AUSTRALASIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1981804

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Edenic Idealism

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ABSTRACT

According to edenic idealism, our ordinary object terms refer to items in the manifest world—the world of primitive objects and properties presented in experience. I motivate edenic idealism as a response to scenarios where it is difficult to match the objects in experience with corresponding items in the external world. I argue that edenic idealism has important semantic advantages over realism: it is the most intuitive view of what we are actually talking about when we use terms for objects.

KEYWORDS idealism; realism; ordinary objects; functional identification

1. Introduction

In experience, we seem to be directly acquainted with objects located in a 3D spatial arena. These objects seem perfectly solid and seem to have simple vivid colours. Borrowing a term from Sellars [1962], I will call the world of objects presented in experience the *manifest world*.

Of course, the world presented in experience does not perfectly align with the *external world*—the mind-independent reality that gives rise to that experience. For example, there are strong reasons for denying that external objects are perfectly solid or are coloured in the way that we naively suppose them to be. Perhaps more surprisingly, there are also reasons to think that external space is very different from how it seems in experience.

These discrepancies between the manifest world and the external world pose a challenge: how do these two worlds fit together? One common strategy is to unify these worlds through *functional identification*. The basic idea is that, even if the external world does not contain simple vivid redness, it does contain a physical property filling the 'redness role'; and, by identifying redness with this property, we can preserve the truth of ordinary colour judgments. Similar proposals are available for other cases of discrepancy.

But in this paper I present several scenarios challenging functional identification. In these scenarios, it is difficult to match the objects in experience with corresponding items in the external world.

One response to these scenarios would be to reject the manifest world as an illusion or a fiction. A second response would be to reject the scenarios' implicit assumption that there is a mind-independent external world. But in this paper I defend a middle view—*edenic idealism*—on which the external and manifest worlds are *both* real and on which each is metaphysically independent of the other. In contrast to

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many traditional idealists, the edenic idealist acknowledges the existence of a mind-independent external world. But, in contrast to the realist, the edenic idealist maintains that our judgments about objects are *about* the manifest world—the world of objects and properties presented in experience.

2. Threats to the Manifest Image

As background, I will review the reasons why the external world is probably different from the manifest world.

2.1 Colours

In visual experience, we seem to be directly acquainted with simple, intrinsic, sensuous colours spread over the surfaces of objects. But there are reasons to doubt that external objects are coloured in the way that we naively suppose them to be (see, for example, Chalmers [2006: 66–9] and Maund [2011: 367ff.]).[1]

Initial doubts arise because objects sometimes seem to have different colours at different times, even though we know that the object itself is unchanged. In addition, we know that colour experience results from a long causal chain from the object to the subject. Given these facts, it seems at least conceivable that external objects lack the qualitative character that they have in colour experience.

These doubts are supported by the *perceptual variation argument* (see, for example, Averill [1992]). It seems that subjects could have incompatible colour experiences without anyone suffering an illusion. For example, suppose that roses look red to humans but green to aliens. We would have no grounds for thinking that either party was mistaken. One might hold that *both* colours are instantiated. But it is not clearly coherent to suppose that a rose could simultaneously be intrinsically red and intrinsically green. Furthermore, the above argument generalizes: roses could look blue, look yellow, etc. to other subjects. So, this would lead to the absurd result that roses instantiate all colours. One could instead insist that there is a fact about which intrinsic character is *really* instantiated. But it is more plausible to say that external objects are not coloured in the way that we naively suppose them to be. In fact, this can be shown without thought experiments: there are experimentally detectable differences in colour perception between different groups of normal human subjects [Hurvich et al. 1968; Neitz and Jacobs 1986].

Some philosophers have resisted these arguments, but I will set aside their objections. This is because the discussion ahead does not assume that the external and manifest worlds diverge with respect to colour. It only requires that such divergence is *epistemically possible* (in the weak sense of not being ruled out *a priori*).

