of colour language. How do the elders teach the children their colour language? It cannot be by indicating things that *really* are yellow, red, or whatever. There are no such things—though there are things that (we say) look to them yellow, red, or whatever, and that they call by those names. How then do the children 'catch on'? The obvious answer is: because, even if *yellowness* is not present in a case where apparently excellent samples are

presented, *something else* is present instead. What might that be? Those cases involve the children (and others) experiencing an *appearance (as) of yellow*; while (in the objects) the cue for this might perhaps be a certain kind of surface reflectance, or some other kind of ground for a disposition to look as they do. Whatever the cues may be, available to the children when learning the language, must they not be available to the interpreter too? And by whatever means the children distinguish yellow from red as they become accredited users of the language, surely the interpreters can do so too. And it is not clear how rejecting (in this imagined case, correctly) the existence of colours in the world would impede such understanding. It seems, therefore, that the Stroud of Ch. 9, at least, has a rebuttal to the worries of the Stroud of Ch. 7. ‘There is a question whether a would-be unmasker could be in a position to recognize perceptions of colour at all’ (159); but it is a question that can surely be answered: the unmasker could identify perceptions of colour on the same basis as anyone else capable of learning the language.

3. ‘No threat’?

Let us set aside these reservations, however, and suppose that Stroud really has shown that the unmasker’s view is unaffirmable: no one can, without a form of self-defeat, affirm the conjunction:

(1) ‘people have many beliefs about the colours of things’, and

(2) ‘those beliefs are all false’ (203)

That is not enough, says Stroud, to establish that there really are colours. A view may be unaffirmable, without being false. And, Stroud thinks, it remains in some sense an open possibility that the unmasker’s view might be true. The unmasker’s claim is like Moore’s paradoxical sentence ‘I believe that it is raining, and it is not raining’: the sentence ‘*expresses a genuine possibility*. But no one could consistently believe or assert that both conjuncts are true.’ (204, my emphasis)

Supposing this is correct, what does it show about scepticism and uncertainty about colours?

According to Stroud:

if the view could not consistently be found to be true, it can represent no threat to our beliefs about the colours of things, even if what it expresses remains in some sense a possibility (204).

[I]n granting that it is not contradictory, and so in that sense that it is possible for objects not to be coloured, even though we all believe that they are, we admit or create no threat to our beliefs about the colours of things, or even *to our knowledge* of them. (205, my emphasis)

There is something *prima facie* strange about this. The sceptic was worried, presumably, that there might be no colours—not merely that he might correctly *make the statement* ‘There are no colours’. And he took the possibility, whether or not actualized, to be an undermining of what we take to be knowledge—on the ground that, for all we know, there might be no coloured things. Stroud now replies that that might indeed be the case, only we’d never be in a position to *say* so. Some would say that this was small consolation: to be robbed not only of what seemed to be knowledge, but also of the capacity to state either challenge or correction to it. Stroud has recently elsewhere taken a similar view on knowledge of an external world in general, not merely of colours.²⁷ One might wonder, however, if this is not after all a new triumph for the sceptic. Though the context is quite different, it seems uncomfortably close to a position that Wittgenstein articulated: ‘What the solipsist means is quite correct; only it cannot be said ...’ (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.62).

I suspect Stroud’s present view is in tension with his earlier article ‘Transcendental Arguments’. In the article, Stroud considers statements which it is in some way self-defeating to deny—for example, ‘I am now speaking’. Suppose now that we found some more substantial, metaphysical statements that were similarly ‘self-guaranteeing’—or perhaps essential to language and therefore to the very formulation of a sceptical doubt. Could they be used to defeat scepticism? The earlier Stroud thinks not: ‘for any candidate S, proposed ..., *the sceptic can always very plausibly insist* that it is enough to make language possible if we *believe* that S is true, or if it looks for all the world as if it is, but that *S needn’t actually be true*’ (p. 128, my emphasis, except on ‘believe’). I am not entirely convinced by the reply.²⁸ But in any case, it is interesting that in the article Stroud talks as if this were a victory for the sceptic: the fact that *S needn’t actually be true* (even if S has to be believed) is all that the sceptic needs to establish. By the standards of the latest book, however, the earlier sceptic would supposedly be defeated: for if it is necessary for the sceptic to *believe* that S is true, then the possibility of S’s being false supposedly constitutes ‘no threat’ to our present belief.

²⁷ Cp. Barry Stroud, ‘Radical Interpretation and Philosophical Scepticism’, in Lewis Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Open Court, 1999), pp. 136-7: ‘If the apparently innocent possibility from which the epistemological reasoning would begin is not a possibility anyone could consistently believe to be actual, it can be eliminated from serious consideration right at the beginning. ... There can be no general threat [of the sort pressed by the sceptic] because our considering the specific attributed beliefs ... guarantees that we find those beliefs to be for the most part true.’ For discussion of this paper, I am indebted to Ernest Sosa’s piece ‘Knowledge of Self, Others, and World’, in Kirk Ludwig, ed., *Donald Davidson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 163-83.

²⁸ With respect to certain self-guaranteeing statements, like ‘I exist’, the reply is implausible (*believing that one exists* is hardly less demanding on the world than *existing*—and it does rule out one, admittedly very restricted, sceptical scenario); with respect to certain other cases, a more plausible reply for the sceptic would be, not that mere belief in S was necessary for language, but that there might be cases where one thought one was employing language though one was actually not doing so.

Which view is more persuasive—the earlier Stroud, or the later? Perhaps the tension is merely apparent: the earlier Stroud is insisting on the triumph of the sceptic, but the later Stroud might himself be viewed another kind of sceptic, though in an ancient more than a modern style—not a doubter, but one who refuses to make dogmatic assertions, whether positive or negative (and who, like Sextus Empiricus, has much to protest Against the Professors), and who wishes above all to live taking appearances at face value. I'm not sure the solution can be so simple: for Stroud actually wishes to leave us with *knowledge* of colours;²⁹ and (except for a proviso I shall mention in the next paragraph) I do not see how a claim of knowledge can fail to be challenged by the concession that it is possible that the beliefs in question might be false.

