

Seeking The Real¹

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The Quest for Reality

Ordinary and scientific thought appears to commit us to a range of objects, properties and facts – tables, electrons, interest rates, numbers, minds, morals and colors. But philosophy, at least as practiced in the West, has traditionally arrogated to itself the right to second-guess ordinary and scientific thought in this respect. Even though a given class of beliefs may meet, and continue to meet, our most refined criteria for acceptance, philosophers have maintained this need not necessarily commit us to the literal truth of those beliefs, to supposing that there really are the sorts of objects, properties and facts that those beliefs represent. What could such philosophers possibly mean?²

One important thing that they could mean – and have meant – is, of course, a *skepticism* about knowledge, the view that a belief's meeting our most refined criteria for acceptance -- even at the 'end of inquiry' -- need not necessarily be a good reason for supposing it to be true. According to this line of thought, for all that we are capable of knowing, the world might be a very different place from what we suppose it to be.

Although it's of great independent interest – and although Barry Stroud has written an important monograph on the subject – skepticism about knowledge is not his concern in the book we are discussing today, which is about metaphysics not epistemology. Epistemic skepticism presents us with a general challenge to move from justified acceptance to justified belief, based on the alleged insufficiency of the sorts of reasons for belief that we may plausibly be said to enjoy. But the sort of metaphysical 'quest for

¹ Presented at a Pacific APA Book Symposium. The essay concentrates on the first part of Stroud's book, the part that lays out his general views on the quest for reality rather than his more detailed discussion of color in the second part.

² I am using "acceptance" here in a technical sense that contrasts with belief. A proposition is *accepted* just in case it is used for a variety of instrumental purposes, such as prediction and control. It need not follow from a proposition's being accepted that it is believed to be true.

reality' that's the topic of Stroud's current work does not question the sufficiency of epistemic reasons; rather, it purports to be able to question the reality of the facts represented in certain selectively specified classes of belief. John Mackie's book, *Ethics* provides a classic example; in it Mackie argued that the world could not contain the sorts of facts to which moral beliefs seem committed.³

Mackie's attempt at correcting ordinary moral thought is an example of an error theory: he accuses moral thought of systematic falsity. But there are two other, less drastic mistakes that metaphysicians have also thought themselves in a position to discern. First, the mistake not in supposing that something exists, but in not realizing that it is really identical to something else, as when the reductionist urges that minds are simply brains.

And second the mistake not in supposing that something exists, but in not realizing that it is not self-subsistent -- that it exists only because minds do -- as when Galileo attempted to correct common sense by saying:

Hence I think that these tastes, odors, colors, etc., on the side of the object in which they seem to exist, are nothing else than mere names, but hold their residence solely in the sensitive body; so that if the animal were removed, every such quality would be abolished and annihilated.

Stroud regards all of these projects as different aspects of a single 'quest for reality.' I shall come back to the question whether they are correctly so regarded; for now I propose to follow his terminology. Stroud's main concern is to demonstrate the enormous difficulties that attend the execution of this quest. He thinks that philosophers have grossly overestimated the extent to which they understand what it is that they even *mean*, when they question the 'reality' of some fact represented by some belief; he certainly thinks that they have not thought clearly enough about *how* they are to plausibly reach such corrective results.

Here is a brief overview of the trajectory of his argument. Distinguish between two approaches to the topic: top-down and bottom-up. On a top-down approach, we start with the totality of our beliefs about the world, apply a criterion to them that will effectively sniff out the impostors, and end

³ J. L. Mackie: *Ethics*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1977.

up with a conception that's pruned of the beliefs that don't represent anything real. On a bottom-up approach, we do the opposite: we start with a minimal sub-part of our overall conception of the world which we regard as incontestably real; we then apply a criterion to it that will help us decide how much of the rest we need to add to it if we are to end up with a conception that contains all and only what's real.

Stroud rejects the top-down approach and favors the bottom-up one. He thinks that there is no plausible criterion that can be applied top-down, but that there is one that can be applied bottom-up.

