

An Introduction to Subjective Facts:

Readings in *From Brain to Cosmos*

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Abstract

This collection serves as an introduction to the concept of subjective fact, which plays a central role in some of the author's philosophical writings. The collection contains two book chapters and a paper. The first chapter (Chapter 2 of *From Brain to Cosmos*) begins with an informal characterization of the concept of subjective fact. Then it fleshes out this concept with examples, gives a more precise characterization, and addresses some potential weaknesses of the concept. This chapter shows how subjective fact is related to key ideas in the philosophy of mind, such as intentionality. The second chapter (Chapter 3) is a detailed study of the concept of “instance of seeming” that was introduced in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 ends with some remarks on the modal logic of subjective facts. The paper, also by the book’s author, answers some potential questions about the ideas in the two included chapters.

For more information about the author’s book *From Brain to Cosmos*, or to learn where to obtain other chapters of the book, please consult the last page of this document.

Chapter 2

Into the Subjective World

The project of this book, as described in the last chapter, requires us to focus upon one particular feature of consciousness. This feature is the one we call the way things seem. In this chapter, I will introduce a set of concepts for the description of the ways things seem to conscious observers. These concepts will let us begin the first part of this book's project — the deductive transition from experience to world.

The Many Meanings of "Seem"

Before beginning my remarks on the way things seem, I should clarify what I mean by the phrase "the way things seem," and in particular by the word "seem." At this stage of my project, I have no need for rigorous definitions of these terms, nor am I able to supply such definitions in any noncircular manner. Instead, I will assume that the reader is familiar with the ordinary usage of the verb "to seem."

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The meaning of "to seem" requires some clarification, for in ordinary usage this verb has several distinct senses. I will use "to seem" in one specific sense: the sense which embodies what one ordinarily calls awareness or experience. Here are some examples of uses of "seem" which reflect this usage of the word:

If a square green object drifts into your field of vision, then it *seems* to you that there is a square green object.

If you just heard a brief loud noise, then it *seems* to you that a loud noise occurred.

If I feel cold, then it *seems* to me that it is cold.

If you are thinking about philosophy, and suddenly realize that you are thinking, then it *seems* to you that you are thinking.

If I have just finished turning around rapidly for a few minutes, then it *seems* to me that my surroundings are turning — even though I know that they really are not.

If I look out the window at a gray, darkening sky, and I get a vaguely ominous feeling from this sight, then the gray sky seems somehow ominous to me — even if I know that it really is not a threat to me at all.

If I have a hallucination of a green dragon, then it *seems*

to me that there is a green dragon — even though there really is no green dragon.

In all of these examples, the word "seem" is used to indicate what someone's surroundings are experienced to be like, or (what is the same) to the appearance or feel of things. We might call this sense of "to seem" the *consciousness sense* — the meaning of "to seem" which you use when you talk about how your world appears or feels to you.¹ The consciousness sense of "to seem" is not the only meaning which this verb can have. "To seem" often is used in a way which expresses *belief* rather than consciousness or experience. For example, if I say "It seems to me that George will win the election," I probably mean much the same thing as when I say "I believe that George will win the election." (Perhaps I also am trying to indicate that this belief is rather tentative.) In this case, "It seems to me that George will win the election" does not mean that I really am *experiencing* George's future electoral victory. I do not have *any* sort of experience of this victory, for the victory still is in the future (and may never even happen). George's victory, or the fact that George wins at some future time, simply is not part of what the world appears like to me now.

One can think of other uses of "to seem" which point to meanings other than that of awareness or experience as such. I will get back to some of these uses later. For our present purposes, the only important sense of "to seem" is the consciousness sense.

By marking off the consciousness sense of "to seem"

from other senses, I am not suggesting that the consciousness sense of "to seem" is free of vagueness or ambiguity. Later in this book, I will bring up an argument from the philosophy of mind which suggests that the consciousness sense of "to seem" contains some irreducible vagueness. But this argument, even if right, is no threat to the project of this book. My characterization of this consciousness sense of "seem" is precise enough for my present purposes.

Throughout the book, when I use the phrase "facts about how things seem" and its variants, I will mean facts about how things seem, with "seem" given its consciousness sense.

Note that my use of the word "things" in "how things seem" is not meant to restrict the subject matter to the appearances of *things*, like tables, chairs or stones. My intended meaning is more general: "how things seem to you" means how your surroundings in general seem to you, or (to borrow a phrase of Nagel's) "what it is like *for*" you.² Perhaps the more colloquial expression "how it seems" would be less misleading than "how things seem," though even the former locution is somewhat misleading (there is no "it," or entity, which seems that way). But I will stick with "how things seem" for want of a better phrase.

Instances of Seeming

For any conscious being, there are facts about how things seem to that being. Things may seem different ways to a conscious being at different times. The existence of a way things seem is not the only interesting or important feature of consciousness, but it is the one which will most concern us in this book. Our project requires us to think about how things seem to various conscious observers, and to use this information to try to find out something about the nature of reality.

The project which we are undertaking requires us to construct arguments whose premises include facts about how things seem. To do this, we must be able to express, in some suitable language, various facts about how things seem. At first sight this appears easy to do: to state a fact about how things seem, one simply takes a statement and prefixes the phrase "It seems that" (or some equivalent thereof) to the statement. For example: "It seems that there is a dog coming through the door." "It seems that the sky is blue."

Unfortunately, statements like these leave out some essential information about the way things seem. This omission occurs because of a peculiar property of facts about how things seem — a property which I will now explore.³

Suppose that I am trying to describe my experience, and I utter the sentence "It seems like there is some red there."

Later on, I am trying to describe a new experience, and I utter the sentence "It doesn't seem like there is any red there." Of course, these two sentences do not contradict one another, as they might appear to do if taken out of context. Why not? The answer, of course, is that the two sentences were uttered at two different times. Or, one might say instead, because the two sentences pertained to two different *instances*, or examples, of seeming: the appearance of my surroundings to me in one instance, and the appearance of my surroundings to me later on.

Now suppose that I again utter, in all sincerity, "It seems like there is some red there." Simultaneously, you utter "It doesn't seem like there is any red there." Do these two statements describe a contradictory situation? Obviously not. The two sentences were uttered by different conscious subjects, and hence pertain to two different points of view. Or, one might say instead, the two sentences pertain to different *instances*, or examples, of seeming: the appearance of things to me now, and the appearance of things to you now.

These two excessively simple examples illustrate a fundamental logical property of seeming which is almost too obvious to notice: namely, that *seeming has instances*. Things do not merely seem such-and-such a way; rather, they seem such-and-such a way in this or that *instance*, or *occurrence*, of seeming. My perceiving red, my failing to perceive red, and your failing to perceive red occurred in three distinct instances of seeming. In one of these instances, it was the case that there seems to be some red. In

the other two instances, this was not the case. In general, there are many different occasions on which things seem to be certain ways. The way things seem on one of these occasions does not have to cohere with the way things seem on another such occasion.

To construct adequate descriptions of how things seem, we need to be able to talk about how things seem in different instances. It is not enough merely to say "It seems that P," where P is some statement. If we only say this much, then we have not said all we can say about the instance of seeming in question. In either of the "red" examples above, if we tried to describe how things seem without worrying about which instance was involved, we would get something like this: "It seems that there is some red there. It does not seem that there is some red there." Since the situations described were not contradictory, it is clear that something is missing from the description.

It is possible, of course, to fill out descriptions of how things seem by indexing them with an observer and a time: "It seems to me now that there is some red there." "It seems to Henry at 12 noon that there is a dog coming in the door." This familiar device allows us to specify in what instance things seem a certain way. However, these sentences have a serious flaw: they are not simply sentences about how things seem. Instead, they also convey information about how things really are, apart from how things seem. When I say "It seems to Henry at noon that there is a dog coming in the door," I am saying that a conscious subject (Henry) has a certain kind of subjective experience at a certain time

(noon). Such a sentence cannot be true unless the subject exists at the stated time: if there is no Henry, then it cannot seem to Henry that there is a dog coming in the door, and if there is no time called "noon," then nothing can seem like anything to anyone at noon. Thus, the sentence "It seems to Henry at noon that there is a dog coming in the door" cannot be true unless there is a conscious subject and a time — provided that we take that sentence literally. We may know for certain that Henry exists and that there is such a time as noon, but we do not want to assert these facts when we are trying to assert a sentence that expresses *only* a fact about how things seem.

A better way to bring instances of seeming into our language is simply to talk about the instances of seeming themselves. Suppose that I want to say that things seem a certain way to me now. The way things seem to me now is the way things seem in a certain instance. I can refer to this instance of seeming — or, at least, I can perform a linguistic act which appears, at first glance, to be one of reference, specifically of reference to an instance of seeming. I can assign the instance of seeming a symbol, say "x," which I use to refer to that instance — or at least to perform the linguistic act of apparent reference which I just mentioned. Hence instead of saying something like "It seems to me now that P," I could say this: "In instance x, it seems that P." This sentence is intelligible regardless of whether or not "x" actually refers.

