

THE PHILOSOPHY-LADENNESS OF PERCEPTION: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION IN HUSSERL AND SARTRE

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ABSTRACT. The basic entity in phenomenology is the phenomenon. Knowing the phenomenon is another issue. The phenomenon has been described as the real natural object or the appearance directly perceived in phenomenology and analytic philosophy of perception. Within both traditions, philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Russell and Wittgenstein have considered that perceptual experience demonstrates what a phenomenon is on the line between the mind and the external world. Therefore, conceptualizing the phenomenon is based on the perceptual evidence. However, if the belief that perception is “theory-laden” is true, then perception can also be “philosophy-laden.” These philosophers have not noticed whether perceptual knowledge is independent of philosophies. If perceptual knowledge is not independent of philosophies, a philosopher’s background philosophy can influence what he or she claims to know about the phenomenon. For Husserl, experience is direct evidence of what exists. The textual evidence shows that Sartre rejects the distinction between appearance and reality based on the assumption of the phenomenon. By examining Husserl’s *Ideas* and Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* I conclude that these philosophers’ philosophical languages influence their perceptual knowledge. Philosophical traditions affect the thoughts of perception.

Keywords: philosophical language; phenomenon; perception; philosophical tradition; analytic philosophy; continental philosophy; discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

In the philosophy of science, perceptions are said to be “theory-laden” when they are affected by the theoretical presuppositions held by the scientist. Hanson (1958) and Kuhn (1962) credibly argued that theory does influence observation. More recently Churchland (1988) and Fodor (1988) have debated about the issue (Brewer and Lambert 2001: 176). Theory-ladenness of perception, however, does not necessarily imply the influence of theoretical presuppositions on perception but on what judgments are derived from perception. Everyday experience proves the existence of such a phenomenon. Moreover, there is much new evidence regarding the effects of language on thought in psycholinguistics. For example, cross-linguistic differences have been found in many of the most fundamental domains of thought including color perception, object categories, conceptions of shape, substance, events and people’s representations of motion, space, causality, time and number (Boroditsky, 2009, 2012). As a consequence, if perception is theory-laden, then perception may also be philosophy-laden. A philosopher’s background philosophy can influence what she or he claim to know about the perceived phenomenon, or about the perceived object. On the one hand, the universalist school of thought opposes linguistic relativity arguing that thought is independent of language (Pinker, 2007; Fodor and Pylyshyn, 2015). On the other hand, philosophical theories and traditions seem to influence philosophers’ thoughts of what they perceive because their thoughts are different. Perception does not justify conflicting thoughts of philosophers. Using Husserl’s *Ideas* and Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* I will ask whether perceptual knowledge is independent of background philosophies, which is the question these philosophers have not asked themselves: do philosophical traditions influence what is said to know through perception? The cognitive acts known as “believing” and “perceiving” have been said to directly inform the observer about real things in the external world. The problem is, however, if the perceptual evidence available to us is sufficient to justify our claims of perception. Philosophical analysis shows the opposite. I will argue that philosophies influence *what* Husserl and Sartre claimed of the phenomenon of perceptual experience. In addition, there is not much research about how Sartre conceptualizes perceptual experience.

Many analytic and continental philosophers who have identified appearance with reality, including Berkeley, Heidegger and Russell, have denied that there is a veil of perception between a subject and the external world or the world-as-phenomenon. In the same way, in *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre reduces an external existent to a particular appearance and claims to gain reliable evidence from it. He claims to know by immediacy that something directly experienced that appears to him is *a real being*, not merely a phenomenon that is deceiving him. This is how Sartre claims to know phenomena. This article will provide an argument for the claim that philosophies can influence what one claims to know through perception. The notion of a “perceptual object” has been defined in many different ways in the Western philosophical tradition. With this in mind, it seems justified to

suppose that philosophical traditions have influenced philosophers' intuitions. That is to say, perception as such cannot reveal the nature of an object of perception when distinct conceptual frameworks explain the same perceptual object in different terms.

First, I will briefly outline the problem whether traditions, beliefs or prejudices color claims derived from perceptions and then review what Husserl argues about the reduction that a phenomenologist must undertake in order for an inquiry to be phenomenological. This shows that Sartre uses "Husserlian reduction" in his own way. After this, Sartre's argument against a distinction between appearance and reality, or dualism of outer entity and inner phenomenon, will be analyzed. According to Sartre, although empirical knowledge is fallible, this immediacy of reality involves indubitable knowledge. Finally, Sartre seems to use certain metaphysical language in his claims to know what he perceives. I will conclude in the final section that philosophies influenced what Husserl and Sartre claimed of the phenomenon of perceptual experience. The philosophical analysis of the use of philosophical concepts in the context of philosophical traditions reveals their effect on the conceptualization of the perception.

2. The Conceptualization of Perception as Independent of the Conceptual Framework

In this section, I will briefly outline the problem with traditions, beliefs or prejudices color the conceptualization of perceptions or claims derived from perception before examining Husserl's phenomenological reduction in detail. Although there is evidence of this effect, it seems that for example Husserl and Heidegger saw perceptual experience as free from background influences. But first I introduce more specifically what the "theory-ladenness" means.