2.2 Spatial Properties

Next consider spatial experience. Just as experience presents objects as having certain colours, so too it presents objects as having certain spatial properties. For example, experience presents some objects as square and others as spherical. And, in general,

[1] Note that the arguments below challenge our naive conception of colours; they do not show that objects lack colours altogether. This is because of the possibility of functional identification (see section 2.3).

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experience presents a three-dimensional spatial arena where objects stand in various distance relations. But, just as before, there are reasons to think that external space is different from how space naively seems to be (see, for example, Thompson [2010: 170]).

For example, we experience space and time as independent dimensions of reality, each with its own qualitative nature. But, from special relativity, we know that the division of spacetime into spatial and temporal dimensions is relative to inertial frame. Similarly, the space presented in experience seems Euclidean. But we learn from general relativity that external space has a Riemannian geometry.[2] These results suggest that external space is probably different from how it seems in experience. (Just as before, my arguments do not require this claim; they require only the *epistemic possibility* that external and manifest space diverge.)

2.3 Functional Identification

Then what is the status of judgments like 'The chair is red'? One might conclude that such judgments are simply false. But few philosophers today adopt this view. This is because, even if external objects lack the specific sensuous character that they seem to have in colour experience, they *do* instantiate properties that are similar enough for 'filling the colour role'. For example, by functionally identifying redness with whatever physical property normally causes red experiences, we can uphold the truth of ordinary colour judgments.

Similar proposals are available elsewhere. For example, even if external objects lack the qualitative character that they seem to have in spatial experience, they do have properties that 'fill the role' of spatial properties. By identifying spatial properties with whatever properties normally cause spatial experience, we can uphold the truth of ordinary spatial judgments (see Chalmers [2012: sec. 7.2]).

On this proposal, we do not conclude that objects lack manifest properties; instead, we conclude that these properties are different than we naively thought them to be. To mark this distinction, let's say that an object is *edenically red* if it is red in the way that we naively suppose it to be—that is, if it has the intrinsic sensuous character that red objects appear to have in experience. (For discussion of edenic properties, see Chalmers [2006].)

Then proponents of functional identification claim that, even if external objects are not edenically red, they are still red in the ordinary sense. This is because we can identify ordinary redness with whatever property fills the redness role. Similarly, let's say that an object is *edenically spherical* if it is spherical in the way that we naively suppose this to be. Then proponents of functional identification claim that, even if external objects are not edenically spherical, they are still spherical in the ordinary sense. This is because we can identify ordinary sphericality with whatever property fills the sphericality role.

Functional identification upholds the truth of ordinary judgments about objects. But, below, I present several scenarios challenging this strategy. In these cases, it is difficult to match the objects in experience with corresponding items in the external world.

[2] Some philosophers, such as Ney [2012], argue that quantum mechanics also challenges our ordinary conception of space. But, since this point is contested, I set it aside.

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3. The Scenarios

Each scenario describes a hypothesis H about what the external world is like 'in itself'. I then ask this: supposing that the external world turns out to be like H, to what do our terms for objects refer? For example, here is a test case.

> **The Newtonian world**. Suppose that the external world W_N is a classical, atomistic, Newtonian world. More precisely, there are n particles populating a 3D edenic space (that is, a space like the one presented in experience). Roughly speaking, when these particles densely populate certain regions, an appropriately located subject experiences an object occupying that region (see Fig. 1).

To what do object terms refer if the external world turns out to be like W_N? In this particular case, there is no puzzle. It is natural to say that, if a subject with the experience in Fig. 1 asserted 'The sphere is red', 'the sphere' would refer to a certain system of particles populating the corresponding sphere-shaped region in W_N. But, in the scenarios below, it is more difficult to identify the referent.

I do not assume that the hypotheses below are physically or even metaphysically possible. It is enough that they are epistemically possible in the weak sense of not being ruled out *a priori*. Of course, I will ultimately use these cases to motivate conclusions about objects in the *actual* world. This might seem worthy of suspicion: how can reflection on mere epistemic possibilities justify conclusions about what objects are *actually* like? I address this question in section 6.2.