At first glance, this trick might appear to involve reference to real items — entities called "instances of

seeming" — and hence to go beyond the description of how things seem. A little reflection shows that this is not a problem, for two reasons. First, it is possible to read the sentence "In instance x, it seems that P" in such a way that "x" does not refer. I will have more to say about this possibility later. Second, even if one thinks that "x" does refer, such reference does not commit one to anything beyond the facts about how things seem. An instance of seeming is nothing more than a particular occasion or example of how things seem. Hence to say that there is an instance of seeming is to say nothing more than that things seem some way. When we assert that there are instances of seeming, we really are asserting nothing more than we do when we assert that things seem some way or other. We are not asserting the existence of some extra objects called "instances of seeming" in addition to the facts about how things seem.⁴ An instance of seeming is not a separate entity, above and beyond all facts about how things seem. Rather, it is a feature of those facts. We can talk about instances of seeming, give them "names," and even reason about them without assuming anything worse than the view that things can seem different ways on different occasions. (Whether we legitimately can quantify over instances of seeming is a question I will take up later.)

Aside from the above remarks and some notes later on, I will not discuss the semantics of the symbols used to refer to instances of seeming. The semantics of such symbols must be very similar to the semantics of natural-language expressions like "the instance of seeming in which it seemed

that the clock struck 12" — expressions which, on their face, appear to refer to single instances of seeming. Since these expressions make sense, it follows that artificial expressions which perform the same function (such as the "x" introduced two paragraphs ago) make sense also. A philosopher of language might try to pin down the semantics further, perhaps asking first whether the relation between an expression of this sort and an instance of seeming is really an example of reference. Since such questions are not vital to my project, I will avoid them here. To try to preserve neutrality on such questions, I will call the expressions in question *tags* instead of names.

It is characteristic of facts about how things seem that any such fact belongs to an instance of seeming. At least this is true of all such facts of which I know. For our present purposes, we are safe in assuming that it is true for all facts about how things seem, period. The following argument shows why. Suppose — just for the sake of argument — that there were some facts about how things seem which did not belong to any instance of seeming. Then we could invent one fictitious instance of seeming for each such fact, and say that each such fact belongs to its own instance of seeming. For fact P, say, we introduce a term " x_P ," and stipulate that "P seems to be the case in instance x_P " is true. All we are doing is adding several new symbols to our language, and deciding to use them in a certain way. Having done this, we can ask whether there really are instance of seeming of which the new symbols, " x_P " and the like, are

tags. We quickly find that we can make a case for the existence of such instances, given that our other tags (the ones we had before we invented the new symbols) really are tags for instances of seeming. The sentence "there is an instance of seeming called ' x_P '" tells us nothing over and above the claim that certain facts about how things seem are the case — specifically, that it is the case that it seems that P. Thus, the claim that " x_P " is a tag of an instance of seeming is a claim of the same sort as a claim that any other putative tag of an instance of seeming really is such a tag. We cannot be wrong in making such a claim if the appropriate facts about how things seem (in this case, just the fact P) really are the case, and if also we are using the putative tag in a certain way.

It is important to note that more than one fact may seem to be the case in the same instance of seeming. In a particular instance, it may seem that there is something pink and it also may seem that there is an elephant.

A Technical Note: Quantifying Over Instances

Earlier I mentioned the issue of quantification over instances of seeming. In this section I will show that one can quantify over instances of seeming without making any existential commitments other than those involved in asserting facts about how things seem. Some of my earlier statements may look more plausible in view of the conclusions of this section. Readers not deeply interested in

issues of existential commitment can skip this section without much loss of continuity.

Suppose that you want to assert that it seems that P. You know that it does not simply and unqualifiedly seem that P; instead, it seems that P in *this* instance. To state this last fact, you can invent a new phrase, "It x-seems that." Take "It x-seems that P" to mean that it seems that P in *this* particular instance — that is, in the instance in which you found it seemed that P. Now change "It x-seems that P" stylistically, to read "In instance x, it seems that P."

To quantify over instances of seeming, one can quantify over the x in sentences like this, giving the quantifiers their substitutional readings. The use of the substitutional reading here does not have to be defended on the grounds that the objectual reading would involve us in unwanted existential commitments.⁵ Rather, the substitutional reading of the quantifiers simply captures the intuitive idea of the existence of an instance of seeming better than does the objectual reading. An instance of seeming, I have said, is not an entity existing over and above the facts about how things seem. The sole condition for the existence of an instance of seeming is that things seem a certain way. If we give the quantifier the substitutional reading in "There exists an instance of seeming x such that..." then claims that instances of seeming exist will boil down to claims that certain facts about seeming are the case. This is precisely the outcome we want, since to say that there exists an instance of seeming is to say that things seem some way or other and nothing more.

Subjective Fact

Now that the concept of instance of seeming is in place, I can introduce another general concept which will play an important role throughout this book. This is the concept of *subjective fact*.

We have seen that any fact about how things seem is a fact about how things seem in a particular instance. Suppose that P is a statement describing how things seem, without reference to the instance of seeming involved. (To continue our earlier example, if Henry sees a dog come in the door, then P might be "A dog comes in the door.") Let x be a tag for an instance of seeming. Then we will say that the sentence

In instance x, it seems that P

is a *subjective-fact sentence*. We will call the fact expressed by this sentence — namely, the fact that in instance x, it seems that P — a *subjective fact*.

Facts and Abstract Objects: A Cautionary Note

By speaking here of facts and of subjective facts, I do not mean to commit myself to the existence of facts as abstract objects. Some philosophers⁶ have held that facts (or states of affairs) are among the real constituents of the world.

When I speak of facts, I am using that word in a prephilosophical sense: the same sense that a journalist or a physicist uses when speaking of "the facts." I do not believe that any of my talk about facts commits me to the existence of facts as abstract objects, for reasons detailed in the next two paragraphs.

It is possible to talk of "facts" without taking sides on the question of the reality of abstract objects. As a simple example, one can truthfully say "It is a fact that Fido is a dog" without believing in any abstract objects at all. In this example, the reference to facts clearly is redundant; the sentence is simply a paraphrase of "Fido is a dog." But in a less trivial example, one can say "The fact that Fido is a dog is a fact about Fido" without presupposing the existence of any abstract objects. One can, if one wishes, paraphrase away the reference to facts in this sentence in favor of a more nominalistic reference to sentences. But whether or not one uses such a paraphrase, one can simply read the sentence itself in a way which avoids commitments to facts. Dennett has pointed out⁷ that, although it is possible to talk sensibly about people's voices, the meaningfulness of such talk does not entail the existence of a special entity called a voice, above and beyond items like a person's vocal organs, sounds, and so forth. Read in this way, talk about voices becomes somewhat figurative. One can understand talk about *facts* in much the same way. It is possible for a journalist to have the facts about a traffic accident or an election, even if there are no abstract entities called facts.

When I speak of facts in this book — for example, when I

assert that there are facts about how things seem — my talk about facts may be understood in this noncommittal way. I am not claiming that there are facts *qua* abstract objects, or that there are not; this question is beyond the scope of this book. If the reader prefers, he or she can construe all my fact-talk realistically, and interpret it as discourse about entities called facts. But I am going to speak freely about facts without insisting on this interpretation, and will leave the question of the reality of facts wide open.

My decision to ignore the question of the ontological status of facts does *not* mean that I think this question is unimportant. I have made this decision because an answer to this question would have little or no bearing on the things I wish to do in this book.

The preceding remarks about fact-talk also are applicable, with appropriate changes, to my use of words which seem to denote abstract objects, such as "set," "class," and "property." I will use these words, but the reader is free to interpret them without the help of abstract objects if he or she so wishes. In this book, I do not wish to make any claims about the reality of abstract objects; hence any statement along the lines of "there is a property such that..." may be given either a nominalistic or a realistic reading at the reader's discretion. Hopefully all of my abstract-object statements can be handled this way. I think the problem of the ontological status of abstract objects is important, but I am not going to take it up in this book.

Subjective Fact Revisited

At times, I will use sentences of forms other than "In instance x, it seems that P" to express subjective facts. Often I will say instead that *P is the case for x*. This form is only a stylistic variant of "In instance x, it seems that P," yet it has a certain psychological advantage: it highlights an important characteristic of subjective facts. This characteristic is a parallel between the idea of *seeming* and that of *truth*. If something seems to an observer to be the case, then that something plays the role of a fact or truth in the observer's subjective "world." Such a fact embodies (in part) what the world is like for that subject — what is true *for that subject's awareness*, regardless of what (if anything) is true in reality.