...we found difficulty in arriving at any general criterion of "absoluteness" that could be applied to a conception of the world to eliminate those features that are peculiarly due to us and so not indicative of reality. I therefore propose to abandon the attempt to proceed from the top down in that way and to work rather from the bottom up. (p45)

What this means, according to Stroud, is that we must approach the corrective enterprise by committing ourselves to some appropriately minimal part of our everyday conception and then figure out what else we must add to it if we are to arrive at a conception that contains only the real. The condition of adequacy is that we be able to best explain everything that needs explaining, including our beliefs and experiences. If, for example, we can best explain everything that needs explaining, without supposing that objects really have colors, then colors would have been unmasked as 'unreal'. If, however, we can't so explain everything, then we will be in no position to correct ordinary thought on this score. In the second half of his book, Stroud argues in great detail that color can't be unmasked in this sense. Even though he is hesitant to draw a more general conclusion, the reader is certainly invited to wonder whether any other significant unmasking – of morality, for example – could ever be convincingly pulled off.

This is an arresting and original line of thought which raises many important issues. However, I do have several reservations about it. First, I think it's a mistake to see the three metaphysical projects that I outlined above as different aspects of a single "quest for reality." I think they constitute three separate questions that one may raise about our everyday conception and that they require different methods for answering them. It's one thing to ask

whether numbers exist; another to ask whether they reduce to something else; and a third thing still to ask whether they're mind-dependent.

Second, once this realization is firmly in place, the temptation to seek a single method for determining what's real – whether top-down or bottom-up – evaporates. Rather, we see that standard metaphysical theorizing contains a mixture of methods including the *horizontal*, wherein one asks how one set of ordinary commitments – to the numbers, for example – could be made to sit with another set of commitments – to causal conceptions of knowledge, for example.

Finally, I don't see why, even if we adopted Stroud's bottom-up approach, color cannot be unmasked. I'll take these points in order.

The Many Quests for Reality

Call the three mistakes that metaphysics purports to disclose in ordinary thought, Existence, Irreducibility and Mind-Independence, respectively. When Stroud talks about the quest for reality, he has all three of these corrective projects in mind. But, instead of seeing that there are three very different questions here, he simply assumes that there is just one, and he agonizes about how to characterize it.

Thus, speaking of the sort of distinction between primary and secondary qualities that may be found in the writings of Democritus, Galileo, Descartes, Locke and others, Stroud says:

In all these theories, there is a conception of the world or reality as being a certain way independently of the responses of any sentient beings; it would have been that way whether there had been any such responses or not....The philosophical conception of reality is a conception of some such independent world. The quest for reality is the process of reflection by which we arrive at a determinate view of such an independent world and see it as adequately represented by many but not all of our beliefs and experiences. The rest are assigned to a "subjective" domain of "appearance" with a wholly or partly human source. (p12)

The "philosophical idea of reality" that is introduced here is that of an object's having a property independently of the "responses of any sentient beings" versus that those properties that *require* the existence of sentient

beings. Having so introduced it, Stroud then proceeds to identify that *same* idea at work in the other two projects, first with respect to Existence.

The same general idea ... is present in that philosophical inquiry known as "ontology". "Are there numbers?" "Are there qualities and relations, as well as objects?" "Are there events?" We apparently speak about all those things from time to time in everyday discourse, and sometimes we even seem to assert that there are such things. But the philosophical question is whether objects of the appropriate kinds really exist in the world that makes the things we say true or false. (13-14)

And then in respect of Irreducibility:

Any metaphysical theory about the nature of reality would seem to make essential use of the same idea. Physicalism, for example,... is a philosophical doctrine about reality. It says that reality is purely physical....But Physicalism is not the only view of the world that expresses the philosophical quest for reality...Mind-body dualism and idealism are different answers to the same philosophical question. The idea behind the shared question is what I am interested in. (14)

Notice the last sentence: "The idea behind the *shared* question is what I am interested in." I quote these passages at length because it is one of the aspects of Stroud's book that I find most baffling. Although it is possible to find philosophers who have conflated both "reducible" and "mind-dependent" with "unreal", I think it should be pretty clear that that's just a confusion. Or, if we wish to express the point less harshly, we can say that it's certainly open to someone to use the word "unreal" so that it covers all of "non-existent," "reducible" and "mind-dependent"; but anyone wishing to talk this way had better realize that there is not going to be any single method for uncovering the 'unreal' in this one inclusive sense.

By contrast, Stroud seems to think that it's essential to the traditional enterprise of correcting ordinary thought that there be some unitary notion that underlies all three projects, and he spends the first two chapters of his book looking for it. His failure to find it forms the basis for his claim that the best we can hope to do is approach the issue of what reality is like bottom-up. But no one should have expected such a general notion in the

first place, and the observation that it does not exist is powerless to motivate the shift in approach that Stroud counsels.