Theory-ladenness of perception does not necessarily imply the influence of theoretical presuppositions on perception but on what judgments are derived from perception, even though there are cases where theory influences perception (Kordig, 1971: 449; Brewer and Lambert, 2001: 178–180). For example, Priestley and Lavoisier – contrary to Kuhn – both saw oxygen, but they interpreted their observations differently; Aristotle and Galileo both saw pendulums, but they differed in their interpretations of what they both had seen. In contrast, for Hanson and Kuhn, different "paradigms" transform observation and experience: transitions from one scientific tradition to another force radical changes in what is observed and in the meanings of the terms employed (Hanson, 1958; Kuhn, 1962; Kordig, 1971: 448–449). Paul M. Churchland's example may clarify the meaning of theory-ladenness of perception. There is a person who suffers mental illness who is "engaged in incoherent, paranoid, or even murderous behavior," describes Churchland (1984: 44). A person suffering from psychosis was seen by ancient and medieval people as a witch and a case of demonic possession. The existence of witches was not a controversial belief for them. A modern human person claims to know that

they have perceived something else: a person who has psychiatric problems. A modern person simply perceives the phenomenon in a distinct conceptual framework that affects interpretation when observing something (Churchland, 1984: 44, 47–8). It is plausible to say that different observers see the same objects but make different judgments about them influenced by theoretical presuppositions. Why then would philosophies not affect interpretations derived from the perception? The philosophical language is full of abstract terms in which the interpretation of the perception takes place.

Something is seen, heard and felt from the first-person point of view, and the theories of perception have different conclusions about the object given to the senses. *Direct realists* assure that the object that is directly perceived is an external body outside of the perceiver. We see the world as we see the garden through a window. There is not an extra thing between the act of seeing and the external object (Austin, 1962; Martin, 2002; Searle, 2015). Phenomenology, as Husserl describes it in *Ideas*, resembles a direct realist theory of perception. Husserl is known to have been critical against some forms of representationalism (Hickerson, 2005; Naberhaus, 2006). *Representative realists* say that the object that is directly perceived is a mental appearance that represents a presupposed mind-independent thing. For example, in visual perception, one is directly conscious of an image of a house. This image is a tiny representation of the house that is located in the external world (Ayer, 1973; Grice, 1961; Jackson, 1977; Russell, 1912). Phenomenology is the study of phenomena. According to Smith (2008: 1), it is a study of “things as they appear in our experience.” He continues that “our experience is directed toward – represents of ‘intends’ – things only through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc.” (Smith, 2008: 2). To my mind, in classical phenomenology, this content of experience or appearance is distinct from the real things. In other words, in classical phenomenology, the object that is *directly* perceived is a mind-dependent phenomenon in oneself. These philosophical traditions do not include the idea that beliefs, theories or prejudices have an influence on perception. However, these traditions may have an effect on *claims* made on objects given to the senses.

Phenomenology seems not to share such a theory-laden view of perception: not even Husserl’s arguments. Although phenomenology studies things as one experiences them in consciousness, and sees these things as directly experienced entities, a phenomenological viewpoint would state that a background theory does not influence the ways by which one describes things. Husserl’s examples give evidence of this interpretation. For example, by “perception,” Husserl meant that “To have something real primordially given, and to ‘become aware’ of it and ‘perceive’ it in simple intuition, are one and the same thing” (Husserl, 1913/1931: 51). And also “‘*Perception*’ in the normal sense of the word does not only indicate generally that this or that thing *appears* to the Ego *in embodied presence*, but that the Ego is *aware* of the appearing thing, grasps it as really being, and posits it” (Husserl, 1913/1931: 315). The following passage shows that Husserl sees perception, rather than being theory-laden, as free from background presuppositions:

But if, in *this* way, we try to separate the actual Object (in the case of perception of something external, the perceived physical thing pertaining to Nature) and the intentional Object, including the latter <as> really inherently in the mental process as ‘immanent’ to the perception, we fall into the difficulty that now *two* realities ought to stand over against one another while only *one* <reality> is found to be present and even possible. I perceive the physical thing, the Object belonging to Nature, the tree there in the garden; that and nothing else is the actual Object of the perceptual ‘intention’ (Husserl, 1913/1982: 219).

Martin Heidegger’s example presents a similar tone in his “The Origin of the Work of Art”:

We never really first perceive a throng of sensations, e.g. tones and noises, in the appearances of things – as this thing-concept alleges; rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e. listen abstractly (Heidegger, 1935/1993: 95).

For Husserl and Heidegger, it seems that background philosophies do not influence the ways in which one experiences things. Transitions from one philosophical tradition to another would not force radical changes in what is observed and in the meanings of the terms employed. All this leads us to ask whether perception is independent of philosophies. Or does “world-view” influence perception? The hypothesis is justified to be such that philosophers’ philosophies influence what they *claim* to perceive.

In his ground-breaking work *Quantum Mind and Social Science*, Alexander Wendt, says “The belief that all observation is ‘theory-laden’ is a rare point of agreement among positivists and interpretivists, and post-structuralists might go even further, arguing that perception is theory-determined” (Wendt, 2015: 224). However, according to Wendt, it seems that both sides implicitly share a classical Newtonian world view, even though quantum effects in human vision are possible (Wendt, 2015: 224–226). In any case, perception is based on the sensory data of sensation and is possibly “theory-laden.” The classic theory of cognitive scientist Ulric Neisser states that a person’s background belief system influences his or her perception, although perception starts from sensation (Neisser, 1976: 13–14, 20–24, 40–43). It begins as a bottom-up process, and the conceptual framework comes in afterwards. Paul M. Churchland (1984: 44, 47–8) also thinks that perception always occurs within a conceptual framework. Therefore, at least, claims derived from perception are not free from theories, ideologies or beliefs. Animals also experience something, but a linguistic subject is able to perceive something *as* a black bicycle. This interpretation of “perception” underlines the role of theories in perception. In fact, it seems to be a fact that cognition influences perception-based

claims that intend to a real thing by way of *noematic* sense. For example, language, beliefs and emotions color people's perceptions of the world, and there is considerable evidence of this effect (Stefanucci, Gagnon, & Lessard, 2011: 296–308; Boroditsky, 2012). Claims concerning everyday life are said to be reliable because they are based on experience. A claim is justified because it is the product of perceptual experience. However, is the perceptual evidence available to me sufficient to interpret things correctly? According to critical theory, experience is not sufficient neutral warrant for knowing because a background ideological framework with a desire for domination might influence what *it is said to be known* in a given situation (Alcoff, 1992: 77–80). Judgment formation occurs in an ideological context. That is why we make distinct claims about the nature of an object that we perceive although contemporary philosophy of perception assures that a background theory does not influence the ways by which one explains the object. Different claims about the same particular fact cannot *all* be true. In the next section, I will review what Husserl argues about the reduction that a phenomenologist must undertake. It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that the philosophical tradition affects the interpretation given to the perception.