Sometimes I will stretch this terminology even further, by saying that P is the case for S, where S is the conscious subject to whom the instance of seeming X belongs. This terminology will become more useful when I discuss conscious subjects in detail. So far, I have not explored the relationship between instances of seeming and conscious subjects. However, since it is intuitively clear that conscious subjects "have" instances of seeming, we can make intuitive sense of the locution "P is the case for subject S."

In a similar vein, when I speak of conscious subjects, I may sometimes speak of them as "having" instances of seeming, or I may speak of instances of seeming as "being

in" subjects. These ways of speaking have fairly clear intuitive meanings, even though I have not yet analyzed the notion of a conscious subject. To a conscious subject, things seem certain ways; hence that subject is associated in a certain manner with instances of seeming. Later on, I will develop an account of the relationship between a conscious subject and its instances of seeming.

All of the new locutions which I have introduced in this section are, at bottom, simply new ways of describing how things seem. The concept of subjective fact provides us with an idiom for the description of how things seem. All of these other locutions, such as "is the case for" and the like, are simply variations on this idiom, hopefully more intuitively appealing than the unadorned language of subjective fact.

Subjective Being

Another terminology which I will use on occasion is that of *subjective being*. Subjective being is a special case of subjective fact; it is defined in terms of subjective fact in the following manner.

Consider once again the locution "In instance x, it seems that P." In some cases, P will be a positive existential statement — a statement saying that there are objects of some sort. In this case, we will say that objects of that sort *exist for* x. (The notion of something being or existing "for" something is not new; neither are expressions like "exist for"

and "being for." These words and notions can be found in the writings of phenomenologists and Hegelians, but I am not committing myself to these lines of thought by using such words.⁸) Here is an example of the use of "exists for": If P is "There is an orange square," then we may say "An orange square exists for x." This latter sentence is just an equivalent of "In instance x, it seems that there is an orange square." As with subjective fact, I sometimes will stretch this terminology to make it applicable to subjects as well as to instances of seeming. Specifically, I may say that something exists for a *subject*, instead of for an instance of seeming which that subject has.

Like the idiom of subjective fact, the idiom of subjective being highlights the parallel between seeming and truth. If it seems to an observer that a thing of some kind exists, then a thing of that kind plays the role of an object or entity in the observer's subjective "world," even if there really are no things of that kind. Occasionally, when I need to distinguish real being from subjective being, I will refer to real being as objective being.

It is obvious, but still important to note, that "objects" which exist for an instance of seeming need not really exist at all. The fact that pink elephants exist for an instance of seeming does not imply that there are any pink elephants. Some philosophers have suggested that there are nonexistent objects as well as existent objects.⁹ The claim that pink elephants exist for an instance of seeming emphatically does not mean that there are pink elephants which are objects of any sort — existent or nonexistent. It only means that there

seem, in that instance, to be pink elephants. Whether there are nonexistent pink elephants is a question which I will leave open.

In many cases, when a fact is the case for an instance of seeming, this implies that there is something which exists for that instance. For example, if for instance *x* there is an orange square, then an orange square exists for *x*. However, it is possible for something to be the case for an instance of seeming, without anything existing *for* that instance. For an example of this, consider how it feels to be in a moderately hot place. When one is in such a place, there is a definite way that one's surroundings seem — yet this does not consist in an experience of any particular object. Moods provide still other examples of subjective fact without subjective being. When one is in a mood, the world just seems a certain way; there is no apparent object in whose perception the mood consists.

More Examples of Subjective Fact

Earlier in this chapter, I gave several examples to flesh out the consciousness sense of the verb "to seem." These were, in effect, examples of subjective fact. In this section I will present more examples of subjective fact. These examples will point up a number of interesting properties (some trivial, some not) of subjective fact.

In most of these examples, a situation is described in the language of seeming, then redescribed in the idiom of

subjective fact. The new description is parenthesized. In each sentence, the symbol "x" is a tag for the instance of seeming to which the subjective fact belongs.

Two ordinary examples of subjective fact:

(1) It seems to me now that there is a rectangular thing in front of me. (In the instance x, it seems that there is a rectangular thing in front of me.)

(2) It seems to me that there is a letter *e* in front of me. (In the instance x, it seems that there is a letter *e* in front of me.)

Example (1) illustrates an obvious principle: the fact that such-and-such is the case for someone does *not* imply that such-and-such *actually* is the case. (The screen in front of me actually is not rectangular, it only looks rectangular.)

Example (2) illustrates a different principle: that subjective fact can involve complex perceptions as well as supposedly "simple" sensations. The facts which can be the case for you are not restricted to very simple sensory facts. It can seem to you now that there is a letter *e*, although perceiving a particular pattern of black and white patches as an *e* is not a simple process from the standpoint of neurophysiology. If you merely saw a black-and-white pattern which you did not recognize as a letter, and then reasoned to the conclusion that that pattern was an *e*, then you would know there is an *e*, but it would not *be the case*

for you that there is an *e*.

The prime examples of things that are the case for someone without being the case are facts that seem to be true during hallucinations.

(3) It seems to me now that there is a huge green dragon. (In the instance *x*, it seems that there is a huge green dragon.)

Perceptual illusions also yield many examples of this sort.

(4) It seems to me that there is a square thing. (In the instance *x*, it seems that there is a square thing. Or: In the instance *x*, it seems that something is square.)

(In actual fact, the thing is not quite square and is tilted. But if I don't look carefully, I miss this fact, and the thing seems square.)

Facts about past events can seem to be the case.

(5) It seems to me that I went to work this morning. (In the instance *x*, it seems that I went to work this morning.)

The "seeming" described in example (5) occurs when I try to recall this morning's happenings. To arrive at the conclusion that I went to work, I do not have to infer consciously that I went to work; it simply seems to me that I

did so. Thus, something can seem to be the case when something is *remembered*. Facts about the past can seem to be the case in this way. When I remember today's commute, it seems to me that I went to work. (Of course, it does not seem to me that I *am going* to work.)

Occasionally, near future facts can seem to be the case, though most cases of anticipation of the future do not involve future facts seeming to be the case.

(6) It seems to me that I am about to catch a basketball. (In the instance x, it seems that I am about to catch a basketball.)

(This sentence can be true a split second before one actually grasps the ball — when the ball is on one's fingers and feels "caught." Of course, in reality, the ball could go either way; the ball's being caught is not assured. There is no precognition at work here.)

Just as subjective fact must never be confused with truth, so also it must never be confused with belief. In the following example, assume that I am nowhere near my desk, and that I believe that there is a pile of papers on my desk.

(7) It does not seem to me that there is a pile of papers on my desk. However, it also does not seem to me that there is *not* a pile of papers on my desk. (It is not the case that in the instance x, it seems that there is a pile of papers on my desk. Nor is it the case that in the

instance x, it seems that there is not a pile of papers on my desk.)

In the preceding example, my desk and its contents, as they are *now*, do not "seem" to me at all.

Example (7) illustrates my earlier cautionary remarks about the use of "seem" to express belief. English speakers often use "It seems to me that..." as a synonym of "I think that...", "I believe that...", "I opine that...", or "I suspect that..." Examples of such usages: "It seems to me that George will win the election." "It seems to me that this equation is right." "It seems to me that our party is right about this." "It seems to me that the suspect is guilty." These sentences express senses of "to seem" different from the consciousness sense. A similar cautionary remark should be made for alternative uses of "to appear." (I may exploit these alternative uses myself in this book; hopefully the distinction will be clear from the context.)

When a fact is too distant from me to be part of my "inner world" at all, then it neither is nor is not the case for me. Example (7) illustrates this. So do the next two examples.

(8) It does not seem to me that Pluto is directly overhead. (It is not the case that in the instance x, it seems that Pluto is directly overhead.)

(9) However, it does not seem to me that Pluto is *not* directly overhead. (It is not the case that in the

instance x, it seems that Pluto is not directly overhead.)

In these two examples, there simply is nothing in my experience right now which gives me any indication of the position of Pluto.

Examples (7), (8) and (9) should make it clear that "In the instance x, it seems that P" and "In the instance x, it seems that not-P" may both be false at once. This point will become important later.

Facts about events that are partly present and partly past to you can seem to be the case for you.

(10) It seems to me that this is the scariest part of the movie so far. (In the instance x, it seems that this is the scariest part of the movie so far.)

These ten examples should help to make more concrete the sense of "to seem" which the idiom of subjective fact is supposed to capture. To be the case for you is to seem to you to be the case — in precisely this sense of "seem."