Suppose I look outside and decide that it is raining. Then a doubt comes to mind: might I not be believing this, though it wasn't really raining? A philosophical voice reminds me of Moore's paradoxical sentence and says: 'But that combination of propositions could never consistently be found to be true, so the alleged possibility represents no threat to your belief about the rain.' Does this help? Can I now return contentedly to my thought that it is raining and treat it as knowledge? Surely not: the threat came not from the stateability of the sceptical scenario, but from the threat that it might for all I knew be the case. To put it crudely: knowledge that *p* seems to require that if it weren't the case that *p*, then one wouldn't think that *p*; if, therefore, it seems perfectly possible that one might think that *p* even though *p* were false, this cannot help but undermine the claim of knowledge.³⁰ One must of course add that the mere possibility of error is no threat if the

²⁹ 'The unmasker's view is not contradictory. We can grant the point even if we *know* that objects are coloured.' (207, Stroud's emphasis)

³⁰ There is a paragraph where Stroud seems deliberately to turn a deaf ear to the common modal idioms in which people discuss these kinds of issues. Affirming that the unmasker's view is 'no threat to our beliefs about the colours of things, ... or even to our knowing them to be true', he says:

We can *see* that objects are coloured, so we have excellent reason for believing that they are. [1] Given that we see that objects are coloured, it is *not* possible that they are not coloured. [2] 'We see that objects are coloured' implies 'Objects are coloured'. [3] Given that we have found that objects are coloured, then, we cannot grant [3'] that it is possible that objects are not coloured. [4] Given that something is so, it is not possible that it is not so. But still, we can grant that [5] given only that we all *believe* that objects are coloured, it is possible for them not to be. [6] Belief alone does not eliminate the possibility of falsity. (206-7, with my numbering of propositions added)

(I intend [3] to be the whole sentence, of which [3'] is a proper part.) [4] might seem to be saying: 'if *p*, then not-possibly-not-*p*' (which might seem strange, for anyone who wanted to allow contingent facts, e.g. that I am now writing). But I suspect that what Stroud means amounts to: 'not-possibly (*p* and not-*p*)', or alternatively, 'if *p*, then (of necessity) not not-*p*' (where the necessity is of the consequence, not of the consequent). But if that is right, then [3] amounts to saying 'Necessarily, if we have found that objects are coloured, then it is not the case that they are not coloured.' And that is quite consistent with the claim that we could be in apparently just the same kind of informational state, even though objects were not coloured—and even that we might well think that things were coloured even though they weren't. And that is all that is

possibility is too remote: ‘*wouldn’t* have ...’ does not mean ‘*couldn’t possibly* have...’ But in the case at issue, nothing Stroud says deals with the question of how he could take a view on whether the possibility of error was remote or not. Stroud’s attitude is that the metaphysics is really beyond our ken: at most he can leave us with a pious faith in a kind of realism, but not with any real support for it. My own hope would be for a different kind of view, according to which our overall best general theory of the world and our place in it was one that enabled us actually to support a form of metaphysical realism (for example, on the existence of material objects, and, with luck, their having colours much as we think they do); if some such theory is overall most rational for us to accept, and if it implies that radical error is conceivable but at most only remotely possible, then after all, claims to *knowledge* (e.g. of the existence of material objects, and of their having colours) emerge as thoroughly rational too. Stroud would be sharply opposed to such a proposal: it elides the distinction he wants to make between ‘everyday’ and ‘metaphysical’ questions, or between ‘internal’ and ‘external’. It is an issue we need to investigate.

4. Scepticism, Defeatism and The Possibility of non-Archimedean Metaphysics

If the unmasking view is in some way self-defeating, ‘there is a temptation,’ Stroud says, ‘to conclude that objects really are coloured after all... This temptation is well worth examining—and resisting.’ (192) We need to examine Stroud’s reasons for resistance.

We are hoping, Stroud believes, for an answer to a question I shall call (Q):

(Q) ‘Do our perceptions and beliefs involving the colours of things represent anything that is part of the world independently of us?’ (192)

The subjectivist replies ‘No’, the dogmatic realist ‘Yes’. Stroud wants us to say neither.

For one thing, giving a positive answer would seem to require just what giving a negative answer required or presupposed—that we can get ourselves into a position to ask the question in the right way in the first place. We would have to be able to consider all human perceptions and beliefs concerning the colours of things, on the one hand, and the world as it is independently of us, on the other, and manage to ask a still-open question about the relation between them. (192-93)

needed for a challenge to a claim of knowledge. Such a challenge is of course not in itself a refutation. If the possibility, for example, were only a remote one, then the challenge might be resisted; but if that is to be the ground of resistance, then we need to check how solid that ground is. And on that, Stroud says, I think, nothing.

And that is an impossible task—‘because even to acknowledge the relevant psychological facts we must also have some beliefs about the colours of objects’ (193). To ask the question seems to require that we ‘rid ourselves of a conception of the world as filled with coloured objects’ (193); but once we recognize the existence of colour beliefs and perceptions, we involve ourselves in that conception after all.³¹

Stroud’s second reason is more uncomplicated:

to conclude from that failure [of the unmasking project] that our beliefs about the colours of things must therefore be largely true would be to draw a nonpsychological conclusion about the world around us from certain psychological facts of belief. (194)

Whereas in fact:

no necessary links have been established or proposed between the presence of such beliefs and their truth. (193)

If such inferences—from facts of psychology to facts about the world—were valid, it would be ‘a remarkable result’ (194). There are some philosophical views that provide for that kind of inference: Kant’s transcendental idealism, dispositionalism (in the special case of colour), and Davidson’s 1980s interpretationism (according to which the truth of most of our beliefs is guaranteed by the nature of ‘correct interpretation’, 202³²). But all those views fail (195-200). So we cannot make any inference from the available mental states to the presence of colour in the world.³³

³¹ In the ‘Reply to Robert Fogelin’ (*P.P.R.* 68 (2004), 433-37), Stroud protests against Fogelin’s reading of him as holding ‘that the color realists ... will, in the end, fare no better in their quest for reality than did their unmasking opponents’. Stroud replies: ‘in *The Quest for Reality* I argue *only* against *subjectivism* about the colors of things ... If the “color realists” ... believe, for instance, that lemons are yellow and grass is green, then I do not think they will be confounded in their question by the very same difficulty that confounds unmaskers. ... [F]or all that I have explicitly argued so far, “an adequate account of the metaphysical status of colors” *might* be achieved by an objectivist, rather than a subjectivist, route’ (435-36, my emphasis on ‘only’ and ‘subjectivism’). I am not sure how to reconcile Stroud’s claim here with the text of Ch. 9: for the latter explicitly says that giving a positive answer would seem to require ‘just what giving a negative answer required’ (192)—namely, the same ‘unintelligible task of trying to peel our perceptions and beliefs off the world, as it were, and compare them in some direct way with what they are about’ (27).

³² Stroud is quoting Donald Davidson, ‘Three Varieties of Knowledge’, in A. Phillips Griffiths, ed., *A. J. Ayer: Memorial Essays* (Cambridge, 1991), 160.

³³ Aside from the detailed evaluation of these two reasons, it may be worth noting a serious logical puzzle about Stroud’s general position: he believes that we are committed to believing that objects are coloured, yet he says we should resist the temptation ‘to conclude that objects really are coloured after all’ (192). The logical puzzle is this: indeed, the fact that we

It is worth noting that these two points have nothing specifically to do with colour: if they carry force, they should apparently carry force equally against someone tempted to say Yes or No to the question whether there are *shapes* and *sizes* in the world, or even any *chairs* or *driving tests*. There are of course plenty of differences between these cases (and the argument would run differently for complex terms that are verbally definable); but Stroud's main concerns would apply in the same way. To ask about the existence of these things would supposedly require us to abandon any belief in them and (in the case of the fundamental kinds) our very conception of them; and in any case the available psychological states could not possibly guarantee their existence.