Start by considering the first project, the one traditionally referred to as ontology. When a philosopher like Hartry Field denies that numbers are “real,” what notion of “real” is he using? It’s not easy to explicate it in significantly other terms because it’s so basic. One seems only to be able to say the same thing in a slightly different way. Numbers don’t exist. There is nothing that is a number. Nothing answers to our concept of a number. And so forth. But it’s quite clear that what’s being said here is neither equivalent to, nor implies, that numbers are reducible to something else, or that they are mind-dependent. If mind-dependence were being claimed, Field would have to believe that numbers *do* exist, for he presumably believes that there are minds. If reducibility were being claimed, we’d have to know to what; but Field is silent on the matter.

What about the entailments in the other direction? To say that X’s are reducible to Y’s is to make an identity claim: it’s to say that X’s are Y’s. In and of itself, such a claim is entirely silent about existence because it is silent about the existence of the Y’s to which the X’s are said to be identical. So the entailment fails in this direction as well. Indeed, in any typical case, a philosopher will pursue a reductionist claim precisely because he thinks that something he believes in – minds, for example – is identical to something else he believes in, brains, for example. So, not only does the entailment fail; in the typical case, a reductionism about X’s will be *inconsistent* with a non-existence claim about them. (There is, I suppose, the following sense in which something about existence is being denied in a reductionist claim: the reductionist would be saying: There are not *two* things here, only one.)

Similarly, to say that X’s are mind-dependent is to say that X’s could not have existed without minds; once again the claim is silent about the non-existence of X’s because it is silent about the existence of minds. So the entailment fails in this case as well. Here, too, though, in any typical case, the philosopher pursuing a mind-dependence claim will be a realist about the sorts of mental fact on which he is claiming X’s to depend; so once again, in any typical case, a mind-dependence claim about X’s will be inconsistent with a non-existence claim about them.

It's clear, then, that we have three independent and distinct notions here and three distinct projects to which they correspond. (Since I'm probably belaboring the point already, I've skipped arguing that mind-dependence is distinct from reducibility.)

What, then, about the methods by which to arrive at justified judgments about these different questions? Start with the basic claims about existence. If they're as basic as all that, it's natural to wonder, how we ever get a handle on them, what methods could we possibly use to determine whether something is or is not real in this sense? There are two aspects to the question, positive and negative. On the positive side, we have a conception of the reasons there are for taking the existence of certain entities seriously; on the negative side, a conception of the sorts of reasons that undermine those positive reasons, or override them.

Take the case of numbers. On the positive side, a number of philosophers think that we have *a priori* knowledge that numbers exist (a notion that, mysteriously, doesn't figure very much at all in Stroud's treatment). Others think only that we having strong empirical reasons for believing in numbers because they are indispensably presupposed by the best and most well-confirmed explanatory theories that we possess. On the negative side, we regard those strong reasons as potentially overridden if we find that serious issues of *coherence* are raised by the supposition that there are numbers -- either because we come to think that there is something intrinsically queer about the entities in question, or because we can't square their existence with some other important commitment of ours, for example, with our views about how knowledge of such entities would have to be acquired. Both of these procedures seem to me to both unobjectionable and neither top-down nor bottom-up but rather horizontal, a search for reflective coherence in our overall conception. My own take, for what it's worth, on the current state of play about numbers is that the realist is getting the better of the argument: the positive reasons seem strong and the Benacerraf-style objections from knowledge seem answerable.

What about the project of figuring out whether something we believe in exists irreducibly or whether it is reducible to something else that we believe in? This project has a venerable history, but Stroud professes not to understand it in anything other than its semantic incarnation: the only reductive claims of the form X reduces to Y that he says he understand are claims of the form: 'X' means the same as 'Y' (p59). This is very restrictive

and is certainly out of line with mainstream thinking on the subject which is willing to allow that X may reduce to Y even if that identity is not underwritten by the ingredient concepts alone. Many philosophers are willing to allow that water reduces to H₂O or that heat reduces to mean kinetic energy. Nevertheless, even Stroud's restrictive notion allows that there is an intelligible question whether minds are merely brains and for an intelligible top-down, semantical, approach to the subject.

Finally, there is the question whether some things we are prepared to believe in – say, colors – exist only in some mind-dependent sense. There are two possible thoughts here; one is that colors are attributes precisely of minds, and the other is that, although they are the attributes of external objects, nothing could have them unless there are minds. The seventeenth century thought that we had discovered that colors are in truth properties of minds, properties that are mistakenly attributed to external objects by visual perception. Many contemporary philosophers think that colors are dispositions that objects have to affect sentient beings in certain ways and that this makes them mind-dependent in the second sense. (I'll come back to this.)