3. The Meaning of Husserl's "Phenomenological Reduction"

I will examine here what Husserl meant by "transcendental-phenomenological reduction" in order to show later that Sartre used it in a different way. All this indicates that their philosophies influenced what they *said* to know through perception.

The written sources show that, for Husserl, the world is the world of perception. Experience is direct evidence of what exists (Husserl, 1913/1931: 52). Although doubting that the empirical scene is itself the world and bracketing the world as "the world" (Schmitt, 1967: 59), Husserl seems to accept the existence of the world and the real bodies that we perceive (Husserl, 1913/1931: 110–111). Nonetheless, the result of bracketing the objective world is that reality that is experienced, which we had previously taken for granted, "now becomes 'mere phenomenon'" (Schmitt, 1967: 59–60). The change of attitude from dogmatism to philosophy, or from "the natural standpoint to the phenomenological one," occurs when questioning or wondering about *that* which one had earlier considered a truism, such as whether what is sensed is the real external world: Husserl called this phenomenological reduction or doubting (Husserl, 1913/1931: 108–110; Schmitt, 1967: 59–60). The open question is whether Husserl's *motive* to question the natural standpoint and the natural world was because it is not a way to obtain *certain* and *infallible* knowledge.

It seems that, according to Husserl, "transcendent" means "absolute" and "mind-independent," which should reduce to "consciousness." Absolute entities are "transcendent" because they are not to be found in pure consciousness. Transcendental-phenomenological reduction means reducing transcendentals to consciousness: for instance, reducing the natural world. On the other hand, "reduction" seems to identify with "suspension" in Husserl's theory. For Husserl, "reducing transcendentals

to phenomena” means “suspending or excluding transcendental real beings” as immediate objects of phenomenological inquiry. He described, for example, how phenomenological reduction as suspension involves the absolute being of pure consciousness and its absolute experiences, which are the basic data and field of phenomenology:

Thus, instead of living naively in experience (*Erfahrung*), and subjecting what we experience, transcendent nature, to theoretical inquiries, we perform the ‘phenomenological reduction.’ In other words, instead of naively carrying out the acts proper to the nature-constituting consciousness with its transcendent theses and allowing ourselves to be led by motives that operate therein to still other transcendent theses, and so forth, we set all these theses ‘out of action,’ we take no part of them; we direct the glance of apprehension and theoretical inquiry to pure consciousness in its own absolute Being. It is this which remains over as the ‘phenomenological residuum’ we were in quest of: remains over, we say, although we have ‘Suspended’ the whole world with all things, living creatures, men, ourselves included. We have literally lost nothing, but have won the whole of Absolute Being, which, properly understood, conceals in itself all transcendences, ‘constituting’ them within itself (Husserl, 1913/1931: 154–5).

By “performing the phenomenological reduction,” Husserl clearly meant “suspending the whole world,” including rocks, flowers, and butterflies. However, this does not exclude our consciousness, in which we introspectively reflect. He did not “bracket” his mental life. I interpret that “suspending” in Husserl’s view does not mean that there is no natural world with its natural entities.

Within “natural” and “the suspension of the natural world,” Husserl included individual objectivities that are constituted through the functional activities of consciousness in valuation and in practice. “Natural” things exist as varieties of cultural expression, works of both technical and fine arts, of the sciences, ideas of state, moral custom, laws, and religion (Husserl, 1913/1931: 171, 177–8). The only things that survive after carrying out this reduction are experiences and “the pure Ego” within “one single stream of experience” and “the flux of manifold experiences” (Husserl, 1913/1931: 172, 177–8). They do not “transcend” pure consciousness but can be found within it (Husserl, 1913/1931: 175). According to Husserl, this reduction is the disconnection of the natural world from experienced consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1931: 189). In other words, this reduction disconnects the extramental mind-independent world from the mind-dependent realm of experience.

Nevertheless, when Husserl stated that “If we wish to construct a phenomenology as a *pure descriptive theory of the essential nature of the immanent formations of Consciousness*, of the events which under the limitations of the phenomenological suspension can be grasped within the stream of experiences, we must exclude from this limited field everything that is transcendently individual...,” we can wonder what his reasoning or arguments are behind this (Husserl, 1913/1931: 178). Why must we participate in transcendental-phenomenological reduction? For example, Luft does not say much about *why* Husserl asked us to use this phenomenological