Stroud's picture of our predicament is, I think, reminiscent of the opening perspective of Carnap's paper 'Empiricism, Semantics, Ontology'.³⁴ (Carnap's response to the problem, of course, is quite different

believe that p is in general no guarantee that p; but surely if we believe that p and are asked whether it is the case that p, then (unless we change our mind in the process) the only acceptable thing to 'conclude' is (with some appropriate degree of modesty) that p. (Of course we should not 'conclude' that p solely on the basis of our belief that p; but if we have any grounds for believing that p, surely they are equally grounds for accepting or 'concluding' that p.) A person who has read Stroud on Moore's paradox will be well aware that looking out of the window and coming to the belief that it is raining are no guarantee that it is raining; but, if writing the book on whether it is raining, the only acceptable thing for her to say (unless in the process she changes her mind) is that it is. Stroud might perhaps reply that this would permit us to reach or 'conclude' the 'internal' claim that certain objects are coloured, but not the 'external' version of it. But if that internal claim is all that the argument of Ch. 7 commits 'interpreters' and us to, then it is not clear after all that that chapter constitutes an objection to philosophical unmasking—for an 'unmasker' like Mackie might claim actually to accept a Stroudian 'internal' judgement that lemons are yellow (e.g. and not blue); hence to convict him of a self-defeating position, Ch. 7 would surely need to show that 'interpreters' and Mackie were committed also to the 'external' judgement of colour realism that Mackie officially rejects. Yet that seems more than Ch. 7 (with its Davidsonian and Private Language Argument-style considerations) undertakes. Or at least: some fuller argument for self-defeat seems to be needed. Later I shall be questioning Stroud's separation of 'internal' and 'external' versions of these claims; but surely, whatever version of a claim we are committed to believing, we are also committed to accepting or 'concluding'. And of course that is not to treat oneself as infallible on the matter.

³⁴ 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4 (1950); repr. in the 2nd edn. of Rudolf Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity: A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956). In *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Stroud characterizes a distinction between 'internal' and 'external' reactions to questions like 'Do I know it?' (SPS 117-18)—responding 'from "within" one's current knowledge', or instead by 'a certain withdrawal or detachment from the whole body of our knowledge of the world' (117): 'I am ... to ask, from "outside" it as it were, not simply whether it is true [—cp. Ch. 1 of the *Quest*—] but whether and how I know it even if it is in fact true.' (118) Stroud raises many objections to Carnap in SPS Ch. 5, but none to his basic setting-up of the problem: it is Carnap's verificationist dismissal of the 'external' questions as pseudo-problems that is Stroud's main concern.

from Stroud's.) On this conception, the disagreement between, for example, realism and phenomenalism is irresolvable on the basis of any empirical evidence available to us; even if we might picture, perhaps, a god or angel deciding between the two hypotheses, nothing within *our* ken is a basis for knowledge of whether there is an external world of material objects, or instead just experiences occurring in regular patterns grounded in no further facts about a material world or anything else either. Meanwhile, however, it would be invidious to deny us, in some sense, everyday knowledge. From some point of view, we can be said to know that water boils at 100 degrees, and that there is such a thing as the Eiffel Tower; each of these facts will be recognized in realism, in phenomenalism, and in idealism, though they will be given a different account in each. But the availability of that kind of everyday 'knowledge', empirically grounded and checkable by ordinary methods, settles (on this conception) nothing about the metaphysical issues. And on those issues, versions of Stroud's two objections can easily seem a permanent obstacle to reaching any conclusion: a conclusion would involve claiming we could set up for comparison our own representations, on the one hand, and reality, on the other—something that people in our own situation cannot do—; secondly, dogmatic claims about the nature of the world could at best be inferred from the nature of our own experiences, whereas any such inferences would be undercut by the fact that (except in special ways that aren't helpful here) the state of things in the mind simply cannot guarantee the state of things outside. So on the difficult metaphysical matters we have to abandon any hope of reaching a solution. A modest scepticism of some kind becomes inevitable; though, since rational argument and ordinary experience are both treated, on this view, as utterly incapable of helping us with the important metaphysical questions, it would seem no less true to call the view a kind of metaphysical defeatism.³⁵

I think there is something utterly misleading about this picture. My objection is not a verificationist one, nor even a protest directly at the conclusions that it leads to. My objection is that it starts out from a fundamentally misconceived division between 'internal' and 'external' questions, which forces an underestimate of the available means for deciding on metaphysical questions. To put the matter crudely: on Stroud's picture (as also on Carnap's and Rorty's) to make progress in metaphysics we would have to be able to find a vantage point outside our own epistemic situation, and from that Archimedean point³⁶ deliver a

³⁵ There are signs of a similar conception in the architectonic of Stroud's earlier paper 'Transcendental Arguments', *Journal of Philosophy* (1968). The article presents a three-cornered debate between scepticism, conventionalism and transcendental argument; given the failure of the last two, scepticism emerges victorious. What Stroud completely omits is a fourth option, according to which our relevant beliefs might be *justified*, without anyone claiming for them infallibility; and that justification might come from a combination of empirical evidence and philosophical argument—not at all in the form of 'direct empirical evidence of their reliability', which would indeed be ridiculous to hope for.

³⁶ 'Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable.' Descartes, Second Meditation, in *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Ch. Adam & P. Tannery (Paris: J. Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1964–76), VII.24; in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, tr. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

judgement on our own epistemic success;³⁷ given that we cannot reach such a vantage point, Stroud concludes that there is factual issue essentially beyond our ken (while Carnap and Rorty conclude that there is no factual issue here at all—only a pragmatic issue of ‘choice’ of ‘language’). My own response is that both sides are blind to the option of thinking that there is a factual—and metaphysical—issue, but we do not have to stand outside our own epistemic situation in order to make progress on it. A prime example of doing metaphysics in this non-Archimedean fashion is Gareth Evans’s article ‘Things without the mind’, which points out reasons for preferring realism to phenomenalism, without pretending for a moment to stand outside our own epistemic situation. But before we get to that, I shall mention a couple of preliminary reasons to worry about the Archimedean background picture in Stroud himself.