3.1 The Dust World W_D

> **Description.** Just like W_N, the dust world W_D has a 3D edenic space. And, for every particle in W_N, there is a corresponding particle in W_D. But, while the spatial positions of the particles in W_N evolve in orderly ways, the particles in W_D are randomly distributed throughout space like a dust cloud (see. Fig. 2).
> Nonetheless, W_D causes 'normal' experiences just like the ones in the Newtonian world (see, for example, the right of Fig. 1). This is because each particle in W_D has a specific trio of 'hidden' properties whose magnitudes mirror directly the spatial positions of the corresponding particle in W_N. These hidden properties have no bearing on the particles' movements through external space, but they have the same role in the physical and psychophysical laws that external spatial properties have in W_N.

Analysis. To what does the expression 'the sphere' refer if the external world turns out to be like W_D? The trouble is that there is nothing sphere-shaped in W_D when we consider it 'in itself'.

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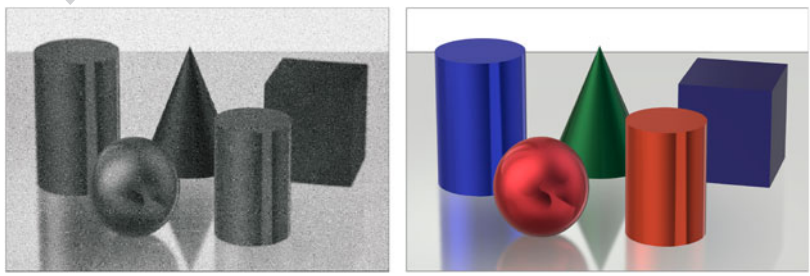


Fig. 1. The Newtonian world (W_N) vs how the world appears (W_M).

Q2 **Fig. 2.** The dust world (W_D).

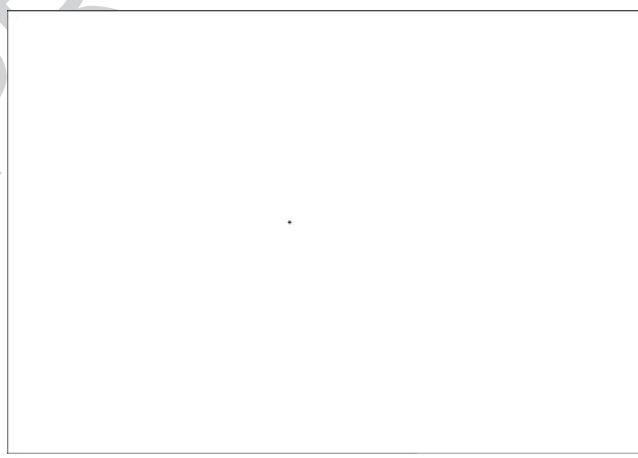
It is probably most plausible to say that 'the sphere' refers to the fusion of those particles in W_D that correspond to the particles in W_N that constitute a sphere. On this proposal, 'the sphere' refers to a fusion of particles widely and randomly distributed through external space.

Perhaps this result is palatable, but it is also odd. It is commonly thought that ordinary speakers do not use a linguistic framework on which widely and randomly scattered particles compose an object (see, for example, Hirsch [2005]). After all, speakers explicitly deny that such items exist.

But, on the current proposal, it turns out that speakers actually *do* refer to scattered fusions due to contingent facts about the external world.

3.2 The Single Particle World W_S

Description. W_S has a 3D edenic space, but, this time, the only thing relevant to the psychophysical laws is a single particle instantiating a specific property *P*. At any time *t*, *P* takes a



Q3 **Fig. 3** The single particle world (W_S).