How might we go about establishing any such claim? I think there's no doubt that the sort of bottom-up approach that Stroud favors has played a heavy role in this connection; and I wonder whether his focus on the case of color led him to over-generalize the relevance of such considerations. For there's no doubt that many thinkers in the seventeenth century, impressed by the advances of the mathematical sciences, were led to believe that everything, including our own responses, should be explicable solely on the basis of the sorts of property that are recognized by those sciences. Stroud's suggestion is that we take this approach as the model for any possible investigation into the nature of reality.

But even in this connection, it seems to me, the bottom-up approach has not been the only relevant method. For example, in a pair of papers written some 10 years ago, David Velleman and I argued for a projectivist, hence mind-dependent, account of color by arguing for two claims: that a non-projectivist conception of color could not possibly explain how we know what we know about the colors a priori, and that a projectivist account could. (Well, actually, we mostly did the former, but it's easy to see that the space for the latter exists). This is another example of the horizontal argument

from overall coherence, a matter of reconciling our commitments to colors with our commitment to knowing certain things about them.⁴

To sum up the points I have been making thus far: there is no single quest for reality, but three different questions about it; and they are legitimately approached through a variety of methods, top-down, bottom-up and horizontal.

Before I leave this part of the paper, though, let me register my opposition to Stroud's desire to classify *dispositional* accounts of color – according to which colors are dispositions to affect certain sorts of perceivers in certain ways – on the “mind-dependent” side of things. Stroud is far from alone in this tendency; but it has always puzzled me. If colors are dispositions to affect perceivers in certain ways, then they are perfectly *objective* features of objects that can be instantiated even in the absence of any minds: it can be a perfectly objective fact about an object that it would affect a mind in a certain way even if there aren't, and never have been, any minds. That is why, when Velleman and I argued that colors could not be mind-independent properties of objects, we thought it necessary to argue *both* against physicalist accounts of color and against dispositional accounts. Stroud spends a great deal of time arguing against a dispositional account on the grounds that it is the sort of “subjectivist” view that he wishes to combat. But the only sense in which a dispositional view is subjectivist is that, in order to have the *concept* of color you have to have the *concept* of mind; but that is a subjectivism at the level of concepts and not at the level of properties, and so is not relevant to the issue of mind-dependence. (That is a distinction about which Stroud is very clear-headed is his discussion of Bernard Williams' “absolute conception” of reality.)

If I'm right, then, finding a property to be mind-dependent, is not a way of finding it to be unreal; and finding a property to be response-dispositional, is not a way of finding it to be mind-dependent. What explains, then, the recurrent tendency, which Stroud illustrates, to group eliminativism, mind-dependence and response-dispositionalism together as “anti-realist?” I think that there is an answer to this, but that the answer is epistemic, not metaphysical.

⁴ See P. Boghossian and D. Velleman, “Colours as Secondary Qualities,” *Mind* 1989 and “Physicalist Theories of Color,” *Philosophical Review*, 1991.

To say that there are no numbers implies that there are no number facts for our number beliefs to be responsive to. Now, no one could reasonably conclude from this that anything goes in the way of arithmetic. Rather, the point is that whatever constraints there are on the assertion of number-theoretic statements, they are not to be explained by the provision of a 'tracking epistemology': when it comes to number statements, we cannot think of ourselves as attempting to keep accurate track of some realm of independent fact.

Now consider the view that x's being yellow consists in its being disposed to look yellow to standard perceivers under standard conditions. Suppose that I am a standard perceiver under standard conditions and that I perceive this lemon to be yellow. If the dispositional analysis is true, then my perception of the lemon as yellow is perfectly objectively true: for it's looking yellow to me under those conditions just *is* what it is for the lemon to be yellow. But it would also be true that, given the dispositional theory, my perception under those conditions could not be thought of as attempting to track some fact that is independent of it; rather, perceiving the lemon to be yellow under those conditions just is what it is for the perception to be true.

It seems to me, then, that, it's because eliminativism, mind-dependence and response-dispositionalism can share this epistemic feature -- of depriving, under certain conditions, certain of our judgments of epistemic objectivity -- that it is sometimes tempting and even useful to consider them together. But this is an *epistemic* grouping and not a metaphysical one.

Bottom-Up

As I've already indicated, I don't take Stroud to have given us sufficient motivation for an exclusively bottom-up approach to metaphysical questions about reality. I now want to present some positive considerations against adopting such an approach exclusively.