In passing, I should mention that one can use sentences which express subjective facts to describe how things seem to a subject, even if that subject cannot describe his experiences in words. If Henry is aphasic but it seems to Henry now that there is a flash of green light, then it seems that way to Henry even if Henry cannot find the words to describe what he saw. Even if Henry is not aphasic, but has an experience so overwhelming or unique that he cannot put it into words (and you, if you had a similar experience, could

not put it into words either), you still can describe this experience within the language of subjective fact. Simply adopt a symbol, say "Q," and define it to mean "things are the way they seemed to Henry during his ineffable experience." Then it will be the case, for a certain instance of seeming x, that "In instance x, it seems that Q."

Consciousness and How Things Seem

The consciousness sense of "to seem" is closely related to several ideas about consciousness put forward by philosophers of mind. I will remark very briefly on some of these ideas.

The most central feature of consciousness — the feature that makes conscious beings genuinely conscious — is the fact that to a conscious being, things seem to be some way or other. For a nonconscious entity, things cannot seem to be any way at all. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, a being for which things do not seem to be any way at all is not genuinely conscious. The kind of seeming which makes conscious beings truly conscious is embodied in the consciousness sense of the verb "to seem."

Various philosophers' characterizations of consciousness appear to agree in their essential features with the one in the preceding paragraph. The most helpful of these characterizations, for our purposes, is the one due to Thomas Nagel. Nagel has suggested that the distinguishing characteristic of a conscious organism is the existence of

"something that it is like to *be* that organism — something it is like *for* the organism."¹⁰ Nagel also has suggested that consciousness involves the possession of a "point of view."¹¹ I would add this: we cannot say that a being has a point of view in any relevant sense unless there is a way that things seem, in the consciousness sense, to that being.

John R. Searle has emphasized the importance of the "first-person" aspects of consciousness.¹² But we can safely say that to have first-person character, consciousness must involve the having of a special perspective on one's surroundings, or on the world. That is, there must be a way that things seem.

A. J. Ayer once contrasted the experiencing of actions " 'from the inside'" and " 'from the outside'";¹³ the former perspective is that of the subject who is performing the actions. This distinction also implies that a conscious being has a special point of view on its own actions — that the way it relates to those actions is somehow fundamentally different from the way in which other beings relate to them.

One need not accept all of the philosophical views of Nagel, Searle, Ayer, or any other particular philosopher to find these philosophers' descriptions of consciousness useful and illuminating. Even Dennett, whose view of consciousness¹⁴ is very reductionistic, declines to allow his proposed method for the study of the mind to defeat conscious beings' claims about the way things seem to them.¹⁵

The above mentioned ideas about insides or viewpoints

all appear to capture, more or less accurately, the same essential intuition about what consciousness is. Consciousness is having a way that things seem for oneself. To be conscious is to have a subjective realm of apparent facts and things which seem to be true or real. This picture of consciousness is what emerges when we search for the lowest common denominator of the ideas just discussed: those of having an "inside," having a "point of view," having Nagel's "something it is like *for*" oneself (discussed above), and so on.

There may be alternative readings of the word "conscious" on which things need not seem one way or another for a conscious being.¹⁶ But these readings, if they exist at all, are not the ones we usually have in mind when we say things like "I am conscious." Ordinarily, we would not consider a zombie — that is, a hypothetical being with humanlike behaviors but without a subjective life — as conscious.¹⁷ If such beings are possible, and you were to become such a being, you would go unconscious. In this book I will not worry about any other meanings of the word "conscious." For my purposes, a conscious being is a being for which things seem to be some way or other.

An Aside on Theories of Consciousness

Before leaving the topic of philosophical theories of mind, I want to avert a possible misunderstanding about the contents of this chapter. I wish to emphasize that the claims

I am making in this chapter do not comprise a "theory of consciousness" in any sense of that term.

Philosophical and scientific theories of the nature of consciousness are intended to inform us about what sort of a phenomenon consciousness really is, or to make some lesser positive assertions about the nature of consciousness. Such theories lead to different views of the nature of claims about how things seem or appear. Dennett's theory, for instance, portrays claims about how things seem as mere "narratives" produced by zombie-like machines.¹⁸ Descartes' dualistic theory implies that such claims are accurate descriptions of states of a nonphysical soul. Most theories of consciousness lie somewhere between these two extremes.

The conclusions to which I have come in this chapter do not commit us to any particular theory of consciousness. They are neutral among the existing theories of consciousness. One can use the concepts introduced here — those of instance of seeming, of subjective fact, and of subjective being — to help one state facts about how things seem, while systematically ignoring the question of what ultimately makes those facts true.

Throughout most of this book I will try to answer certain questions about consciousness while avoiding the question of what consciousness really is. Much later — and as a result of having done this systematic ignoring — I will be in a position to venture some conclusions about the nature of consciousness. But even then, I will not attempt to offer a complete theory of consciousness.

A complete understanding of consciousness will not be

possible until we have a neurophysiological explanation of the behaviors characteristic of conscious beings, plus a metaphysical account of mind which tells us what conscious experiences really are. Nowadays it is easy to forget that if we had the scientific theory, we would not automatically have the metaphysical account, which perhaps is more important for the conduct of human life. But even if we had such a pair of theories, this would not change facts that things *seem* this way or that. For my present purposes, the latter facts are all that matter.

An Aside for Philosophers of Mind

For philosophers of mind, a certain technical objection may have suggested itself as early as the beginning of this chapter. This objection arises from arguments which suggest that seeming is reducible to some other psychological or physical phenomenon, or at least has borderline cases with such a phenomenon. A prime example of such an argument is Dennett's attempt to explain the ways things seem to people in terms of "discriminations" in the brain, which Dennett likens to "'judgments'."¹⁹ According to Dennett's view, there are no "seemings" separate from these.²⁰ Such an hypothesis might make one wonder whether there really is a kind of "seeming" which is just a matter of being conscious of things, apart from belief or judgment about one's surroundings. But even if Dennett's view of seeming as judgment were right, it would be

irrelevant to what I have said about the meaning of "to seem." There still would be a difference between judgments of the kind which we ordinarily regard as seemings, and the very different (less compelling?) judgments which we usually regard as acts of belief. For example, many people believe, fervently and unshakably, that there is a God, without *experiencing* that there is a God as a mystic might claim to do. A blindfolded person can believe that an apple is red without it *seeming* to him or her that that apple is red. Many people believe unshakably that the Earth is round, without the Earth ever *seeming* round to them. Views like Dennett's also may imply that there are borderline cases between seeming and belief or judgment.²¹ But such borderline cases pose no threat to anything I have said, since there still would be some clear-cut examples of seeming.

No fact about the neurophysiological basis of consciousness can change the fact that a conscious being's surroundings seem, or appear, some way or other to that being. Knowledge about the nature of consciousness may change our understanding of that fact, and perhaps even change our psychological feel for it²² — but those are different kinds of change.

Subjective Fact and Intentionality

States of mind in which something seems some way or other involve the apparent truth of facts and/or the apparent existence of objects. Hence such states are states of a

special sort; they are what philosophers of mind call *intentional* states. An intentional state, according to one widely used characterization, is "about" something; it has an object of some sort. Commonly invoked examples of intentional states include states of sensation, in which some object is sensed, and states of thinking, in which some subject matter is being thought about. A related notion, also widely used in the philosophy of mind, is that of *content*. I do not wish to discuss the relationship between intentionality and content in detail; for our purposes, it is enough to say that an intentional state is a state with content.²³

Philosophers who think about intentionality typically regard it as one of the most central features of consciousness. Earlier I characterized consciousness in terms of subjective facts without mentioning intentionality. However, my characterization directly implies that consciousness is intentional. Conscious states have apparent facts and entities as intentional objects.

There may be more to an intentional state than its associated subjective state. One can, for example, continue to believe a fact while not currently thinking about that fact.²⁴ Nevertheless, the instances of seeming associated with conscious mental states have subjective facts and beings as intentional objects, and therefore are intentional and insure that the conscious states with which they are associated are intentional.

In what follows, I sometimes will speak of the "content" of an instance of seeming. By that I will mean the set of

subjective facts and beings associated with that instance.

The Subjective and the Objective

Earlier I pointed out that the notions of subjective fact and subjective being suggest a certain parallel between seeming and truth. Now I will explore this parallel more thoroughly, and will touch upon some deeper issues connected with it.

One can think of facts which seem to be the case as having *subjective truth*, in contradistinction from truth as such, which is *objective truth* (independent of viewpoint). For example, if a fact is the case for one instance of seeming but not for another instance of seeming, then one can think of that fact as being subjectively true for one instance of seeming but not for the other. Similarly, one can contrast subjective being with being as such, which is objective being. Thus, an entity which exists for Henry but does not exist for John can be thought of as existent with respect to Henry and as nonexistent with respect to John. One can think of subjective fact and subjective being as *subjective* or *perspective-dependent* notions of being and of truth, in contradistinction from the familiar *objective* or *absolute* notions. This way of thinking about subjective fact really adds nothing to the notions of subjective fact and being, but it will prove suggestive later on.