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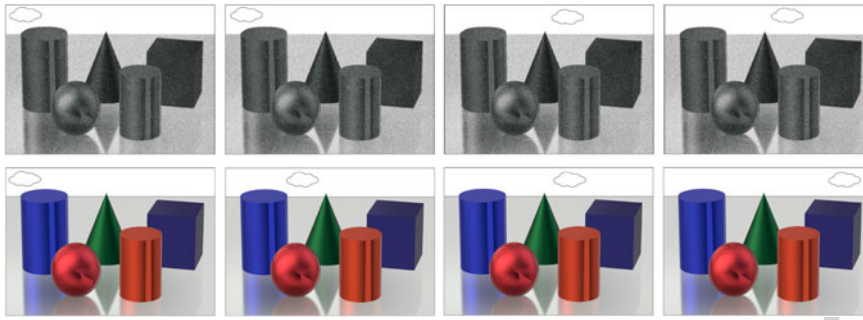

Fig. 4. The frozen world (W_F, top row) vs how the world appears (W_M, bottom row). The frames depict these worlds at successive five-minute intervals.

certain real number r_t as its magnitude. r_t encodes the entire state of the Newtonian world W_N (at the corresponding time t^* in W_N), as follows. We enumerate the magnitudes of the (assumed-to-be-finite) fundamental properties had by the (assumed-to-be-finite) particles of W_N at time t^*. r_t is the real obtained by interleaving the digits of these reals. Nonetheless, the psychophysical laws act on P in such a way as to generate the same experiences as in W_N (see, for example, the right of Fig. 1).

Analysis. To what do our object terms refer if the external world turns out to be like W_S? The problem in this case is that, since our experiences are generated by a single property, it does not seem that we could be referring to concrete entities of any kind. Later, I consider whether we might refer to some *other* kind of entity. But suffice it to say that there are no obvious candidates to serve as denotations for object terms in W_S.

3.3 The Frozen World W_F

Description. From $t = 0$ minutes to $t = 5$ minutes, W_F is exactly like the Newtonian world W_N. At $t = 5$, all matter in W_F freezes in place for five minutes. (To avoid presupposing substantival time, we can suppose that objects in some distant location do not freeze.) At $t = 10$, matter is instantaneously relocated, so that W_F is just like W_N at t = 10. This cycle continues throughout W_F's history. But, due to adjustments in the psychophysical laws,[3] our conscious experience is always exactly like in W_N, even during those times when W_F is frozen (see, for example, the cloud in Fig. 4, which moves in W_M but remains stationary in W_F during the 'frozen intervals.')

Analysis. To what do object terms refer if the external world turns out to be like W_F? For example, to what does 'the cloud' refer? From $t = 0$ to $t = 5$, it is natural to say that 'the cloud' refers to a cloud-shaped arrangement of particles, just as in W_N. But what about the frozen intervals? From $t = 5$ to $t = 10$, we would continue to make judgments about the cloud's changing properties, but, during this interval, W_F is static.

We might identify the temporal parts of the moving cloud in W_M with the corresponding temporal parts of the stationary cloud in W_F. But, to sharpen the problem, we can modify the case. Suppose that we adjust the physical laws of W_N, so that

[3] Ordinarily, we view psychophysical laws as functions from physical states (at a time) to phenomenal states (at that time). B, t during the frozen intervals, the phenomenal state of W_F will be a function of the physical state of W_F when the interval began and the time elapsed since that point.

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new objects are sometimes spontaneously generated (while also making corresponding adjustments to the physical/psychophysical laws of W_F). And now suppose that, during a specific frozen interval, such an object is created. During this interval, we can imagine a subject's saying 'That object spontaneously generated.' But this subject could not be referring to any concrete item in W_F, since the object in question does not exist in W_F until the end of the interval.[4]

3.4 Simple Error Theory

What is problematic about those scenarios? One might think that these are exotic sceptical hypotheses—scenarios where our judgments are simply false (albeit justified).

In fact, I do not think that these hypotheses are any more exotic than some hypotheses offered by philosophers of physics. For example, the single particle world is reminiscent of the 'world particle' postulated by one version of Bohmian mechanics (for discussion, see Ney [2012]).

But, regardless of that, a 'simple error theory' (the view that our object judgments are simply mistaken, although justified) is difficult to maintain.

To see why, consider how we would react upon learning that any of the above hypotheses *accurately* describes the external world. Suppose that the all-knowing and perfectly trustworthy Oracle tells us that, in fact, the external world is just like the single particle world. We would be very surprised. Indeed, we might react by saying 'Tables and chairs do not really exist!' and 'We have no bodies, after all!' But this shock would pass. And soon we would return to saying things like 'There are three chairs in the kitchen' and 'The bus arrives soon', just as we always had done. This is because we would have to return to the ordinary concerns of life—buying groceries, taking the bus, and so on.