One might hear a warning bell at the point where Stroud talks of the question I’ve labelled (Q)—whether the world really corresponds to our beliefs and perceptions. Stroud evidently treats this as a perfectly coherent question. But he does not merely deny that we can answer it Yes or No, he doubts that we can even ‘ask the question in the right way in the first place’ (192, cp. 200, & 27). This immediately sounds odd: how can a question be *coherent*, but *incapable of being asked*? And hasn’t Stroud himself asked it and gone on to proclaim our inability to give it an answer? What Stroud turns out to mean, I think, is that the question is askable, but not while standing outside our own epistemic situation. And his own exceptionalism then falls into place:³⁸ he thinks he himself can ask the question without needing to leap outside his own skin, because he asks

1984–85), II.16. Interestingly, however, the Archimedean point Descartes sought—or at least, the evidence for it—was not outside his epistemic situation; on the contrary, it lay within, in the form of the cogito, supplemented later with evidence, again found in the mind, for the existence of God. The predicament in which Stroud and Carnap place metaphysics is much more desperate.

³⁷ At one point in *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* indeed, Stroud says that metaphysical questions are in his view mostly epistemological. I suspect that what he means is that true metaphysics has at its core questions like, ‘Is there an external world?’ which can only be answered by someone claiming to *know* a certain fact (establishable with certainty only from a special perspective). I believe that this picture makes as little sense of ‘Are there any numbers, values, or universals?’ as it does of ‘Are there colours?’ On all those issues, I do not think our ignorance is, so to speak, of a straightforward fact, on which a visiting angel from an Archimedean point would have some additional information (!); rather, I shall be arguing (though here only for the case of colour) that we need to investigate *what* we are saying when we say there are such items, and *whether* such claims can be strictly *true*, in a world of the kind we fairly uncontentiously take ourselves to be in. And that leaves epistemological questions almost entirely bracketed.

³⁸ There is another place where one might wonder how Stroud can count himself an exception to a general objection he has used against other people: in setting up the absolute conception in Ch. 2, Stroud worries that we cannot simply ask whether colour beliefs ‘represent reality [or ‘the world’] as it is in itself’ (18)—since if we take the world to be ‘whatever is so’ then the philosophical question evaporates, and if we take it to be ‘everything we believe’ then the answer becomes a trivial Yes. To escape the dilemma, we need to take the question to concern ‘the world’ as defined by the absolute conception. At the

it in a sceptical (non-committal) spirit, but anyone who professed to make progress towards answering it could only do so if they met that paradoxical requirement. But even that is, I believe, incorrect.

It may begin to indicate a mistake in the background conception, to point out that everyday claims like, for example, that there is a fallen tree in the garden, do not in fact have a content that is neutral between realist, idealist and phenomenalist views; our basic conception of physical objects is, I think (and as Evans argues), a realist conception,³⁹ and *what* we actually claim when we claim there is a fallen tree in the garden, would not be strictly true if (contrary to the usual belief) things were as the idealist or phenomenalist says. What is more, obviously enough, our evaluation of ordinary material object statements is governed not merely by ‘experience’ or ‘observation’, conceived as contrasting with ‘theory’: our view on whether experience supports the claim that there is a fallen tree in the garden involves something like theory too, and a theory that is not neutral on the question of whether such objects are material objects, idealist objects or phenomenalist objects. Hence, we should not imagine that we can as philosophers grant the status of straightforward everyday knowledge to such beliefs as that there’s a fallen tree in the garden while remaining quite uncommitted on the metaphysical questions.⁴⁰ (A further moral we can draw from Evans, I believe, is that if we meant by ‘tree’ what the phenomenalist says we do, then it would be crazy for us to claim or grant knowledge—of even an ‘everyday’ sort—that there is a fallen tree in the garden: for without the background picture provided by realism, the subjunctive conditionals supposed to be known would be utterly without rational support.) Conversely, we should not imagine that we can and do make no headway with metaphysical questions without leaping outside

end of the book, in Ch. 9, however, it looks as though Stroud after all must think he himself has a different way out of the dilemma: for he raises a metaphysical question—whether colour beliefs and perceptions really are true—without either losing philosophical content, or answering a trivial Yes, or adopting Williams’ absolute conception of the world. How can Stroud think the Ch. 2 position correct, if he himself has another way out of the dilemma? Part of the answer is that Ch. 2 is not Stroud’s own full story, it is the story of Bernard Williams and the introduction of the absolute conception. But more importantly, Ch. 2 is canvassing ways in which one might feel entitled to deliver a specific answer to the question of whether there are, for example, colours; whereas in Ch. 9 Stroud is merely raising the question, while insisting that it cannot be answered from within our epistemic perspective. (This is to answer a question raised earlier, at the end of fn. 15.)

³⁹ I mean by this pretty much what Dummett and Evans mean by it: the existence of these things, and what is true of them, may transcend our ability to verify or get access to them. See e.g. the Introduction and ‘The Philosophical Significance of Intuitionistic Logic’ in Michael Dummett’s *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London, 1978), and ‘Realism and Anti-Realism’ in *The Seas of Language* (Oxford, 1993).

⁴⁰ Stroud’s Ch. 1 does much to encourage this kind of conception, e.g. at 17-18. For the case of colour:

We have found that lemons are yellow, tomatoes are red, grass is green, and so on. ... But if we know that objects are coloured, we know it in the way we know many other things—*by observing* the world around us and doing the best we can to find out on that basis what is so. ... [However,] settling the question of the colours of things in this everyday way does not settle the metaphysical question about the reality of colour. (205, my emphasis)

our own epistemic situation—as if the actual course of our experience were just indifferent between materialist realism, idealism and phenomenalism, and only access to an Archimedean point could let us make a rational decision among them.⁴¹ In fact, I believe that everyday thought, like philosophical thought, can be treated as building a very general picture of the world and of our place in it—a single large picture or theory, which cannot be sharply divided into observation-level knowledge and higher-level theoretical speculation (—or into ‘internal’ and ‘external’ issues—), for the content of the supposedly observational thoughts is essentially suffused with theoretical content, and if ‘observational’ thoughts are ever to count as knowledge, it can only be thanks in part to their ‘theoretical’ content. And the particular character of our experience is actually capable of giving support to certain large pictures of the world and our place in it, rather than others. Realism gains support over phenomenalism, for example, because it is part of the overall best ‘theory’ to make sense of the overall course of our experience.

Being part of the ‘best theory’ is not enough, however: the explanation must also, I would suggest, be *excellent*. The best is not good enough if it is merely the best of a bad lot—if there are much better explanations that haven’t even occurred to us, or if the scope of our information is terribly restricted compared with that of the claims based upon it. Someone tied up with a cardboard box over his head, trying on his own to learn details of his environment ought to know that his ‘best theory’ is likely to be a bad theory; but someone learning in the way we usually do, about questions like whether there are fallen trees in the garden, often has reason for the greatest confidence. The presence of a fallen tree in the garden is not just the best available explanation of our apparently seeing a fallen tree in the kind of everyday course of experience that we mostly enjoy; it is also an *excellent* explanation. To get a clear understanding of that notion of excellence and of our right to apply it, is of course another big task, which I shall have to defer.