Using the terminology of subjective truth and being, we can say that consciousness is a phenomenon in which

subjective truth plays an essential part. There is consciousness if and only if there are facts that are true *for* something, not merely objectively true. The presence of consciousness in the world is the presence of subjective truth in the world.

Of course, the idiom of subjective fact and subjective being is at bottom simply a way of talking about phenomena involving seeming. It cannot conflict with other ways of talking about phenomena of this sort.

Relativism and Subjectivity

Note well that the use of the notion of subjective truth does not back us into a position of relativism with regard to truth. I have deliberately avoided using the term "relative" to describe this notion since I do not want my intentions to be misunderstood. The idea of subjective fact does not replace objective truth with something relative or subjective; on the conceptual level, there is enough room in the universe for both subjective truth and objective truth.

The fact that there is subjective truth does not, by itself, imply that there is any truth beyond the subjective. If one believes in relativism, then one consistently can deny the reality of objective truth while still admitting the reality of subjective truth as a special kind of relative truth. However, one does not have to believe in relativism to recognize that subjective truth is real. *And not even a committed relativist can deny that there are ways things seem.*

Every argument which relativists might offer against the objective reality of the world is, in effect, an argument that there *only seems* to be an objective world. If there did not seem to be an objective world, then relativism with regard to truth would not be controversial: no one would doubt that truth is relative to perspective. An argument intended to persuade someone to adopt relativism must represent an attempt to convince an audience to ignore how things seem to them — to ignore the appearance that there is an objective world. Thus, relativism, through its rhetoric and also through its very existence, acknowledges the reality of seeming. This acknowledgment is its first act.

It is worth noting that subjective fact and subjective being are, in a deeper sense, *objective* phenomena. If it seems in a particular instance that there is a loud noise, then it *really is* the case that it seems in that instance that there is a loud noise. Thus relativism, by tacitly presupposing the existence of ways things seem, unwittingly bases its claims upon a foundation of objectivity.

In later chapters (4 and 13) I will address issues of objectivity and relativism in more detail, and will explore further the relationship between subjective and objective truth.

Note also that the notion of subjective fact does not have built into it any prejudices about what subjective facts really are. A postmodernist might want to claim that subjective facts are of a merely linguistic or "textual" character. I have not ruled out this possibility, nor have I endorsed it. A philosopher who claims that the content of our experience is

built on social factors, belief systems, theories, values, or the like will not be able to use these claims to attack the notion of subjective fact — for the notion of subjective fact presupposes nothing about the real nature or origin of such facts.²⁵ A subjective fact is simply a fact about how things seem — regardless of what a fact about how things seem ultimately turns out to be, and regardless of how it originates.

Subjective Fact as a Fundamental Notion

Throughout the rest of this book, I will treat the notion of subjective fact as a fundamental notion. I will use it as a basic concept for explaining other concepts, and will define other concepts in terms of it. This use of the notion of subjective fact will encompass the use of the notion of instance of seeming, which is a component of the idea of subjective fact. I will use these twin concepts in various examples and arguments about how things seem. With the help of these examples and arguments, I will arrive at some conclusions about the objective world, thereby accomplishing the project of this book and doing some philosophy along the way.

Taking subjective fact as a fundamental notion amounts to taking the notion of *seeming to be the case* as a fundamental notion.

This decision to adopt subjective fact as a fundamental notion is not meant to suggest that I think the concept of

subjective fact is undefinable. Already I have defined this concept, albeit non-rigorously, by presenting an informal definition and several examples. My decision to treat this concept as fundamental also does not imply that I think it is unanalyzable. Anyone is free to argue that consciousness — and its central feature, subjective fact — really is identical to some neurophysiological or behavioral phenomenon, or to something that happens to Cartesian egos, or whatever. Anyone is free to maintain that some other notion is more fundamental and to define subjective fact in terms of it. By adopting subjective fact as a fundamental notion, I am simply choosing a conceptual starting point for further argumentation. This particular starting point is extremely convenient, since it allows us to make statements about how things seem without importing any major assumptions about what really exists.

Chapter 3

The Happenings Within

In the last chapter, I developed some conceptual machinery for the study of consciousness, or at least of consciousness' central feature, the way things seem. In this chapter, I will begin to explore the relationship between consciousness and time. I will develop further the concept of an instance of seeming, and will point out reasons to believe that instances of seeming are *events* of some sort. Since events happen in time, this exploration will begin to shed light on the subject of time.

Later in the book, I will draw several other conclusions about time — some of them perhaps quite surprising. For now, I will concentrate on the apparent temporal features of instances of seeming.

Consciousness Events

Instances of seeming are rather puzzling items. On the face of it, they do not appear to belong to any of the standard

categories of entities recognized by philosophers, such as the categories of things, events, and abstract objects. It could turn out that instances of seeming form an entirely new metaphysical category. However, there is some reason to think that instances of seeming are *events* of a sort.

Consider how things seem to you now. When you consider this, you find out at once that things seem a certain way. If you continue to register how things seem to you, you also find out that things are continuing to seem that way, or else are seeming other, new ways. Something is *happening*; things *are seeming* some way or other. Apparently, things' seeming some way or other is not only a static fact; it is something that happens. Hence, *prima facie*, when things seem a certain way an event is happening — an event of appearing, of things seeming some particular way. An event of this sort is a single example or occasion of things seeming a certain way. Hence it is plausible to identify such an event with an instance of seeming. Consequently, it is plausible to suppose that an instance of seeming is an event.

The preceding highly informal argument is far from conclusive, but it is suggestive. It does not pretend to establish once and for all that an instance of seeming is an event. Also, this argument does not tell us what kind of event an instance of seeming might be. A decision upon this matter would have to depend upon which philosophical view about the nature of mind is correct. If a materialistic or physicalistic view is right, then all mental events are physical in nature; hence an instance of seeming, if it is an

event, can only be a physical event. Presumably, this physical event is the very complex event or process which your brain undergoes, by virtue of which you are conscious of something. Different physicalists will have different ideas about what that event is. If the dualistic view of mind is right, then an instance of seeming is an event that happens to a non-material soul or self; it must be whatever happens to your soul, by virtue of whose happening you experience something. If behaviorism is right, then there really is nothing to mental life besides observable behavior. In that case, an instance of seeming might be something like the event of the onset of certain bodily behaviors. However, we do not need to ascertain the real nature of this event to continue with our project.

An event in the history of a dead lump, or of a zombie (an imaginary being with no subjective life),¹ does not involve things seeming any way. Some events in the lives of humans (in particular, some mental events) are associated with things seeming certain ways. Hence some events in the lives of humans are events of the sort which it is tempting to identify with consciousness events. Events in the careers of lumps and of zombies definitely are not consciousness events.

The above arguments suggest that we may think of an instance of seeming as an event of a particular kind — an event whose occurrence consists in things seeming a certain way. However, the concepts I have introduced for talking about instances of seeming do not force us to think this way. For now, we can regard an instance of seeming simply as an

inherent feature of subjective facts. Later, we may begin to regard all instances of seeming as events, if we have sufficiently good reason to do so. If we do that, then we can treat "In the instance __, it seems that __" as an open sentence in which an event name and a sentence must be inserted.

We have not shown conclusively that instances of seeming are events. Be that as it may, I am going to use the term *consciousness event* as a synonym for *instance of seeming* throughout this book. This term is intended to highlight the appearance of happening which accompanies instances of seeming. If consciousness events turn out not to be events, then this terminology will be misleading, but no more so than some commonplace expressions like "plastic flower." Later on, the term "consciousness event" will turn out to be quite fitting for several reasons.

Consciousness Events: Some Examples²

A consciousness event is an instance of things' seeming to be some way or other. Right now, your surroundings seem a certain way to you. A very short time later (when you read the next word, hear a new sound, or change your view slightly), your surroundings seem a slightly different way. Each time things seem to be some new way to you, there is another consciousness event.

The following examples of consciousness events are meant to show how consciousness events enter into our everyday experience. They should enable the reader to get a

better psychological feel for the concept of a consciousness event. Also, they point up the apparently "dynamic," or event-like, nature of consciousness events.

(1) Look at the period at the end of this sentence, then suddenly look at something else. When you move your eyes, you pass from one consciousness event to another. One instance of seeming has ended in time (at least in time as you feel it); another instance of seeming has begun. What seems to you to be the case after the change is not what seemed to you to be the case before the change.

(2) Visualize a yellow square. Then stop visualizing it; just visualize blackness instead. When the square disappears, you pass (at least in apparent time) from one consciousness event into another. Your subjective "world" is not the same after the change as before.

(3) Look at the period at the end of this sentence; then keep on looking at it. After the first brief moment of looking, your experience of the period is not quite the same as it was during that first look. Among the differences: You now *remember* having looked at the period, and your thoughts, moods, and other sensations (such as the sensation of the background noise in the room) may have changed slightly. You have passed into another consciousness event.