method of reduction or suspension. He paraphrases Husserl's method of reduction without providing an explanation of Husserl's sentences or technical terms (Luft, 2004: 203–208). Pietersma, too, engages in a similar description, but does not say much about the motive for the use of the phenomenological reduction in Husserl's phenomenology (Pietersma, 1979: 38–39, 41–42). On the other hand, Overgaard assures his readers that Husserl does not exclude the natural world by reducing it to the status of “mere phenomena.” While the reduction means that the attitude changes from the natural standpoint to a phenomenological one, for Overgaard this change does not exclude the transcendental natural world (Overgaard, 2008: 294–299). However, the meaning of “reduction” remains unclear if phenomenology does not examine phenomena through experiencing them, but instead the natural world and its entities of cups, rocks, and butterflies. If the natural things are as they appear in consciousness, then why should we reduce anything? The concept of reduction remains unclear. Could an explanation of Husserl's motives be as follows? Transcendental-phenomenological reduction is necessary because 1) we are immediately in connection with entities within the stream of experiences, 2) we directly know mental entities of conscious experiences rather than natural entities of the external world, although we believe otherwise, and 3) reduction is the way to obtain absolute certain knowledge about reality. The last suggestion indicates that our knowledge of our conscious entities is infallible, although it is contingent knowledge, which could possibly be fallible. For example, a thought that a sound heard is the internal *mental* entity is not justified because the introspective process is not reliable. Knowledge cannot be both infallible and fallible as this would be self-contradictory.

According to Husserl, phenomenology can begin only after the transcendental-phenomenological reduction (Schmitt, 1967: 238). However, this reduction cannot be what analytic philosophers have previously meant by a term “reduction.” This kind of a reduction can be defined as follows: questioning a thing A in such a way that A is reduced or changed to a simpler form B. For example, mathematics has tried to reduce to logic and mental states and their phenomenal properties to brain processes. Husserl's transcendental-phenomenological reduction does not mean this, but instead means excluding the natural world and obtaining knowledge about intentional objects in consciousness. According to Husserl, this means understanding that *what* one experiences is not the natural world and its real objects, but the experienced world and its particulars as they appear in one's conscious experience. This reduction means to study our inner phenomena from the I-perspective rather than seeming to study outer objective things themselves. Did phenomenological reduction influence Husserl's claims about the phenomena of experience?

The transcendental-phenomenological turn is turning away from an external world beyond phenomena. We then focus our attention on the entities that are experienced within our consciousness (Smith, 2008: 11). In *Ideas*, Husserl admitted a dualist world-view: a realm of consciousness and the external natural world. However, his “bracketing the world as ‘the world’” and “the change of attitude

from ‘the natural standpoint to the phenomenological one’” may influence how he described, interpreted and understood the sensible phenomena. Conceptualizing perception in Husserl’s way is influenced by philosophical ideas because without these ideas conceptualizing in such a way is impossible. Indeed, Husserl’s philosophical discourse is so abstract that it is in a philosophical tradition context.

4. Sartre’s Identification of Absolute Reality with Relative Appearance

To my knowledge, there are no studies of how Sartre conceptualizes perception from the traditional epistemological point of view. Instead, his affection for direct realism has been emphasized (McCulloch, 1992: 456–457). At the beginning of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre tries to disprove the dualist appearance/reality distinction that occurs when phenomenology is understood as purely a study of phenomena. The distinction means that the phenomena that are bare inner appearances differ from external reality. For example, I can directly know a rustle sound that I hear now, but I cannot be aware of the real things that cause it to enter my consciousness. Nevertheless, if the phenomenon is the real thing, then we cannot mistake what appears to us. Therefore, Sartre says that if we know what appears to us, we know real things themselves, not things-as-they-appear in one’s subjective experience and experienced from a first person point of view. For example I could discover nothing but that a black shape experience is a black bicycle. According to Sartre, we can obtain infallible knowledge of an external world. Personal perception is directed toward a real existence without supposed sensory content or a separate level of appearance. On the other hand, what are Sartre’s reasons for arguing that there is no separate level of appearance between a subject-in-itself and an object-in-itself? He did not form this argument that there is no distinction between appearance and reality simply *through guesswork*, and even without this distinction he would still experience something before he knows what it is.

Sartre claims that the appearance itself is the real being because there is nothing behind the appearance that is present to us. That is why, according to him, the dualism of the appearance/reality distinction must be negated. For example, Sartre would argue that the appearance of something being black and the appearance of it being a certain shape are united with each other, and these appearances are the thing itself. He states that they do not hide from sight the true nature of the bicycle (Sartre, 1943/2003: 1). He claims that the appearance indicates only itself. His belief that phenomena are the real thing is based on perceptual experience and its reliability. He also states that:

The appearances which manifest the existent are neither interior nor exterior; they are all equal, they all refer to other appearances, and none of them is privileged (Sartre, 1943/2003: 1).

He uses the example of force, which is not an *unknown* thing that is located behind its effects, but rather “the totality of these effects” (Sartre, 1943/2003: 1). In the same way, it is possible to say that perception is nothing but a brain process in a

sensory nerve and a certain part of the cortex, and table an aggregate of atoms. Nevertheless, this analogy is refuted in the case of an appearance if the real existent *causes* a specific appearance in the observer to whom the inner phenomenon appears. If the appearance of a bicycle is located in the brain, then a real bicycle is absolutely distinct from the appearance. But Sartre argues that the real thing is not within the consciousness (Sartre, 1943/2003: 7).

He presents an argument for a claim that the appearance of a phenomenon does not refer to any being other than it is. His words may be put as follows. There are no two distinct entities but the appearance is the real thing because: 1) there is nothing behind the appearance, and 2) it indicates only itself (Sartre, 1943/2003: 4). Sartre claims that we can describe what appears before our minds because we can speak of it. Nevertheless, a question arises: is our description true? That is similar to another question about whether we discover the nature of a being that appears to us. For example, do we know the true nature of this color of experience that appears black, and how do we know it? It, the blackness, is focused upon by our consciousness because we are aware of its presence. According to Sartre, being aware of something yields to knowing it: one knows something is present.