The arguments of e.g. Gareth Evans in ‘Things without the Mind’,⁴² supplemented with others of the ‘Inference to the Best Explanation’ type, give us extremely good reason, I believe, to prefer realism to phenomenalism. Evans describes the structure of realist thought about things: we treat our experience as the joint upshot of encounters between ourselves and things, as we take our bodily path through the world. A situation where there is a fallen tree in the garden, for example, will result in a visual perception that there is a fallen tree in the garden only if there is a person suitably placed, looking in the right direction, with decent eyesight, in suitable lighting, and so on; but an apparently quite similar experience could also occur through some illusion-producing apparatus, or even perhaps through hallucination. And in a case where we have an

⁴¹ As Stroud (in ‘Transcendental Arguments’) quotes Hume: ‘It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent.’ David Hume, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Sec. 12 Pt. 1 Para. 12, ed. P. H. Nidditch, p. 153.

⁴² Gareth Evans, ‘Things without the mind’. In Zak van Straaten, ed., *Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1980), 76–116. Repr. in Gareth Evans, *Collected Papers*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 249–90.

experience that might have been produced in way x, or instead in way y (with a very different layout of things in the world), we typically decide between such hypotheses on the basis of further evidence from other times and places—getting, as we say, different views upon either the same scene or one which we take to be connected with the original scene—the whole being interpreted ‘holistically’. On the basis of the evolving available totality of experience, we build up an evolving general picture of the world and the path that we have taken through it. And this provides for the characteristic thesis of a realist conception: that it can be the case that p whether or not anyone perceives that p (since, for example, there may be no perceivers near enough, or looking in the right direction), and conversely, people can have apparent perceptions that p whether or not it is the case that p (since, for example, there are ways in which such apparent perceptions can be produced by causes other than the fact that p).

We might now compare this realist picture with the phenomenalist’s hypothesis for ‘explaining’ the course of our experience. Suppose I walk back from the window and say to a friend, ‘There’s a fallen tree in the garden.’ The phenomenalist pretends to do justice to this: I am accepting (and recommending the friend to accept) the conditional ‘if I looked out at the garden I would have an experience as of a fallen tree’ (at least with respect to nearby times); but what *ground* does the phenomenalist think I have for believing that subjunctive conditional claim? The realist—who no doubt accepts the subjunctive conditional (at least with respect to times close to the time when I was looking)—has a ground, in her belief that there is actually a material object fallen tree in the garden (and that trees are the kind of thing that tend to stay in existence, and take a bit of time to get out of a garden once in it), that I am a competent perceiver, that if you put together competent perceivers together with trees in the presence of light, etc., then experiences as of a tree will occur—and so on. (This is a ground for accepting the conditional claim, not in the sense of establishing it as certain, but as giving a good reason for accepting it.) On the other hand, the nearest the phenomenalist can come to offering a ground is the fact that, when a couple of times earlier I went to the window, I had successive experiences as of a fallen tree. But simple projective induction from past conjunctions is utterly irrational—as Hume so clearly argued—when past conjunctions are not taken as a sign of something that produced or was in some way responsible for them (in the way that the constant conjunctions *are*, for the realist, a sign of something: namely, a material object tree).⁴³ Hence to combine a phenomenalist world-picture with such everyday claims as that there is a fallen tree in the garden is an utterly unreasonable position. The phenomenalist’s basic picture of the world is that there is nothing more basic than the experiences that occur in whatever sequences they do—

⁴³ I am here of course adopting Hume’s negative conclusion (e.g. in the *Enquiry* sect. 4) about the irrationality of simple projective induction, while suggesting that we can escape irrationality by a process Hume did not envisage. This is of course a difficult and contested topic; but the beginnings of a defence of such views can be found in: John Foster, *A. J. Ayer* (London: Routledge, 1985), Ch. 3, esp. sects. 4-5. There are many further issues to take up, not least those of the differences and connections between the case of inferring causal powers as a best explanation of our experience and the case of inferring material objects.

nothing that *produces* them, or *causes patterns* in them. And *yet*, the phenomenalist wants us to believe that certain kinds of experience *will* recur, and *would* recur *if ...* And that is an utterly irrational combination of views. The realist view, on the other hand, makes good sense of the overall course of our experience—and provides a framework within which the kinds of beliefs we hold about things currently unobserved are revealed as rational things to think.

Evans unashamedly deals with metaphysical issues, showing how, on the basis of a combination of rational and empirical considerations, we build what might be called a theory of the world and our place in it—and he gives us reasons to approve a realist theory of that type (and disapprove a phenomenalist theory). A version of something like question (Q) would be firmly answered Yes by Evans: there is abundantly good reason to say that, in thinking there are trees, and gardens, and material objects in general, we are indeed often accurately representing what is going on ‘in the world’, if you will. But what about Stroud’s two objections? First: that we cannot get into the detached position of comparing the totality of our representations with ‘the world’. (Sometimes Stroud seems to add the worry that we cannot both employ and ‘stand outside’ the conceptual scheme (of, for example, material objects, or colours).) But Evans gives an obviously impressive answer (whether we accept it finally or not) to the kind of metaphysical question Stroud has in mind, without pretending to abandon the concepts of material objects, trees, or whatever. And there seems no reason why he should do so: to exhibit a theory as well-supported it is not necessary to stand at an Archimedean point and renounce any understanding of the theory. After all, we can defend a certain theoretical model of the atom as the best explanation of the phenomena without having a duty to divest ourselves of the concepts of electrons, quarks or whatever that are employed in the theory. But what about Stroud’s special argument in Ch. 7, that so much as to understand a theory—if only to raise the question of its justification and truth—commits the theorist to accepting the simple terms of that theory as actually having reference? I have already given reasons to think Stroud’s argument is open to direct objection. (Even among what look to be ‘simple’ or acquaintance-based terms, we have to recognize there may sometimes be cases of reference-failure; and at least in some cases, it is possible for a commentator to allege reference-failure without losing her understanding—or perhaps strictly ‘quasi-understanding’—of the term in question.) But in any case, Stroud’s argument is so abstract, tentative and complex that we can hardly be confident of its conclusion when it conflicts with other things we have good reason to think. It is much too quick to conclude that one cannot even *understand* a theory (whether of material objects, or of their having colours) without accepting the actual existence of such items.

What about Stroud’s second worry? There are ‘no necessary links’ (193) between (relevant, available) psychological facts and what is the case in the world—unless, that is, we follow idealism, Davidson, or (in the case of colour) a dispositional theory. But let us ask what this means. If Stroud simply means that there are *no infallible inferences*, then it is plausible but no objection: Evans does not pretend to show that realism is infallibly established—only that it is rationally attractive, and obviously more so than phenomenism. If, on the other hand, Stroud means that there are *no good inferences* from (relevant, available) psychology to the nature of the world, no cases of inference to the best explanation, then this seems extraordinarily implausible.