The essence of the bottom-up approach is to begin with an appropriately minimal conception of reality, and then to see what would need to be added to it if we are to arrive at a conception that's adequate. One crucial question concerns the criterion of adequacy. A second crucial question concerns the selection of the minimal starting point. How is to be decided where we are to start?

Regarding the first question, Stroud, following a line of thought that he finds in Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel, suggests that the relevant criterion of adequacy is that a corrected conception of the world *best* explain everything that needs explaining including our own beliefs, conceptions and experiences (71). Regarding the second question, he selects the physical as the correct starting point on the grounds that it is a “minimal conception of the world that seems about as “absolute” as any human conception could be.” (45) Putting all the elements together allows us to say that a property is unreal if it can be unmasked; and it can be unmasked if it is not required to give the best explanation possible of everything that needs explaining, including our own beliefs and experiences.

It’s unclear what Stroud takes this unmasking procedure to amount to – in particular, it’s unclear whether he takes it to somehow give the *meaning* of “unreal,” or whether he intends merely to be recommending it as the best *method* for figuring out what’s unreal. He sometimes writes as though he intends to be making the meaning claim (p74); but his reluctance, at the end of the book, to infer “real” from “can’t be unmasked” suggests otherwise. He says:

To say that the unmasking view can be eliminated from consideration because it cannot be reached, or that no one could find it to be true, is to say that no one can carry off a certain intellectual feat. That is not necessarily to say or imply anything about how things in the world are or must be. (203)

Actually, this reluctance cuts equally against the method reading, so I guess that, once again, I’m puzzled. If we’re justified in believing that something is real if it can’t be unmasked, why can’t we justifiably infer that something is real from the fact that it can’t be unmasked?

In any event, whatever Stroud’s intentions, unmasking would be hopeless as a theory of the *meaning* of “unreal,” for there is clearly no *contradiction* in the supposition that something may not exist and yet be indispensable for what we regard as good explanations, or in the supposition that it does exist and yet has no role to play in our “best” explanations. So, at best, unmasking would have to be put forward as a method.

And as such, it would obviously be a limited method. The bottom-up approach requires us to select, pretty much arbitrarily, some set of features

whose status as real is going to be incontestable. Stroud picks the physical. But wouldn't we want our framework for discussing the nature of reality at least to *allow* for the discovery that Berkeley was right, that there are nothing but mental facts.

Furthermore, Stroud's criterion of adequacy insists that our ultimate conception of the world best explain why we have the beliefs and experiences that we have. This commits us to beliefs and experiences, thereby eliminating from the discussion an *eliminativism* about the mental.

Actually, in Stroud's hands, the commitment to psychological facts is even more committal than has emerged so far, because, as I mentioned earlier, Stroud professes not to understand any notion of reduction apart from the semantic. Since psychological sentences are clearly not *synonymous* with physicalist ones, the up-front commitment to psychological facts amounts to nothing less than a commitment to *irreducible* psychological facts. Thus, it turns out that, on Stroud's view, an acceptance of Mind-Body Dualism is just the price of admission to the metaphysical debate about the nature of reality.

For these reasons, then, I think we do better to read Stroud, not as trying to describe a method for figuring out the nature of reality in some fully general sense, but as trying to explain what someone who was a skeptic neither about the physical nor about the psychological would have to do, if they are to justifiably eliminate, or view as mind-dependent, some aspect of our ordinary conception. This puts aside both the general project of explaining what "real" means and also the question about the nature of reality to which Physicalism and Idealism are competing answers. It zeroes in on the question, in which in fact a lot of philosophers are interested: what else, beyond the physical and the psychological, do we need to believe in? In particular, do we need to believe that the world is colored or moral; and if we do, must we think that those facts are mind-independent?

Seen this way, Stroud's method looks compelling as a necessary condition: it's clearly appropriate to insist that the error theorist about color or about morality be able to explain everything that needs explaining, including whatever facts there may be about our own psychology.

However, I disagree that meeting that explanatory burden is sufficient for justifiably concluding that something is real; other considerations could

conceivably trump the explanatory criterion. Consider Mackie on moral properties. Mackie motivates his error theory about moral properties primarily by his argument from queerness: moral properties, he argues, have an impossible nature. Could he explain everything that needs explaining without invoking moral properties? Probably (Harman certainly think so). Would an explanation in terms of moral properties be better? Perhaps. So should we conclude that moral properties are real, for they provide a better explanation of our responses? No, for there's still that problem with their queerness.