Sartre eliminates the dualism of the appearance and the absolute being. It is hard to recognize reasons for this conclusion in *Being and Nothingness*. He insists that there is nothing behind appearance. He infers *from what it appears to himself that it is an appearance*. According to him, this means that the appearance is a real entity; the real entity is a phenomenon; and then the appearance is a phenomenon. This argument, for him, replaces the dualism of being and its appearance (Sartre, 1943/2003: 1–4, 6). He writes:

But if we once get away from what Nietzsche called ‘the illusion of worlds-behind-the-scene,’ and if we no longer believe in the being-behind-the-appearance, then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an ‘appearing’ which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it. For the being of an existent is exactly what it *appears*. Thus we arrive at the idea of the *phenomenon* such as we can find, for example in the ‘phenomenology’ of Husserl or of Heidegger – the phenomenon or the relative-absolute. Relative the phenomenon remains, for ‘to appear’ supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear (Sartre, 1943/2003: 2).

What *causes* something to appear to a subject? Sartre’s conception of appearance seems to be uncaused. It is not under causality. According to Sartre, an appearance does not have causes that realize it, since he equates it with the real being. I would say, however, that the appearance has an event-like nature that entails causes. That is, if “to appear” means “something appears to somebody,” then why would this “appearing” *not* mean “something occurs to somebody when a phenomenon comes into existence or arises in experience”?

For Sartre when an absolute being, such as a butterfly, is an appearance, and thus what it appears to be to somebody is identical with the phenomenon and the appearance, i.e. the butterfly is an appearance, the appearance simply exists. Nothing

external to the appearance of a butterfly causes it to exist for “somebody to whom to appear.” It exists by itself. Sartre does not mention in *Being and Nothingness* why something starts to appear or appears to someone. To my mind, Sartre’s meaning of “appearance” is insufficient. But how then does Sartre discover what an appearance is?

Because Sartre rejects the idea of a distinction between appearance and an external object, he says that he discovers what appears to him. A real bicycle, not a visual phenomenon, appears to him. He knows this because a bicycle appears, and therefore the idea of a real *x* behind the appearance of a bicycle is a fallacy. He directly knows a sight that appears to him and a sound that is heard, and he knows that sight is a bicycle and that sound is a bell ringing. For Sartre, these sights and sounds are beings of knowledge, not knowledge as such (Sartre, 1943/2003: 6–7). According to him, they are the same as our knowledge of them because our consciousnesses are directed towards them: “...all knowing consciousness can be knowledge only of its object” (Sartre 1943/2003: 8).

Sartre’s argument for knowledge about appearance may be put as follows (Sartre, 1943/2003: 8).

- 1) If I am conscious of being conscious of the *x*-appearance, then I know the nature of the *x*-appearance.
- 2) I am conscious of being conscious of the light-appearance.
- 3) Therefore, I know the nature of the light-appearance.
- 4) Therefore, I know that the light-appearance is artificial light of a lamp, not natural light.

For Sartre, consciousness is the foundation of knowledge: consciousness is a thing to which all other appearances appear, “the absolute in relation to which every phenomenon is relative” (Sartre, 1943/2003: 13). However, a thing’s appearance as an object is not within consciousness. For example, according to Sartre, a table that reflects light waves is in space, beside the window (Sartre, 1943/2003: 7). In fact his definition of “knowledge” seems really to be “consciousness of being consciousness of something,” of the phenomenon behind which a real thing does not hide (Sartre, 1943/2003: 8–10). The object, a bicycle in consciousness, determines knowledge of what is perceived to exist in the world. For Sartre (1943/2003: 9), the property of black shape appears to my consciousness as a property that exists in the world. But can *consciousness* be evidence for knowledge of reality? Sartre argues that this is the case.

He uses Husserl’s idea of “the phenomenological reduction” in his own way: the existent reduces to the appearance (Sartre, 1943/2003: 2, 4). If, by “reduction,” Husserl means “suspension,” Sartre uses “reduction” to mean “identification,” “if we no longer believe in the being-behind-the-appearance” (Sartre, 1943/2003: 2). Sartre’s view is unconvincing: if there is no appearance of a butterfly, there is no a butterfly. This is Sartre’s inference, which follows from the reduction of real existence to appearance. The question “Is an appearance experienced by a subject located in the external material world?” is fundamental because it has been always

thought that appearance is in the mind and is not in itself real (compare space-location, for example, with the views of Sextus Empiricus, Berkeley, and Kant). Sensible qualities of experience, sounds, colors and shapes, appear to a subject. The planets Mars and Venus exist in space without a subject. However, these sensible light points of experience in the black background do not *appear* without a subject where their appearances arise in the night sky. Furthermore, the subject will not perceive Mars and Venus from the group of lights points of experience if she has no background knowledge in order to look in the right direction. In sum, despite Sartre's claims, existence is not always reduced to appearance.

According to Sartre, however, one perceives these appearances as existing, and nothing absolute exists behind them:

It seems that we have arrived at the goal of our inquiry. We have reduced things to the united totality of their appearances, and we have established that these appearances lay claim to a being which is no longer itself appearance. The '*percipi*' referred us to a *percipiens*, the being of which has been revealed to us as consciousness. Thus we have attained the ontological foundation of knowledge, the first being to whom all other appearances appear, the absolute in relation to which every phenomenon is relative (Sartre, 1943/2003: 13).

This means that *consciousness* has become the absolute that perceives appearances. Sartre bases this "knowledge" on imagination. It is impossible to hold a reliable belief that *consciousness perceives* by means of external perception or introspection.