One might as accurately say there are ‘no necessary links’ between any data and the theory that best fits them; yet we know very well that that does not prevent *rational inferences* from being made. Evans can easily admit that we might conceivably be wrong in thinking that there are external objects, while still advancing strong, indeed overwhelming, reasons for that belief.⁴⁴

It is all too easy to treat realism, idealism and phenomenalism as ‘empirically equivalent’. There is something right about that idea, and something badly wrong. Compare the case of a machine that is outputting numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, ... We consider two hypotheses: that it is a computer generating the natural numbers, or, instead, that it is a random number generator that merely happens to be producing numbers in the natural number sequence. Suppose a little later the machine is still continuing in accordance with the sequence: 1034, 1035, 1036, 1037 ... The hypotheses are both *compatible* with the phenomena; but only one is *rationally supported*, and *reasonable to believe* on the basis of those phenomena. (And note, anyone who has seen the series continued only up to 1037, and concludes ‘This is a random number generator; but it *will continue* to generate numbers that coincide with the natural number sequence’ can do so only irrationally.) The same is true of realism and phenomenalism: they may be empirically equivalent, in the minimal sense that, when carefully set up, two such theories may imply the occurrence of the same experiences. But the two theories are not empirically equivalent in the sense that whatever experiences give rational support to the one give equal rational support to the other. (And anyone who concludes on the basis of our experience so far, ‘Nothing underlies the regularities in our experience of the solar system, and yet the sun *will continue* to rise tomorrow and thereafter’, can again do so only irrationally.) Our actual experience supports realism more strongly than phenomenalism.

Let us return to the special case of colours. The case is, I think, not exactly parallel to that of external objects: certain kinds of sceptical doubt that make sense with respect to external objects do not, I think, make sense with respect to colours. Stroud thinks it conceivable that there might be no colours. I find it hard to see quite what he has in mind. Perhaps the point is just that we could apparently have the experiences we do, though there were no material objects at all. But Stroud wants to resist *any* inference from (relevant, available) psychological states to the state of the world. So presumably, he means that even if we’ve removed the ordinary causes of scepticism—and can take for granted that there are material objects, operating according to a physics pretty much as we suppose—*still*, there is no way in which the pattern and content of our experience can guarantee that there are colours. (Note how Stroud repeats his rejection of the dispositional theory of colour at

⁴⁴ In *SPS*, Stroud rules out as ‘a total failure’ the ‘straightforward’ claim that we often do know that we are not dreaming (19). We can see now a possible response. Our best and excellent overall theory implies that (in the simplest cases, e.g. like now) we are actually awake, and that if we weren’t then we wouldn’t think we were in the way that we actually do. And in that case, we actually have good reason to conclude both (i) that we are not (e.g. now) dreaming, and (ii) that we *know* that we are not dreaming.

this point, 197-98.) Here I am puzzled. A sceptical challenge to everyday belief in material objects can be supported by sketching a scenario—where things seem pretty much as they ordinarily do to us, yet there are no material objects, but instead (for example) an evil demon producing our experiences. And we may picture ourselves waiting to be told—so to speak by an angel visiting from an Archimedean point—whether the normally accepted scenario or instead the sceptical scenario was in fact true. But how could something parallel work in the case of colour? Suppose that it has already been established that there exist material objects, fitting a physics very much as we now think. (Let us suppose that this is not just the most reasonable hypothesis available to us, but something confirmed by the visiting angel.) Presumably Stroud’s old principle is as true as it ever was: (relevant, available) psychology is no guarantee of the state of the world. So it might be that there are colours, and it might be that there are not. And we hope the visiting angel can tell us which.

Unfortunately, I don’t think I have the faintest idea what we are asking the visiting angel to settle. ‘Well, think of a scenario within which there are material objects and experiences apparently of colour, yet the former don’t produce the latter in anything like the way we actually suppose. Adding suitable further details, we might have a situation where there weren’t any colours in that world, though we thought that there were.’ But in that case, some part of our physics or physiology would surely be wrong too: material objects and their surfaces wouldn’t in fact be reflecting light selectively; or perhaps the reflected light wouldn’t really be what was relevantly operative on our eyes (angels or fairies doing the job instead); or perhaps the changes at our eyes wouldn’t in fact be responsible for our experiences. But if the question of the representational accuracy of colour perception remains open, *even while the scientific story is wholly settled*—which is the present hypothesis—, then I am puzzled what the question can amount to.⁴⁵ Stroud, who wants the question to remain open, may even seem in danger of falling into a kind of extreme objectivism, a kind of hyperrealism about colours: just as, on his picture, the issue between realism and phenomenalism is a matter of *distant fact*, one which our own experience allows us to make no real headway with, so also with colours. Whether colours exist or not—whether what we mean by ‘colours’ strictly do or do not exist—becomes something hidden beyond our experience. And that is, I submit, to blow up colours to being, not the everyday objects of experience that we tend to take them to be, but instead hyper-real items, supposedly represented (if we’re lucky) by our experience,

⁴⁵ I’m tempted to propose a principle:

if, in a certain informational state *i*, *x could be mistaken* in thinking that *p*, then it should be possible to specify some scenario in which *x* is apparently in the very same informational state as *i*, and yet it is in fact not the case that *p*.

(Conversely, if in *i*, *x could be right* in thinking that *p*, then it should be possible to specify another scenario in which *x* is apparently in the same informational state as *i*, and it is the case that *p*.) If that is right, then, given Stroud’s view that it is epistemically possible that there are no colours, he should be able to describe a scenario in which there really are no colours and yet it looks, in much the same way as now, as though there are. He does not do so, and I wonder if the task is really performable.

but such that we can't really tell if they are or they aren't. This is the kind of predicament that Berkeley thought Locke got himself into—where material objects end up being 'in themselves insensible'.⁴⁶ Yet to end up with colours being invisible—or, at least, such that knowledge of them is not really available through sight—would be particularly worrying. For, as Strawson has remarked,⁴⁷ surely 'colours are visibilia or they are nothing'.