This thought experiment clarifies what is puzzling about the scenarios in section 3. In those cases, it seems that our judgments about objects would *continue* to be correctly assertible even after we learned about the apparent lack of objects in the external world. This motivates the following *desideratum*.

> **Correctness.** A proper response to the scenarios should explain why sentences about objects would continue to be correctly assertible even after subjects learn what the external world is like 'in itself'.[5]

The thought experiment itself suggests one explanation: subjects would continue speaking of objects because it would be difficult to return to everyday life without doing so. But this *pragmatic* response is not the type of explanation currently sought. The proposals below are instead rival *semantic* explanations. To clarify what I mean, consider the various specific explanations that mereological nihilists offer for the correctness of our everyday object talk. Some claim that we are engaged in a fiction, others distinguish between strict and loose truth, others claim that we refer to items from different ontological categories, etc. In section 4, I will discuss these types of *semantic* explanations of Correctness (all of which are compatible with the

[4] Might we refer instead to a *future* existent in W_F—the object created when W_F later aligns with W_N? We can rule this out by supposing that objects in W_N sometimes spontaneously annihilate as well, and that the object in question annihilates before the frozen interval ends.

[5] In fact, I think that our (typical) object judgments are simply *true* in these scenarios. But here I use the term weaker term 'correctly assertible', so as not to prejudge against fictionalism (see section 4.1).

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above pragmatic explanation). I will return to the pragmatic explanation in section 5.3, where I argue that it supports edenic idealism.

4. Possible Responses

Unlike a simple error theory, the responses below each explain Correctness. While some are stronger than others, each faces serious problems.

4.1 Fictionalism

According to *fictionalism*, object judgments do not aim at the literal truth, but instead involve fiction, pretence, or non-literal speech. This view provides a clear explanation of Correctness. But fictionalism faces independent problems.

One problem is that the standard types of evidence indicating non-literal or fictional discourse are absent from ordinary discourse about objects. For example, if someone says 'She has butterflies in her stomach', and a child asks 'Why did she eat them?', the original speaker will immediately explain that this claim was not literally true (see Rosen and Burgess [2005: 532–4]).

Similarly, in all clear cases of non-literal or fictional discourse, speakers retract their judgments when prompted in this way. But speakers have no inclination to retract their judgments about chairs in response to queries like 'Is there *really* a chair?' This is a crucial disanalogy between ordinary discourse about objects and typical cases of non-literal or fictional discourse.

In addition, fictionalism seriously conflicts with our self-conception of the distinction between fictional and non-fictional discourse. As the terms 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' are actually used, they mark a clear distinction between sentences like 'Sherlock Holmes lives on Baker Street' and sentences like 'There is a chair' (when, for example, one experiences a chair). So, any theory on which *all* sentences about objects count as fictional (or as pretence, or as non-literal) simply fails to respect the distinction as it is ordinarily drawn.

4.2 Deflationism

Suppose that, in the Newtonian world, there are particles 'arranged chairwise'. Is there, in addition to those particles, a further entity—a chair—composed of them? Philosophers have offered complex arguments for, and against, such objects. But, according to *deflationists*, we can resolve this dispute through mere conceptual reflection. For example, Thomasson [2007] argues that, if there are particles arranged chairwise, it trivially follows (given the rules of use constitutive of competence with the terms 'chair' and 'exists') that the sentence 'There exists a chair' is true, and thus that a chair exists. Non-deflationary metaphysicians, says Thomasson, ignore these rules of use.

Perhaps the deflationist can diagnose similarly the scenarios from section 3. I observed that, in these scenarios, the sentence 'There is a chair' would remain correctly assertible post-Oracle (see section 3.4). One might suggest that this, too, is simply explained by the rules of use for the terms 'chair' and 'exist'.