One essential argument of phenomenology seems to be:

1. One is conscious of something, x.
2. Therefore, one knows something, x.

However, the conclusion does not follow from the premise. The argument is invalid. That is, it is possible that the two statements "One is conscious of something, x, and one knows something, x" are untrue when occurring together, as the former could be true while the latter is untrue. For example, although Sartre would be conscious of a *sensible quality of redness*, it is certain that he does not know what *sensible redness* is. He does not know *its nature* because the colors may be physical events themselves. He knows the red color sensation, the existence of which is the object of his conscious experience. The general reason for the claim that one can decide to know the colors is *perception*. The argument is as follows: "Because I perceive them, I know that colors are the qualities of real things." Nevertheless, the argument seems slightly circular, since one has to assume that the immediate objects of perception are real when giving a reason "I perceive them." "Them" in the proof means real things that are neither simply apparent nor false.

Although perception does not reveal how it occurs in itself, it is, after all, ready to non-verbally vindicate that the objects are directly and immediately disclosed in the world and that the immediate objects of perception are located in the world. For Sartre, the brain and the sense organs are not necessary in the meaning of "perception," but in truth they are necessary.

Sartre's *knowledge-claim* is a belief in the real bicycle, which is not a false or apparent picture in the visual field. That belief is a contingent knowledge: his description can be true or it can be untrue. Sartre's *justification* of knowledge relates to being conscious of something. For example, he says that "consciousness implies in its being a non-conscious and transphenomenal being" (Sartre, 1943/2003: 18). This objective phenomenon "gives itself as already existing when consciousness reveals it" (Sartre, 1943/2003: 18). In the same way, consciousness implies "a being other than itself" (Sartre, 1943/2003: 18). So Sartre claims that he knows what kind of beings his consciousness discloses: "It is the being of this table, of this package of tobacco, of the lamp, more generally the being of the world which is implied by consciousness" (Sartre, 1943/2003: 18). He continues that these things are "immediately disclosed to consciousness" (Sartre, 1943/2003: 19).

Sartre's *criterion* for knowing what is perceived is the denial of the distinction between appearance and reality. According to Sartre, we do not perceive an apparent sensory entity behind which the real bicycle exists. Sartre argues that, because the distinction between appearance and reality is false, something of which one is conscious must be a real being in space next to the perceiver. This evidence available to Sartre is not sufficient to justify the beliefs that he holds. His belief "Something of which one is conscious must be a real being" is based on the denial of the being-behind-the-appearance. Background metaphysical beliefs influence Sartre's perceptual belief, although this belief is grounded in being conscious of something and the denial of the distinction between appearance and reality.

Many phenomenologists and existential philosophers have described a human person as having some kind of a basic holistic state during his or her lifetime that embodies or illustrates his or her existence in the world. Such a general mental feeling, or a way of being in life, has been exemplified with "nausea" by Sartre, "care" by Heidegger and "anguish" by Kierkegaard. For example, "I have far-reaching nausea about my future existence" would mean living my life in a continuing mental state that lasts. Nausea has possessed my mind and disturbs me all the time. According to Sartre, I know that I suffer nausea because I am conscious of my state, not another person's state. If such a mental state occurs and remains over time, it must have causes that realize it. Otherwise, mental pain or *anguish* exists only when one is conscious of it, and thus it is produced by one's consciousness. More generally, this would mean that phenomena exist at random somewhere in a human person's unconscious, and that he or she becomes conscious of them. In Sartre's argument, nothing has caused these phenomena. But this argument does not reflect general truth: mental pains do not simply exist externally of causality. An experience of mental feelings may be caused by the brain state *and* certain social conditions.

In the same way, perception does not exist because of the presentation of the real bodies. It requires energy that causes changes in the qualities of a *human person* or an *animal*. We do know *the change* of things in sense experiences. I am justified in believing that things of the sense experience change because its

presence on the visual field causes my belief. However, the presence of objects of experience does not cause the true belief that an object *must* be real. Metaphysical presuppositions influence this belief formation. I conclude that Sartre's perception-based claims are influenced by the philosophy because otherwise he would not have been able to make arguments like above from perception phenomena. Sartre's discourse is not unbiased.

5. Perceptual Knowledge Influenced by Background Philosophies

I will finally discuss in this paper whether the examination of Husserl's and Sartre's views would justify the idea that their philosophies affect what they think of the experience of the objects. My point is that the object of experience should be distinguished by what belongs to the experience and what the perceiver thinks about the experience. Husserl seems to distinguish things as they appear in experience from things as they are independent of the observer, whereas Sartre equates the two. That is, Sartre reduces things as they are to things as they appear to the observer. How do people then discover *what* they experience? The idea of experience naming *perception* cannot be a sufficient answer because, according to Sartre, people form their knowledge claims by perception. The following two judgments are contradictory and cannot both be true: 1) experienced things are not the real things; and 2) experienced things are nothing but the real things. Perceptual experience itself does not show which judgment is true. Is it then possible that a theory or a philosophy can influence how a person interprets what she is perceiving? If the scientific background presuppositions influence knowledge based on perception and perceptual beliefs, then underlying philosophical ideas and beliefs also influence them. Therefore, the perceived phenomena do not cause the correct observation belief. In philosophy of perception, in the 20th century, there has been a transition from one philosophical framework to another, meaning from the sense datum view of perception to the object view. Following Kuhn's words, why would these different philosophies not transform perception and philosophers' interpretations of what they are perceiving?

Everyday life shows that people's claims about the objects of perception do not always correspond with the perceivable world. People's talk is full of value judgments, political and abstract concepts. Philosophers do not make an exception. The observation reports are influenced by both background beliefs and traditions, not just a perception. Let me put it this way. After starting to experience a thing, person 1 may recognize it as p, whereas person 2 recognizes it as q. The first person's recognition, p, occurs within a certain system of concepts, A, and the second person's recognition, q, occurs within a different system of concepts, B. This would mean as follows.