From Brain to Cosmos

(4) As you read the word "as" which began this sentence, you were having one consciousness event. *Now* you are having another (and perhaps you had several more since you read the "as"). (Pause here.) And now you are having still another. (Pause.) And another. (Pause.) And...

You can find other examples for yourself. It is not difficult to identify consciousness events in your own experience.

Note that the finding of consciousness events for yourself does not require you to engage in any genuine *introspection*, or observation of your own inner processes. You only need to describe, or take note of, how things seem; observations of apparent structures or processes within yourself are quite unnecessary for this. Finding a consciousness event is simple; ascertaining that there is more than one consciousness event requires a slightly more complicated act. To do the latter act, describe to yourself how things seem, or take note of how things seem, and then do the same thing again a moment later. If what you noted the second time is different, then you can infer that there were two different consciousness events. (Of course, this last inference may require you to rely on memory of the first of the two descriptions, and hence may depend upon the tacit assumption that your memory of the previous consciousness event was correct. In Chapter 4 we will see that this assumption is not always necessary, especially in cases like those of examples (1)-(4) above.) Finding consciousness

events is easy, once you know what to look for. It is not a matter of spotting some rare bird in the forest.

Consciousness Events and Experience

You, the reader, are conscious now. The present condition of your consciousness involves all that *seems* to be happening to you right now — what you are sensing, thinking, feeling, and so forth. This present occasion of your being aware of your outer and inner surroundings is an instance of seeming. Speaking loosely and intuitively, we can say that the fact that this instance of seeming exists is the fact that there exists, for a brief time, a particular "realm" of subjective facts. These subjective facts are associated with thinking, sensing, and other conscious processes. After a fraction of a second, you will be undergoing a different consciousness event. You still will be conscious, but this time you may be conscious of different things.

Ordinarily, a consciousness event is not merely a single instance of one kind of seeming — the kind we associate with seeing, hearing, thinking, or the like. If I am feeling a pain, then my present awareness includes other things besides that pain — for example, I may be thinking about philosophy as well. If so, then I am undergoing a consciousness event that involves both of these kinds of seeming — the ones associated with the mental phenomena which we ordinarily call "feeling pain" and "thinking." The subjective facts which are the case in a single instance of

seeming may be of the sort which arise from sensing, thinking, feeling, or any any of the other phenomena which can help to make up a single instance, or incident, of being conscious.

Consciousness events are not the same as experiences. You can have an experience which involves the content of several of your consciousness events — for example, the experience of reading a sentence in a book. Also, you can have several different kinds of experience, and hence (arguably) several different simultaneous experiences, during the same consciousness event — as in the preceding example of feeling pain while thinking. From now on I will use the word "experience" to refer to those conscious mental events which we customarily call experiences. If an experience involves the content of a consciousness event, I will speak of that experience as "happening during" the consciousness event. I will not address the question of whether experiences might be entirely reducible to consciousness events, or the related question of whether, in some special cases, consciousness events might count as experiences. The answers to these questions are not necessary for my project.

The Timing of Consciousness Events

In ordinary human life, a consciousness event appears to be a brief event in the history of a conscious subject. This fact suggests another way to point out what a consciousness

event is. A consciousness event might be thought of as a *specious moment* in the conscious life of a subject — that is, a subjective moment of experience, roughly the same as what C.D. Broad termed "the Specious Present."³ It is intuitively reasonable to characterize a consciousness event as a specious moment of conscious life, while recalling that this moment need not be instantaneous in clock time.

This last point bears repeating: it is important to remember that consciousness events need not be instantaneous. Empirical evidence points to the conclusion that a consciousness event takes a substantial amount of time — typically about a third of a second. Several experiments strongly suggest that a stimulus received within about 300 milliseconds of an earlier stimulus can affect the conscious perception of that earlier stimulus.⁴ This suggests that the conscious perception of a stimulus takes at least this long to occur.⁵ (Even if a single consciousness event lasts this long, some consciousness events might *seem* to be quicker.)

Unusual Consciousness Events: Some Possibilities

In ordinary human experience, consciousness events appear to be event-like "specious moments" of the kind described above. However, the notion of a consciousness event does not fix most characteristics of a consciousness event. To underscore this fact — and also for other reasons

which will surface later — I will mention some possible kinds of consciousness events quite different from the ones humans usually undergo. I am not claiming that consciousness events of these kinds really are possible, physically or otherwise; perhaps they are possible, perhaps they are not. My only point in describing these "possibilities" is to show that the notion of a consciousness event does not exclude consciousness events quite different from those which people normally have.

One example of an unusual consciousness event would be an isolated consciousness event which is not part of the life of a persisting subject. This would be reminiscent of, though not identical to, the stray perceptions — perceptions that belong to no one in particular — which Hume once considered.⁶ Another possibility is a consciousness event which is not transitory — which is not an event that *happens* in the usual way, but which simply *is*. This possibility becomes less impossible if we recall that a so-called consciousness event is not defined to be an event. (Theologians interested in the concept of eternity have suggested that God exists beyond the transitory sort of time that we know.⁷ We should leave open the possibility of non-transitory consciousness events, if only because we do not want to beg any *theological* questions.) Still another example would be a consciousness event which occurs in the absence of physical events like those in the brain. We have not ruled out the possibility of such a consciousness event, nor have we ruled out the opposite view that all consciousness is physical.

We have not ruled out the possibility of consciousness events whose *timing* is very different from that of ordinary consciousness events. For example, we have not asked whether it is possible for there to be an instantaneous consciousness event. (Those of humans, as I have said, are of finite duration.) Nor have we asked how the consciousness events which happen to a single subject are arranged in time. In subsequent chapters I will address some questions much like these, about the possible kinds and relationships of consciousness events.

It is not conceptually necessary that a consciousness event involves any of the familiar features of consciousness, except those which follow from the mere existence of a way things seem.

The Logic of Consciousness Events: Three Appendices

The following three appendices deal with some logical properties of subjective fact. They use standard ideas of modal logic.⁸ The reader who is not a logician can skip the details, but should be aware of two key conclusions, which I will describe here before beginning the appendices. The conclusions are that consciousness events possess logical features which we may call *logical incompleteness* and *worldlike character*. (The term "logical incompleteness" is borrowed from mathematical logic, where it denotes a property of formal systems somewhat analogous to the

property of consciousness events which I will discuss.)

By saying that consciousness events are logically incomplete, I mean that it is possible for a sentence (or proposition) and its negation both to fail to be the case for a consciousness event. It is quite possible for P and not-P both to fail to be the case for a consciousness event. For example, if I am not looking up into the sky, then it is not the case for my present awareness that Pluto is overhead, but it also is not the case for my present awareness that Pluto is not overhead. Pluto's present position simply is not a part of my inner world right now. (Recall the Pluto example from Chapter 2.) This feature of consciousness events may seem rather trivial, but it will prove quite useful in later chapters, where I will use it in an investigation of the problems of personal identity, the unity of the self, and the nature of the unconscious mind.

By saying that consciousness events have worldlike character, I mean that a consciousness event is analogous, in some important respects, to what philosophers call a *possible world*. If a sentence (or proposition) P is the case for a consciousness event, then one can think of P as being true *at* that consciousness event, just as a modal logician might say that P is true at a possible world. From a logician's point of view, a consciousness event is much like the possible worlds, or alternative possible universes, used in metaphysics and in modal logic. (Some points of similarity and of difference are mentioned in the appendix.) This analogy between consciousness events and worlds does not stretch the truth too far, since a consciousness event is

associated with a subjective "world" of subjective facts and beings.

An intuitive recognition of the worldlike character of the subjective realm may well have lain behind Leibniz' analogy between the monad (or perceiving entity) and the cosmos.⁹ My view of consciousness events as worldlike is reminiscent of this Leibnizian view. (Of course, my view does not imply most of Leibniz's other ideas about monads, and is based upon simple logical properties of consciousness events rather than upon strong metaphysical arguments.)

Appendix A: Subjective Fact and Modality

From a logician's standpoint, the notion of being-the-case-for is a *modality*, with its own special logical characteristics.¹⁰

The locution "For x, it is the case that" introduces an intensional context in sentences of the form "For x, it is the case that P." The truth value of such a sentence is not determined by the truth value of P. One can regard "For x, it is the case that" as a modal operator. Because this operator requires an object (a value of x) as well as a formula to act upon, this operator resembles the modalities expressed by "knows that" and "believes that" more closely than it resembles the modalities of necessity and possibility discussed in elementary modal logic texts. We might call the operator "for ____ it is the case that" the *being-the-case-for operator*, or the *BTCF operator* for short. The modality

which it represents — that of subjective truth — can be thought of as a *subjective alethic* modality.