But this proposal ignores the evidence about linguistic rules provided by the scenarios themselves. When considering, for example, the single particle world W_S, we immediately judge that there are no objects. This judgment is not the result of some

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metaphysical argument that the deflationist might diagnose as ignoring linguistic rules. Rather, we simply consult our intuitions. It is plausible that competence with object terms involves the ability to make intuitive judgments about whether objects exist across various possible cases. And, when we judge that W_S contains no objects, it is plausible that we are exercising these conceptual capacities.

So, the challenge does not result from *ignoring* linguistic rules. On the contrary, it was our attention to various judgments exhibiting these rules that *generated* the challenge.

4.3 Non-Standard Functional Identification

The problem for functional identification is that the scenarios do not seem to contain any concrete entities to which object terms can refer. According to *non-standard functional identification*, we explain Correctness by having these terms refer to abstract items instead.

One promising version of this strategy is to identify objects with dispositions. For example, suppose that the single particle in W_S causes experiences presenting a chair in region R in appropriate subjects. Then we might say that 'the chair' refers to the disposition—*being such as to cause chair experiences in region R in appropriate subjects*. Or perhaps, if we identify the parts of the chair with dispositions, we might identify the chair with the set of dispositions corresponding to its parts.

While this is a rough illustration, the advantage of the general idea is clear. For any item x in the manifest ontology, we can simply *define* a corresponding disposition mentioning x. So, there are sure to be sufficient dispositions to serve as denotations for object terms.

Still, this proposal conflicts seriously with our self-understanding of our object discourse. It is clear that, when we talk about chairs, we do not intend to refer to dispositions. We mean to refer to items that are concrete, that are located in space and time, that have sensuous colours, and so on. But dispositions meet none of these conditions. Indeed, dispositions are not even the right ontological category. (Note that, simply because W_S and W_E do not contain sufficient concrete objects, any proposed 'non-standard' identification will encounter this worry.)

In addition, this proposal (like the previous one) ignores the evidence provided by the scenarios themselves. When subjects consider W_S, they immediately judge that chairs do not exist. With these judgments, speakers are plausibly exercising their conceptual capacities. But the current proposal discounts these judgments.

Perhaps these worries are not fatal to the functionalist. However, the present discussion motivates searching for a more plausible alternative. Before presenting such a proposal, I will explain how the present argument relates to a classic argument, from John Foster, against realism.

4. Comparison to Foster's Argument

Foster [1993, 2008: 298–301] also presents scenarios in which the manifest world and external world diverge. In one example, moving subjects 'jump' discontinuously between regions in external space. But, due to unusual laws, subjects never notice; it appears to them that they move along continuous paths. In another example, external

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colours flip every hour, but, because their functional role (in terms of what experiences they produce) simultaneously flips, objects (typically) appear to have constant colours.

According to Foster, we should say that subjects in the first example move continuously (despite their discontinuous jumps through external space). Similarly, we should say that objects in the second example have constant colours (despite external colours flipping). He then argues that this is inconsistent with realism.

I agree that Foster's cases challenge realism. But I do not think that his specific scenarios raise this challenge in its strongest form. This is because the *functionalist* realist can provide reasonably plausible responses to these cases. For example, the functionalist might identify a manifest spatial region R with whatever external region typically causes experiences as of R.[6]

Similarly, the functionalist might identify (for example) greenness with a property such as *being edenically green during hours 1, 3, 5, … and being edenically red during hours 2, 4, 6, …* .

While these proposals are reasonably natural, the options available in the scenarios from section 3 are much less so. These scenarios focus on objects rather than colours and spatial properties. Because there are insufficient concrete items in W_S and W_F, the functionalist is forced to identify objects with items from the wrong ontological category (see section 4.3). Again, this motivates looking for a more plausible response.

5. Edenic Idealism

Our object judgments would continue to be correctly assertible even after our learning about the apparent lack of objects in the external world. But this is puzzling only if we assume that object terms purport to refer to items in the external world. I think that we should reject this assumption by endorsing the following thesis.