This must not be misunderstood. I am not saying that science itself settles metaphysical questions; rather, I am saying that our own experience plus science should be capable of giving us all the relevant facts on the kinds of question here at issue. This needs some explanation. Stroud treats our main question about colour as a question, so to speak, of external fact: the angel passes by and we ask 'Well, do our experiences represent what is really there? How exactly are we embedded in the world? Is it in way x or in way y?' I suspect that our metaphysical questions here are not straightforwardly factual in the way suggested, nor are they quite so 'external'. There are questions that remain even if we remove, so to speak, all the relevant 'factual' uncertainty; but what remains is not a question of fact, but of philosophical understanding. Let us suppose a scenario, in which persons like us—I shall suppose, e.g., my sister—have experiences very much as we ourselves do now; the causal processes are just as we suppose them to be (light falls on the object, is selectively reflected, affects the retina ... etc.) Now we ask: in that scenario, when Vicky sees something red, is her perception a correct representation? It is not as though there's a *fact* that we want information on (in the way that we might have wanted to discover whether our experiences were produced by material objects or instead by demons beaming thoughts into our minds). It seems that we could, in a relevant sense, know 'all the facts' of the situation, and still not know whether the colour perceptions were accurate or not. We know (*ex hypothesi*, and if we like, the angel can confirm it) what experiences she has when looking at yellow things (namely the same kind as we too have now), and we know the physical story of the way in which light and object and eye interact in producing the perception. And *yet*, we worry that we don't know whether there is accuracy of representation. What then are we worrying about? 'Whether there is in fact yellowness in the world—as well as, so to speak, the physical qualities.' But what *information* could we expect the angel to have on the matter? If the angel sees colours in the same way as we do, then presumably it'll be no better nor worse informed thereby than we ourselves are. If the angel doesn't see colours in the same way, then the question would arise whether it had relevant information at all: how, after all, without colour vision, could it tell whether there were colours in the world?⁴⁸

⁴⁶ George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Dialogue I, ed. Luce & Jessop 206.

⁴⁷ P. F. Strawson, 'Perception and its objects', in G. F. MacDonald, ed., *Perception and Identity: Essays presented to A. J. Ayer with his replies* (London: Macmillan, 1979), at p. 56. On the kind of relativism to points of view that Strawson also proposes in that article, Stroud gives, I think, a thoroughly conclusive reply in Ch. 8.

⁴⁸ This may be the place to respond to some objections that Stroud made in response to an earlier version of these remarks. (See my paper 'Realism, Scepticism and the Lament for an Archimedean Point ...', *P.P.R.* 68 (2004), 417-24 and Stroud's 'Reply to Justin Broackes', *ibid.*, 441-44.)

My own suspicion is that if we are to expect any progress on this matter, what we need is not additional information from some other vantage point, but a better understanding of the content of colour experience—something that should be available from within our conceptual scheme, and I'm sure is no easier if approached 'from outside'. We need a better understanding of what exactly we claim when we claim things in the world really to be red or green—so as to be able to assess better whether such claims can strictly and literally true with respect to, e.g. the scenario envisaged in the previous paragraph. Stroud, in much of the book that I've not been discussing, in fact makes some progress on just such issues, for example (in Chs. 5 and 6) explaining ways in which the content of colour perceptions links with that of colour beliefs, and (in part of Ch. 8) explaining ways in which our concept of colour is not a concept of a property crudely relative to a point of view. But he shies away from offering any very substantive account of the nature of colour, or of our colour concepts.

I wonder if he is not excessively tentative on this matter. Without pretending to supply a theory of my own, I would like to consider two ideas that may have a substantive role to play in an account of colour, and which may, after all, provide for connections between colour-experience and colour in the world, of just the kind that Stroud himself is so wary about.

Stroud's main point (—he does not take up the issues of Archimedean and non-Archimedean metaphysics—) is that his position in Ch. 9 should not be seen as sceptical: the key part of Ch. 9 merely points out, he says, the 'failure of implication' (443) from 'x believes that p' to 'p'; and that point has no sceptical force. I agree that the fallibility of a belief of course does not by itself imply that the belief fails to count as knowledge. But once the possibility of radical error has been aired, what can save for colour-beliefs the status of knowledge? Ch. 9 does not tell us just of a failure of implication; it tells us (195-200) of the failure of the three main ways Stroud knows 'to draw a nonpsychological conclusion about the world around us from certain psychological facts of belief' (194); and it tells us of two principled obstacles (192-94) to giving a positive answer to the metaphysical question, whether those beliefs are, strictly, true. My point was not that the failure of implication alone entailed scepticism; it was that the remainder of Chapter 9 made it unclear how Stroud could honour any claim to knowledge on the topic.

There is one place where I may seem in danger of misrepresenting Stroud. He reports that on my reading of his position, 'for all we know, the familiar objects around us might not be colored' (441), and he responds: 'This is not what I believe. I think I know that most physical objects are colored, and I think every other competent person knows it too.' (441)

In the sense in which Stroud intends his final claim, I certainly do not mean to challenge it: *what Stroud believes, what Stroud thinks he knows*, is indeed incompatible with tomatoes' not being red; but I am not at all sure the same is true of *what Stroud actually establishes in his book*. Stroud indeed *claims* knowledge e.g. that tomatoes are red; my doubt is whether he is entitled to do so. For he opens up the possibility of radical error and then—without having shown that possibility to be merely remote or minimal possibility—he denies us resources to close it again. And radical error on the 'external' issue, if it occurred, could hardly be prevented from percolating down to 'internal' claims too. Hence my judgement that Stroud has opened up a kind of scepticism that he would reject but is no position to do so.

Stroud raises a series of objections to dispositional theories that take yellow, for example, as some kind of disposition in an object to look yellow to normal observers under normal circumstances. Stroud's fundamental objection (in Ch. 6) is this. Suppose a situation where human beings were built so differently that a *normal perceiver* were quite a different kind of perceiver from what is actually the case; or where circumstances or the laws of nature were so different that what counted as *normal conditions* in the environment were quite different from what actually so count. In such a situation, things that are actually not yellow (perhaps ripe tomatoes), constituted exactly as they actually are, might *look yellow to (what in the envisaged scenario count as) normal observers under (what there count as) normal circumstances*. A crude dispositional theory would count those objects (in that scenario) as yellow. And yet, as Stroud says, this is surely incorrect: rather, these would just be non-yellow objects that were looking yellow to the (locally) normal observers under the (locally) normal circumstances.

There is, however, a more sophisticated dispositional claim that escapes the objection. Most of Stroud's discussion ignores it, but there are two pages that bring it into the open (135-36):

we could fix the right-hand side of a true biconditional about yellow things and say [D] that yellow objects are all those objects which, as things are now, in fact produce the identified perceptions of yellow in the specified circumstances in normal human perceivers as now constituted. (135, with my own addition of the label [D])

Stroud concedes that this claim 'would tell us what objects are yellow, and so to that extent what yellow is, and it would do so by appeal only to what is true of normal human perceivers as we are right now' (135). But he dismisses the claim:

the suggestion does not reveal any relativity to us in the colours of objects. Nor does it support a *subjectivist or dispositional view* of an object's colour. It does not support the idea that an object's being yellow *depends on* its being disposed to produce certain specified kinds of perceptions in certain perceivers in certain circumstances. (136, my emphasis)

After all, ovoid objects also look ovoid to normal observers in normal circumstances 'as things actually are'; but that clearly 'does not show that an object's being ovoid depends on what kind of perceptions normal human perceivers would actually get from it' (136).