One could formalize the notion of subjective fact and develop a system of modal logic for the BTCF operator. I will not undertake such a formalization here because it will not be necessary for what follows. However, I will make a few remarks on the logic of the BTCF operator.

The syntax of the BTCF operator is clear from the preceding remarks. The semantics of the BTCF operator follow from my previous discussion of subjective fact. One can state the truth condition for the wff "For x, it is the case that P" as follows: "For x, it is the case that P" is true if and only if "x" is a tag for an instance of seeming in which it seems that P. This truth condition makes the truth of "For x, it is the case that P" depend solely upon facts about how things seem — specifically, upon what seems to be the case in what instance, and upon nothing else.

Appendix B: Consciousness Events as Incomplete Worlds

One can think of a consciousness event as that which fills in the blank in the modal operator "for ____ it is the case that." Alternatively, one can think of a consciousness event as the analogue, for subjective fact, of the important philosophical concept of a *possible world*. One can regard "For x, P" as asserting that P is true *at* the consciousness event x, in much the same way that a sentence or proposition

can be said to be true at a possible world. This is the basis for my earlier assertion that consciousness events have worldlike character.

Consciousness events, conceived of as analogs of worlds, make sentences or propositions true or false. One could construct a modal semantics in which consciousness events play the part of worlds. Consciousness events differ from worlds in respect of their logical incompleteness; a consciousness event need not make every statement about experience either true or false. Consciousness events behave like what philosophers have called "incomplete worlds" or "possibilities",¹¹ rather than like standard possible worlds.

Truth at a consciousness event creates an intensional context. The intensionality of the BTCF operator (discussed in Appendix A above) reflects this. The familiar intensionality of mental contexts¹² arises at least in part from this intensionality — the ability, as it were, of consciousness to endorse propositions. For example, "John believes that P" tells us nothing, in the absence of other information, about whether P is true. But it does tell us something about John's subjective world. The intensionality of consciousness events lies behind at least some instances of false belief (consider beliefs arising from hallucinations and illusions). If "John knows that A" fails to follow from A, this is largely accountable to the character of John's experience. (If John were aware of everything — that is, if subjective truth for John's consciousness events coincided with objective truth — then this occurrence of "knows" might not introduce an intensional context.) The

intensionality of mental contexts arises, at least in part, from the conceptual connection between mental acts and subjective fact. Hence this intensionality arises, at least in part, from the very essence of consciousness.

Appendix C: Are Consciousness Events Logically Consistent?

It is tempting to suppose that consciousness events, like possible worlds, are *logically consistent*. This will be the case if for any value of "x", the sentences "For x, P" and "For x, not-P" are not both true. The claim that this is the case is intuitively appealing, and is correct for our ordinary experiences. It also is plausible in view of our ideas about consciousness events. We think of a consciousness event as being associated with a realm of subjective fact, and particularly with a *unique* realm of subjective fact. According to this picture, any given subjective fact either belongs to the realm (making "For x, P" true), or does not belong to the realm (making "For x, not-P" true), but not both. If this is a conceptual truth about consciousness events, then consciousness events are logically consistent.

In this book, I will not address the general question of the logical consistency of consciousness events.

Notes

Bibliographical references, cited here by author and year, can be found in the "Works Cited" section of the book. Numbers following such citations are page numbers unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter 2. Into the Subjective World

1. Using Block's terminology (Block 1996, 456-457), we might call this the "phenomenal consciousness" sense.

2. Nagel 1974, 442

3. The claim which I am about to make is reminiscent of the fact that conscious experience always is associated with a particular perspective. Hence it is reminiscent of Nagel's observation that conscious experience involves a "point of view" (Nagel 1974, 437) and of Searle's emphasis on the "first-person" nature of consciousness (1992, 16, 20; see also 116-124). However, the fact which I will discuss is even more fundamental, as will become apparent later.

4. In particular, we are not asserting the existence of any mental entities of the sorts mentioned in Chapter 1.

5. On the substitutional reading of the quantifiers and its relationship to existence, see Orenstein 1978.

6. For example, D.M. Armstrong; see e.g. Armstrong 1989, 88-96.

7. Dennett 1969, pp. 8-13.

8. Husserl used "exist for" and kindred expressions in a sense not far from mine; the idea of something existing for something else occurs in Husserl's thought. See Husserl 1950, 84 (sec. 41), for one example among many. The notion of something being or existing for something can be found in Hegelian philosophy; Hegel himself used terms which have been translated as "being-for-self," "being-for-other," and "being-for-one" (Hegel 1816, 157, 119, and 159,

respectively). James, in a footnote (James 1884, 149), speaks of Hegelians who may say that "segments of the stream are consciously *for* each other." This last usage of the Hegelian terminology is closer to my conception of "existing for" or "being for."

9. For a modern approach to nonexistent objects together with discussion of older views, see Parsons 1980.

10. Nagel 1974, 436.

11. Nagel 1974, 437.

12. See Searle 1992, 16, 20; see also 116-124.

13. Ayer 1959, 67.

14. In Dennett 1991; see especially 362-367.

15. Dennett 1991, 96-97.

16. See Block 1996, especially 456-457; the kind of consciousness with which I am concerned in this book is what Block calls "phenomenal consciousness." Also see Searle 1992, 84 for a relevant (critical) remark on alternative meanings of "consciousness."

17. For a description of zombies, see for example Dennett 1991, 72-73.

18. This assessment of the theory is based on Dennett 1991; see p. 406 for the zombie-human comparison, pp. 135-137 on the role of narratives in the theory.

19. Dennett 1991, 134; see also 364.

20. Dennett 1991, 134; see also 363, 364.

21. Dennett's theory allows for borderline cases between conscious and unconscious behavior; these may give rise to the borderline cases I just mentioned. See Dennett 1991, 447.

22. Dennett seems to be suggesting the possibility of this sort of change, in Dennett 1991, 24.

23. For more information, see, for example, Dennett 1969, 20-21.

24. See Searle 1992, 159.

25. This remark is applicable to many of the various anti-philosophical or "postphilosophical" views being advocated today. For an introduction to views in this vein, see Baynes et al. 1987.

Chapter 3. The Happenings Within

1. On zombies, see for example Dennett 1991, 72-73.

2. Those familiar with the work of Carnap may detect a strong resemblance between the notion of consciousness events (especially as illustrated in this section) and Carnap's concept of "elementary experiences" (Carnap 1928, 107-110 (secs. 67-68)). Closer inspection will reveal that these two concepts are quite different. Consciousness events are *logical* entities; as I have said, they are instances of seeming, and can be thought of as features of subjective facts. Elementary experiences are not mere instances of seeming; they are products of a conceptual subdivision of "the stream of experience" (Carnap 1928, 109 (sec. 67)). Moreover, this subdivision is at least somewhat arbitrary, and is not meant to reflect any pre-existing segmentation in the stream (Carnap 1928, 109 (sec. 67)). This is not the case for consciousness events. The consciousness events in the

"stream of experience" are simply all of the instances of seeming which occur there, so there is no question of getting different consciousness events by subdividing the stream in a different way. Consciousness events are not mere segments of the stream.

3. Broad 1927, 59. (There Broad also says that psychologists use the term "*a Specious Present*" (italics Broad's)).

4. Regardless of what one thinks of its philosophical standpoint, Dennett 1991 contains an interesting discussion of several such experiments. (See especially pp. 114-115, 139-144, and 153-170; the figure of 300 milliseconds comes from p. 168, where it is given for something different from, though related to, what I am estimating).

5. Dennett (1991, 112-113) recognized that conscious processes can take significant amounts of time. (See also the preceding note.)

6. Hume 1739-40, Book I, Part IV, Sec. II (p. 207); Book I, Part IV, Sec. V (p. 233); Appendix (p. 634).

7. For a classic exposition of this view, see Boethius 524, 115-119 (Book V, Prose 6).

8. The reader unfamiliar with modal logic should consult texts in this field for the required background information.

9. Leibniz 17xx, paragraphs 53-62 (pp. 156-158), especially 56 and 62.

10. Dennett has pointed out that "a report of pain has, as it were, a built-in 'seems-to' operator" (Dennett 1969, 157). If this operator — the modality implicit in claims about how things seem — were rigorized, it would become the modal

operator which I am considering here.

11. Forbes (1985, 19) discusses "'incomplete worlds'" and "possibilities."

12. Intensionality (including that of mental sentences) is treated in, for example, Gorovitz and Williams 1969, 77-88. See also Russell 1940, 324-329.

Works Cited

(Note added later: This list pertains to the entire book, not just to the excerpts.)

This list contains all works used as sources of information or ideas in this book. It is not a comprehensive bibliography of any sort. Many of the topics discussed in this book are subjects of vast bodies of published literature; others, such as introductory physics, are covered in many good books. In cases of these sorts, I concentrated on typical reference sources which I felt would be useful to the reader, or which I personally found helpful. (In areas of active research, these may not be the most current works available.) No slight is intended toward any work not mentioned in this list.