Edenic Idealism (EI). Object terms refer to items in the *manifest world*—the edenic world W_M presented by our experiences.

5.1 The Edenic Idealist's System

The edenic idealist claims that two worlds are relevant to our judgments about objects (see Fig. 5). W_E is what I have called the external world. While Fig. 5 depicts W_E as the dust world, this is for illustration; it could be the single particle world, or something else. As for W_M, it is a world with a 3D edenic space populated by edenic objects (see section 2.3). In other words, W_M aligns with the naive conception of objects that we get from experience. The central claim of EI is that object terms refer to items in W_M, not W_E (as the realist supposes).

W_M and W_E are not spatiotemporally or causally related. Nor does W_E constitute or metaphysically ground W_M. Instead, W_E and W_M are two metaphysically independent

[6] To rule out this reply, Foster [2008: 304–6] argues that any genuine space—including manifest space—has its topology essentially. External space has its functional topology contingently. So, these spaces must be distinct. But, says Foster, the topology of a space is also essential to the identities of its points. Therefore, points and regions of external space cannot be identified with points and regions of manifest space. To respond to that argument, the realist could deny that a space's topology is essential to the identities of its points. In particular, a given set of points could have distinct topologies defined over it, such that it composes two 'genuine spaces'. This issue deserves further discussion.

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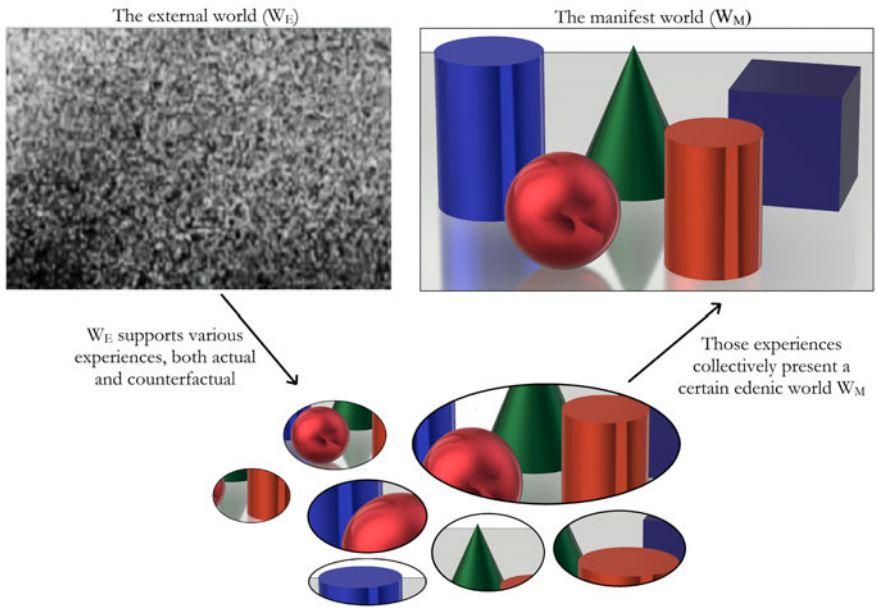

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Fig. 5. The edenic idealist's system.

worlds. But they stand in the following indirect relation: W_M is the edenic world *collectively presented* by the experiences counterfactually supported by W_E.

For example, suppose that there are thirty people looking at an apple. Let e_1-e_{30} be the experiences of these subjects at a certain time. These experiences are not unrelated to each other. On the contrary, taken together, they seem to present a single object from various perspectives. Intuitively, W_M is the world presented by e_1 from perspective p_1, presented by e_2 from perspective p_2, and so on. So, W_M contains an object with the same edenic properties that are presented in e_1- e_{30}. Of course, all actual experiences taken together do not collectively present anything close to an entire world. This is why EI also invokes the experiences *counterfactually* supported by W_E. For example, no one is currently in my kitchen. But if someone *were* there, they would experience a toaster. So, W_M contains the relevant toaster-shaped edenic object.