There is no need to quibble over Stroud's insistence that anything worthy of being called a 'dispositional view' must take an object's colour to *depend on* its disposition to produce perceptions. (My own preference would be to use the label 'dispositional' instead for views that take an object's colour to *consist in* its having such a disposition.) The key point here is that nothing in what Stroud says even pretends to be a reason for rejecting the dispositional claim [D] as *false*. That claim, with suitable actuality and temporal operators, seems in fact to be acceptable—and may even be accepted by Stroud—as true.

If that is the case, then it offers us a new reason to question Stroud's later rejection of any 'necessary links' between colour-beliefs and -perceptions and colours in the world (193). For claim [D] above seems indeed to link those two classes of item, and one can add a necessity operator to it without sacrificing truth. Unless there actually are no normal observers, no normal circumstances, no cases of something looking yellow, or no suitable combinations of those elements, then we may have enough to conclude that some things are really and truly yellow. Perhaps Stroud's admission in Ch. 6, limited as it is, secures the reality of colour after all.

But we must not go too fast. A proper treatment of this would need, I think, to mention something like a distinction between 'statistical' and 'conduciveness' understandings of 'normal' observers and conditions, and to ask about the relative priority of 'looks yellow' and 'yellow';⁴⁹ it would need also, I think, to recognize that no claim like [D] on its own is sufficient to settle an answer to certain puzzle cases (like Kripke's killer yellow), which however the concept of yellow does seem sufficient to settle.⁵⁰ If that is right, then [D] could never be a full account of yellow. But it might still serve as a *criterion of adequacy* on any account.⁵¹ We might know *a priori* that whatever, more precisely, colours might be, they would fit something like [D]. And if so, that would be enough after all to repair part of the rift between the mind and the world that Stroud insisted on opening.

There is a second proposal that might also help to repair that rift. Stroud considers various views that claim necessary connections between psychological states and states of the world: in transcendental idealism, dispositionalism and Davidson. But there may be a fourth option more promising in the present context. Suppose we took colours to be what we might call *phenomenal natural kinds*, identified demonstratively. Let us sketch a simple model: starting with some particular samples in the world, we might group together as *of a certain shade* things that stand to those samples in a certain phenomenal equivalence relation like *is indistinguishable in colour from* (somewhat as—in Putnam's theory of scientific natural kinds—samples are grouped together with paradigm samples according as they stand to those paradigms in a scientific equivalence

⁴⁹ See Crispin Wright, 'Moral Values, Projectivism and Secondary Qualities'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Vol., lxii (1988), 1–26; and David Wiggins, 'A Sensible Subjectivism?' in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987) 185–214.

⁵⁰ See Justin Broackes, 'The Autonomy of Colour', in K. Lennon & D. Charles, eds., *Reduction, Explanation, and Realism* (Oxford University Press, 1992), sect. 3.1.

⁵¹ I have in mind the way that Frege uses 'the number of fs = the number of gs iff the fs can be 1-1 correlated with the gs' as a criterion of adequacy on a definition of number, even if it cannot itself yield a complete account. See Gottlob Frege,

relation like *is the same liquid as*).⁵² Then, pointing at a particular patch (e.g. a paint sample), I could talk of a certain shade as possessed by all things that are *indistinguishable in colour from that patch* (perhaps adding: by normal human observers in normal circumstances). That *shade* would class together all things that *look in colour like that patch*. With broader equivalence relations, or larger sets of paradigms, we could capture broader groupings that were more like our colour kinds *red, green, blue* and so on.

Much would be needed to defend and elaborate an account of colour building on this model. But it is worth noting that such an account, if defensible, would also enable us to remove the worry that there might be no such things as colours in the world. The worry would be reasonable only if it were reasonable to worry that no patch or patches was ever actually indicated, or that there was no such thing as *looking in colour like them (to normal observers under normal circumstances)*. Both are worries we could hope to remove; and in any case removing them would not require us (hopelessly) to claim access to a vantage point outside our own epistemic situation. What is more—most significantly—it would save us from worrying about the ‘representational relation’ between our experience and what is there. (We can classify things as *looking like grandmother* or not, without raising the issue of whether there’s a resemblance or not between our visual experience and grandmother.) Stroud might continue to worry that in some way psychological state was being taken too quickly as a guide to the world. But on reflection, it might emerge that the view proposed did not, in a Cartesian fashion, pretend merely to work outwards from views on the mind to views on the external world. Rather, it takes external items—like sample patches—and uses them as reference points in the calibration of thought. None the less, however, it makes colours the kind of thing that we might hope to have a full grasp of, and, in happy circumstances, full knowledge of things as instantiating—rather than leaving such matters, as, I think, Stroud does, ultimately in the lap not of humans but of gods and angels.

I am tempted to draw a perhaps strange sounding conclusion: that for all his expressions of Wittgensteinian sympathy, Stroud is most fundamentally a Cartesian—both in the more familiar sense of one who believes that the contents of the mind are fundamentally independent of the world (though of course, if we are lucky, in fact linked up with that world) and in the more special sense of one who treats metaphysical knowledge as unavailable to us without an Archimedean or supernatural guarantee. In the end, Stroud’s verdict on Wittgensteinian manoeuvres (as also on Moore and Carnap in the earlier book) is that they fail to block metaphysical or ‘external’ scepticism—while insisting that ‘we do have knowledge’ that there are external

Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik (Breslau, 1884) esp. §§ 62-69; trans. J. L. Austin, as *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1950).

⁵² On this proposal, ‘— is indistinguishable in colour from —’ is used for an indiscernibility relation graspable in advance of the colour concepts it is used to introduce. The situation is parallel to that where Frege uses the notion of *1-1 correlation* (or the notion expressed by ‘— is equinumerous with —’) in advance of the concept *number*. Cp. *Grundlagen* §§68 and 73. One can know that the knives are 1-1 correlated with the forks without yet employing the concept of the number of knives.

objects and that many of them are coloured, when those claims are taken in a more restricted ‘internal’ manner. I have argued that the resulting combination of views is unsustainable: once we open up an ‘external’ question separate from the ‘internal’ one, we are not entitled to claim knowledge on the latter as long as knowledge on the former is thought genuinely unavailable. There is an alternative, following the example of Gareth Evans: metaphysical argument can help us with both questions—or rather, with a single question, which is the subject both of ordinary discourse and of our metaphysical enquiry. And it can underwrite claims of knowledge on that question—which of course are not the same as claims to infallibility. In the absence of knowledge on the ‘external’ issue, to insist on the claim of knowledge of ‘internal’ issues is in danger of appearing the epistemological equivalent of banging the table: it adds vehemence, but not rational support. Meanwhile, if I am right, rational support is indeed available both for everyday and for philosophical belief in the existence of material things which have colours, and it should save us from a number of divisions in the fabric of our world that Stroud laments but actually deepens.