- i) One examines x from point of view Y; therefore, one perceives x as p.
- ii) Therefore, the examination from the point of view Y influences how one perceives x.

Now let us consider a few examples of this.

First, something happens in a country. The average Finn recognizes the happening in experience as being civil unrest. The human rights activist recognizes it as a justified democratic rising. The Machiavellian political analyst recognizes it as a clear coup d'état. The authoritarian president recognizes it as a terrorist act against the people. In sum, the same thing of experience appears to these four persons but they lead to different conclusions from the perception.

Second, as I mentioned earlier, Paul M. Churchland's example may clarify the meaning of perception-in-a-conceptual-framework. There is a person who suffers mental illness who is "engaged in incoherent, paranoid, or even murderous behavior," describes Churchland (1984: 44). This is an observable phenomenon that may be called by the name "psychosis." A person suffering from psychosis was seen by ancient and medieval people as a witch and a case of demonic possession. The existence of witches was not a controversial belief for them. A belief-system involving witches and demons made them think that they were simply seeing with their own eyes that a person was a witch. A modern human person claims to know that they have perceived something else: a person who has psychiatric problems. A modern person simply perceives the phenomenon in a distinct conceptual framework that affects interpretation when observing something (Churchland, 1984: 44, 47–8).

Third, why would philosophical theories *not* influence what philosophers "know" when they are perceiving? Imagine an entity visually appears in front of a philosopher. For Berkeley, a set of propositions and assumptions of Idealism stored in the memory would enable him to see perceived objects as visual ideas existing in mind. These ideas include, for example, the color yellow, a round contour, and an aspect of a building. Berkeley would argue that these ideas did not include sensation, perception and belief, which are mental acts produced by a subject. For Kant, however, a set of propositions and assumptions of Transcendental Idealist thought would enable him to see perceived objects as copies of archetypes called "things in themselves." These "things in themselves" cause mental representations, which then appear to the subject. For Husserl, a set of propositions and assumptions of Phenomenology would make him see conscious objects in his world of experience, relative to him. His philosophical attitude towards the objects of the world is based on personal experience. Finally, Sartre's refutation of the distinction between appearance and reality would lead him to decide that he "knows" that the perceptual appearances are "what they really are": they are real existents, not mental items in his mind. Sartre claims that he sees the real nature of beings that visually appear to him.

In every case above, the same sensible object would be used to justify these philosophers' claims about what they perceive. That is to say, they believe that they know the nature of a particular perceptual object. Their cognitive criterion for deciding that they know something seems to be "whatever appears to us in experience make our claim p evident to us about that object." However, what they claim to know when something appears to them in experience leads to distinct

claims that they make. Their experiences do not make their beliefs true. Therefore, the perceived phenomena do not cause the correct belief because the same phenomenon that p causes distinct beliefs about the phenomenon. What they claim to experience is not part of the experience. What is in the experience and what these philosophers think about the experience differ from each other.

Finally, perception does not give justified thoughts about language if a perceiver does not know the language he or she interprets. For example, using perception to seek knowledge from the Internet depends on the background information of the observers. A person who has a loose definition of “knowledge” and no criteria for “a thing” constituting knowledge *perceives* raw digital data of experience on an Internet site as “knowledge” without hesitation. He does not recognize the difference between reliable knowledge and poor opinion. He finds much “knowledge” if he knows the language. Perception in a conceptual framework affects how much information one receives when searching for evidence for the existence of the reality. For example, I can accurately state regarding language perception that if one does not know French, one will not gain much information from the French sites on the World Wide Web *by means of experience*. Recognition of the content of the Internet as knowledge requires a general understanding of this thing called “knowledge.” But people seem to refer to any content that they share and use on the Internet as knowledge. A person’s experience is of the Internet and language. However, the essential concern is with how the Internet and language are meant by experiencing them. What concepts he uses affects how he interprets the meanings phenomena have for him in a cultural context. How he conceptualizes the Internet sites and their content defines their *meaning* in his current experience. The given language in perception does not mean much if the perceiver is not part of the language community.

As an objection, it can be argued that empirical words and propositions are derived directly from perceptual experience without the influence of theories, philosophies or background assumptions. The words “blueness,” “green,” “bluebird,” “bird,” “wings,” and “head” as examples can be derived from the male bluebird. My reply is that perceptual experience does not justify conflicting thoughts of philosophers: the empirical object is the same, but philosophers use different words. Moreover, one’s language can influence how one thinks and perceives the world, which is the Whorfian hypothesis (Whorf, 1956). There is much new evidence regarding the effects of language on thought in psycholinguistics. For example, cross-linguistic differences have been found in many of the most fundamental domains of *thought* including color perception, object categories, conceptions of shape, substance, events, and people’s representations of motion, space, causality, time, and number (Boroditsky, 2012: 618). Some languages do not have a color word for blue: some distinguish only between dark and light; some have a color word that includes both blue and green, and others would require one to specify necessarily whether the house was dark blue or light blue (Boroditsky, 2012: 615, 620–621). Can language play a role in even such low-level perceptual decisions as

judging whether two squares of color are exactly the same? Boroditsky answers the question that at least sometimes the language plays a role:

To test whether differences in color language lead to differences in color perception, cognitive scientists compared Russian and English speakers' ability to discriminate shades of blue. In Russian there is no single word that covers all the colors that English speakers call 'blue.' Russian makes an obligatory distinction between light blue (*goluboy*) and dark blue (*siniy*). Does this distinction mean that *siniy* blues look more different from *goluboy* blues to Russian speakers? Indeed, the data say yes. Russian speakers are quicker to distinguish two shades of blue that are called by the different names in Russian (i.e., one being *siniy* and the other being *goluboy*) than if the two fall into the same category. For English speakers, all these shades are still designated by the same word, 'blue,' and there are no comparable differences in reaction time. Further, the Russian advantage disappears when subjects are asked to perform a verbal interference task (reciting a string of digits) while making color judgments but not when they are asked to perform an equally difficult spatial interference task (keeping a novel visual pattern in memory). The disappearance of the advantage when performing a verbal task shows that language is normally involved in even surprisingly basic perceptual judgments – and that it is language per se that creates this difference in perception between Russian and English speakers. When Russian speakers are blocked from their normal access to language by a verbal interference task, the differences between Russian and English speakers disappear (Boroditsky, 2009).

These results demonstrate that language is involved in even basic perceptual judgments (Boroditsky, 2009; Boroditsky, 2012: 620–621; Winawer et al., 2007). It seems then that language affects at least what the perceiver thinks of her perceptions. The members of universalist school of thought, like Pinker, Fodor and Pylyshyn, oppose this type of linguistic relativity, the claim that language affects thinking. Thought would be independent of language. Fodor and Pylyshyn, for example, argue that forms of speech inherit their semantic contents from the concepts and thoughts that they express; not vice versa. For example, you can speak about cats because "cat" refers to cats. Moreover, another argument against "language before learning" is that language learning takes a lot of thinking on the part of the learner. So, if you have to be able to talk before one is able to think, it follows that one cannot learn a first language. However, many children do so. Therefore, conclude Fodor and Pylyshyn, thought comes first and language follows after. In contrary to Boroditsky, one cannot learn or speak a language, including a first language unless one can already think (Fodor and Pylyshyn, 2015). They also argue against the Empiricists that early stages of perceptual processing provide canonical representations of sensory properties of things-in-the-world. A process of conceptualization then pairs such canonical sensory representations with perceptual beliefs: causal interactions with things in the world give rise to sensory representations, and sensory representations give rise to perceptual beliefs (Fodor and Pylyshyn, 2015). Firstly, I consider that Boroditsky's studies provide more empirical evidence than

that of Fodor and Pylyshyn. Fodor and Pylyshyn's work is theoretical and philosophical of how external objects cause mental representations in mind and of how a reference relation occurs between mental representations and the things-in-the-world. This does not, however, undo a possibility that different languages affect beliefs based on mental representations. In fact, I believe that Boroditsky agrees with Fodor and Pylyshyn in a sense that though comes first in language learning. Secondly, and this is more important, even if causal interactions with things in the world give rise to sensory representations, sensory representations may give rise to many conflicting perceptual beliefs, which can be verified every day by listening to people. For example, Husserl and Sartre certainly perceived the same objects, but their perceptual beliefs were conflicting. Husserl and Sartre expressed their perceptual beliefs under different philosophies, like Fodor and Pylyshyn express their claims under a theory. In this way perceptual beliefs and thoughts can be philosophy-laden, although early stages of perceptual processing are not philosophical. Observers can use what words they want, and yet those words do not have empirical content. In conclusion, my argument is as follows: if perception does not justify philosophers' conflicting thoughts of the object of perception, then philosophers' philosophies influence these thoughts; perception does not justify philosophers' conflicting thoughts of the object of perception; therefore, philosophers' philosophies influence these thoughts. In fact, background theories and philosophies explain the difference of thoughts. However, perception seems to be independent of thought. To sum up, philosophers' philosophies have influenced how they have conceptualized perceptions. This is a reason why Husserl's and Sartre's claims of the object of perception are contradictory.

The examples above justify the claim that philosophies and world views about the nature of reality influence perception-based reports. In sum, the philosophy-ladenness of perception is as likely a phenomenon as the theory-ladenness of perception, even though the philosophy-ladenness of perception would not imply the influence of philosophies on perception. Philosophical discourse is not based on perceptions.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that perceptual knowledge is not free from a conceptual framework under which a human perceiver claims to know the nature of a sensible object of experience. Philosophies can influence philosophers' belief-formation in perceiving because what they say that they perceive changes so much from one philosopher to another. One thing is certain. Sartre does not start knowing the world of perception in general and an object that is being perceived in particular simply by refuting a metaphysical principle. Rather, there is too much divergence in different people's claims about what a sense experience presents to them for this to be the case. This thesis clearly contradicts Sartre's view of phenomenology and the notion of direct realism about what is claimed to be perceived.

Western philosophers' different sayings about one and the same phenomenon cannot be all true. I do not understand how continental and analytic philosophers' different claims about knowing the perceptual phenomenon can be explained if not through their different philosophies. They can be said to perceive the same phenomenon. Husserl and Sartre perceive the same phenomenon or object but their claims differ from each other. Therefore, they cannot both know the phenomenon. Now we know that their different conceptual perspectives *explain* why they have different claims about the same perceptual phenomenon. Husserl says to know that the phenomenon directly perceived is a conscious object and Sartre that it is a real thing. Thus, we can see that they must have different metaphysical presuppositions. This conclusion means that perception does not justify claims of what is a perceptual phenomenon, but claims derived from perception are philosophy-laden. Transitions from philosophical traditions to others affect the philosophical claims about the perceptual phenomenon. This conclusion also questions the objectivity of a philosophical language about perception. The philosophical language of perception is not neutral, but is determined by the abstract language of philosophies. To avoid mistakes, we should not follow one of the philosophical traditions.

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