Stroud on Color

My view, then, is that Stroud's picture is at best an incomplete method for answering a much more limited question than the one he describes. Suppose, however, that, for the sake of argument, we set aside our qualms about the method's limitations and that we adopt it in order to raise a question about the status of color. Could color be unmasked in Stroud's sense? Stroud argues that it's very difficult to see how we could ever arrive at a positive answer to this question: we could never rationally conclude either that colors are not real or that they are mind-dependent properties of objects.

Since Velleman and I thought that we had sort of arrived at the place that Stroud says is unreachable, we must have committed some mistake. What was it?

Stroud's claim is that no one could coherently think that no object was colored consistent with recognizing that people have color beliefs and perceptions, because unless we assume that some objects are colored, there will be no way for us to identify which properties are being attributed to an object in color perception or color belief.

With no beliefs about the colors of any objects, we could find other people to have beliefs to that effect only if we regarded them all as at best false. We could not share those beliefs. But could we even find or identify the beliefs in question? If Jones utters the sentence "There is a yellow lemon on the table" about the table right before us, what belief could we understand her to be expressing? What property could we understand her to be predicating of a lemon on the table? It could not be a property that we find to belong to any physical object.
(156)

Stroud says that his argument here is inspired by Donald Davidson's views about the conditions for interpreting someone as having thoughts with a certain content. These views, he says,

strongly suggest that no one could abandon all beliefs about the colours of things and still understand the colour terms involved in ascribing perceptions and beliefs about the colours of things. If that is so, no one competent to understand and acknowledge the perceptions and beliefs he hopes to unmask could free himself completely from all commitment to a world of coloured things. So no one could succeed in unmasking all those perceptions and beliefs as giving us only 'appearance' and not 'reality.' (168)

But Davidson's claim that interpretation must obey a Principle of Charity only applies to the *totality* of another person's beliefs – it does not apply to localized subparts of that totality, for example those about color. It is perfectly consistent with the strongest thesis that Davidson has ever argued for -- let alone proved -- that we should interpret someone's color discourse as incorporating systematic error, provided that we do so against a background of agreement with a significant portion of that person's other beliefs.

Davidson's views on interpretation aside, it seems to me quite clear that there is no reason to expect a Principle of Charity to apply specifically to color discourse. To understand what property Jones is attributing to the lemon in front of us, it's enough for me to assume that she is attributing to it the same property that the lemon *looks to me* to have; I don't also have to assume that the lemon *has* that property, if I am to understand how Jones believes the lemon to be.

After all, even an error theorist agrees that lemons look to have the property of being yellow; that's what explains why people are inclined to a realism about color and why the error theory is regarded as so radical. Nor is a commitment to this intentionalist account of color perception threatened by the eventual endorsement of an error theory; even after we learn that the two lines of the Muller-Lyer illusion are of equal length, they still look to us to be of unequal length. Just so, even if I were to become convinced, say through the sort of argument I previously sketched, that no lemon was actually yellow, it would still remain true that lemons would look to me as

though they had the property of being yellow. And I could identify the property that Jones takes the lemon to actually have as the property that lemons did, and still do, look to me have.

To counter this, Stroud argues that I could not hope even to identify how an object looks to *me* to be, when it looks colored, without assuming that some objects are colored. His rationale for this involves a complicated appeal to another tendentious thesis in the philosophy of language and mind -- Wittgenstein's private language argument. I don't have the space to chase all of Stroud's optional assumptions in this argument, except to say that I have never seen a version of the private language argument that makes it seem convincing; and Stroud doesn't succeed in changing my mind. There is a brief way of indicating why no such argument could succeed.

I don't think of my *sensations* as the properties of anything out there. But I think I have no difficulty in identifying which sensations I mean by my various sensation terms, and hence of thinking that others have the same sensations as I do. Similarly, even if I came to think that no object out there has a color, I would have no difficulty in identifying the properties that I now think no object has, nor in being able to think that others might be subject to the same illusion.

Conclusion

Although his stated ambitions are much grander, I think that Stroud is best read as offering a method for answering the following question:

Given that reality consists at least of the physical and the psychological, what else should it be taken to contain?

His suggested method, which emphasizes explanation, is incomplete: a number of other sorts of consideration may be relevant as well. And one of his principal contentions, that his method makes it impossible to see how anyone could ever rationally arrive at the conclusion that the world isn't colored, strikes me as false.