Dates following author's names are meant to be (approximate) publication dates unless a separate publication date is given, in which case they are meant to be (approximate) dates of first publication or creation. The latter dates come from the works themselves or their front matter, or occasionally from Durant 1953. Dates listed in this section should not be treated as exact; some may be educated guesses.

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Notes on *From Brain to Cosmos*:
Questions and Answers about Subjective Fact

Mark F. Sharlow

In my book *From Brain to Cosmos*, I made extensive use of the concepts of a subjective fact and of a subjective fact statement. Here I will try to answer some questions and objections regarding these concepts. These questions did not come from readers of the book, but are questions that I anticipate some readers might have.

Question 1. Are subjective facts theory-laden?

Question 2. If subjective facts were theory-laden, would this undermine the project of *From Brain to Cosmos*?

Question 3. Is the language of subjective fact an independent observation language?

Brief Answers to Questions 1-3:

1. Yes, in a certain sense.
2. No.
3. No.

Longer Answers to Questions 1-3:

Philosophers of science have long recognized that observation statements can be "theory-laden," or dependent in a certain way upon theoretical presuppositions. Often it is argued that there cannot be an "independent observation language" – that is, a language for the description of observations independently of any prior theoretical framework. (On these two points, see for example [Hesse].) Persons familiar with these issues might suspect that the subjective fact language in *From Brain to Cosmos* is intended to be an independent observation language of some kind. If this were the case, then the line of argument in *From Brain to Cosmos* might be seriously weakened.

Fortunately, this is not the case. The subjective fact language is not intended to be an independent observation language – and the project of *From Brain to Cosmos* does not depend upon its being one. Of course, if one believes in the possibility of an independent observation language, one might be tempted to think that there is some overlap between the classes of subjective fact statements and of independent observation statements. But one does not have to think this, or even to believe in an independent observation language, to recognize that the subjective fact language can be formulated and used for the purposes described in *From Brain to Cosmos*.

Subjective facts are, at bottom, facts about how things seem – although subjective facts differ in certain respects from conventional facts about how things seem. (See *From Brain to Cosmos*, Chs. 2 & 3.) In *From Brain to Cosmos*, I tried to deduce, or at least render plausible, certain conclusions through the use of subjective facts. For that project, it does not matter *how* the subjective facts got

to be true; it only matters *that* they are true. Even if subjective facts are true only by virtue of theory-laden judgments (or theory-influenced perceptions), one still can use such facts as the basis of arguments, as I do in the book.

Note that subjective facts, unlike many "theory-laden" statements, are not subject to abandonment in the face of empirical evidence. This is the case, not because of anything mysterious about subjective facts, but simply because subjective facts are concerned with how things seem and not with how things really are. (The answer to Question 4 below may help with this point.) However, the *subjective content* of a subjective fact certainly can be theory-laden in a sense. For example, a trained weather observer might look out into the sky and immediately notice a rain cloud. The principal subjective fact involved here is one in which it seems in a particular instance that there is a rain cloud. An observer with no knowledge about weather might not see the rain cloud as a rain cloud, but simply as a dark area in the sky. In this case, the subjective fact is one in which it seems in a particular instance that there is a dark area in the sky. This difference in subjective facts reflects a kind of theory-ladenness, though not the strongest possible kind.

In brief, the subjective fact language is not intended to be an independent observation language, and may well be theory-laden in some respects – but none of this has any bearing on the uses of subjective fact presented in *From Brain to Cosmos*.

Question 4. Isn't the very idea of a subjective fact, or the related idea of how things seem, itself theory-laden? Doesn't this possibility cast doubt upon the project of

From Brain to Cosmos?

Answer: We cannot summarily rule out the possibility that these ideas are theory-laden. But even if they were, subjective fact statements still could be true, and the arguments in *From Brain to Cosmos* still would work.

One might think that if the notion of subjective fact (or of how things seem) turned out to be theory-laden, then the project of *From Brain to Cosmos* would be undermined, because that project would be tied to a particular, and perhaps revisable, theoretical standpoint. The only theoretical revision that plausibly could threaten the notion of subjective fact would be a revision that causes the phrase "It seems that...", or its equivalents, to be abandoned. Presumably this would be a revision in our beliefs about mental phenomena. But even if these beliefs were radically revised (and I will not argue that this should happen), there would be no need to abandon the view that it can *seem* that something is the case. The following argument shows one reason why.

Suppose, for the sake of *reductio ad absurdum*, that we adopted some theory that forced us to deny truth to statements of the form "It seems that P." Then we could simply introduce a new word, say "seems-1," and use it in all the situations where we previously would have used "seems." We could take the statement "It seems-1 that P" to be true if and only if one of *those* situations obtained. Then we could decide to redefine the word "seems" to be an abbreviation of "seems-1." In this manner, we could keep using statements of the form "It seems that P" in the customary way, even without the mind-related beliefs that we now automatically associate with such statements. We could do this even if we originally learned how to use and understand "seem" with the help of the old beliefs about

the mind, and even if the circumstances under which the statements are true are picked out with the help of the outmoded beliefs. (We could just consider the old belief system as a device for picking out situations – in much the same way that a game leads to the picking out of a winner.) Thus, the adoption of the new theory could not interfere with our use of statements of the form "It seems that P." The same argument is applicable to subjective fact statements, which are not quite statements of the form "It seems that P."

Question 5. Is *From Brain to Cosmos* an attempt to found all knowledge upon subjective fact?

Answer: No! The project of *From Brain to Cosmos* is something much more modest: an attempt to find out how much metaphysical knowledge can be built upon a specific domain of facts (facts about how things seem). The most that the book accomplishes by way of foundations is the founding of a limited range of metaphysical knowledge – but even limited results of this sort can be interesting. (And even these limited foundations are not unanalyzable. Those who have read the entire book will know what I mean by this last remark.)

Question 6. Could the language of subjective fact be a private language?

Answer: There is no particular reason to think that the language of subjective fact could be a private language. However, for the purposes of the book, it doesn't really matter if it could. *From Brain to Cosmos* contains arguments in which subjective fact statements, or

generalizations built upon such statements, play important roles. If it turns out that one can't learn to use these statements without being part of a linguistic community, this has no bearing on the truth of the subjective fact statements – and the arguments still will go through. What matters to the book is not *how* subjective fact statements come to be used, but *that* they can be used.

Wittgenstein famously argued against the possibility of a private language [Wittgenstein, pars. 256-271]. One's stand on this question does not bear on the project of *From Brain to Cosmos*.

Question 7. Does the concept of subjective fact depend upon folk psychology?

Answer: This question presupposes that there is such a thing as "folk psychology" as some philosophers of mind understand that term. Here I will not address the large issues surrounding folk psychology, and will not try to summarize the debate about this concept, but will focus on the question at hand.

The answer to this question is implicit in the answer to Question 4. Even if our beliefs about the mind were infested with folk psychology and needed to be abandoned or radically revised, there still would be no reason to stop talking about how things seem – and we still could regard subjective fact statements as true or false. (Perhaps the "situations" mentioned in my answer to Question 4 could be neurophysiological or behavioral situations.) As long as some subjective fact statements can be regarded as true, we can use these statements as premises and can argue about them, as I did in *From Brain to Cosmos*. What matters isn't *how* subjective fact statements come to be

true, but *that* they come to be true.

For the record, I am not endorsing the view that folk psychology, as usually understood, really exists – or that it deserves all the attention it has gotten in the literature. I am only pointing out that the idea of folk psychology cannot be used to mount a successful critique of the notion of subjective fact.

References

[Hesse] Mary Hesse, "Is There an Independent Observation Language?" In *The Nature and Function of Scientific Theories*, ed. Robert G. Colodny (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1970).

[Wittgenstein] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen / Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

About This Document and *From Brain to Cosmos*

Mark Sharlow's book *From Brain to Cosmos* was out of print at the time this document was prepared (late 2010). Most of the chapters of *From Brain to Cosmos* appear in the following documents, which may be available online:

“An Introduction to Subjective Facts” (chaps. 2-3)

“Knowledge of How Things Seem to You” (chap. 4)

“Personal Identity and Subjective Time” (chap. 5)

“Subjective Facts and Other Minds” (chap. 6)

“Time and Subjective Facts” (chaps. 5, 7-9)

“Conscious Subjects in Detail” (chaps. 5, 10-12)

“Beyond Physicalism and Idealism” (chap. 13)

“Which Systems Are Conscious?” (chap. 14)

Each of the above documents has “Readings in *From Brain to Cosmos*” as its subtitle and Mark F. Sharlow as its author.

Copies of the printed book may be available through sellers of used books.

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