Unlike traditional idealism, EI views the relation between experience and objects as intentional, not metaphysical.[7] Objects in W_M are not *constituted* by experience; instead, they are the (*sui generis*) edenic items collectively *presented* in experience.[8]

Of course, most realists agree that objects are (in some sense) presented in experience, but realists attempt to locate objects in W_E, and therefore must deny that objects have edenic character (see section 2).

[7] I use the label 'intentional' broadly, to capture any relation in which one item is *about* or *directed towards* another. For example, philosophers disagree on whether perceptual experience involves representation or instead 'direct presentation' of objects (see Siegel [2010] for discussion). Both relations count as intentional, on current usage.

[8] I write 'presents' because experience has a presentational phenomenology (see, e.g., Chalmers [2006: sec. 5]). Here, I remain neutral on the precise nature of the perceptual relation (see the previous note).

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5.2 Features

Here are several unique features of EI.

Two worlds. Whereas traditional idealism rejects the existence of W_E, EI rejects the assumption that object judgments are *about* W_E. In claiming that object judgments concern W_M, EI secures the epistemic and semantic advantages sought by idealists (which I discuss in section 5.3). But, by acknowledging W_E, EI avoids certain objections to idealism. For example, there is a worry that idealism cannot explain intrasubjective and intersubjective experiential coherence. But EI gives the same explanation as realism does: subjects' experiences cohere because they are supported by the same mind-independent world.

The distinction between W_E and W_M recalls Kant's [1781/1787] distinction between noumena and phenomena, but there are also differences. According to Kant, our knowledge of noumena is very limited. But it is consistent with EI to say that we have more substantial knowledge of W_E, such as structural knowledge provided by physics. EI also differs from Carnap's [1950] ontological pluralism. According to him, there are no objective facts about what exists: we carve the world in different ways by adopting different linguistic frameworks. By contrast, W_E and W_M are not two ways of carving the world; instead, they are two distinct (and incompatible) worlds.

An intentional form of idealism. EI's intentional element distinguishes it from, for example, the subjective idealisms of Berkeley [1713] and Foster [2008], Yetter-Chappell's [2017] phenomenal unity view, and Pelczar's [2019] phenomenalism. Accordingly, EI diverges from these views on the character of ordinary objects. Objects in W_M are not sense data, elements of consciousness, or dispositions to cause certain experiences; instead, they are mind-independent physical entities. This ensures that objects in W_M have the correct modal properties: for example, EI agrees that (many) ordinary objects would still exist, even without consciousness.[9]

On the other hand, objects in W_M differ from the items that modern physics describes; objects in W_M align with the naive conception of objects we get from experience—see section 2.3. (I have described the character of objects in W_M, but why think that such items actually exist? I address this question in section 5.4.)

Standard referential semantics. According to Russell [1924], objects are *logical constructions*: sentences about objects are analysable into sentences referring only to sense data. By contrast, EI gives object discourse a standard referential semantics based on W_M.

Because of the distinction between W_M and W_E, the edenic idealist will view various terms as context-sensitive. For example, in typical contexts, the predicate 'actual' applies to the objects that we encounter in W_M. But if we are specifically reflecting on the Oracle's testimony, there is also a perfectly good sense in which 'The single particle actually exists' is true. So, sentences involving the term 'actual' are context-sensitive: their truth depends on whether we intend to talk about W_E or about W_M. Similarly, the edenic idealist will acknowledge senses in which both 'My pain is caused by the hot pan' and 'My pain is caused by the single particle' are true.

Consider also $T \equiv$ 'That chair is part of the external world.' Philosophers often use 'the external world' as a term of art; it refers to whatever reality is 'behind the

[9] This, in turn, helps to ensure that—as I argue in section 5.3—EI aligns with our referential intentions in everyday discourse about objects.

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appearances', such as the dust world. On this usage (which I have adopted throughout this paper), EI denies *T*. But, in ordinary contexts, we might use *T* to distinguish chairs from hallucinated items. So, the edenic idealist grants that, in everyday life, 'the external world' refers to W_M.

5.3 Why Accept EI?

On first approach, one might be tempted to give EI the 'incredulous stare'. Indeed, the view's provocative label might encourage this reaction.

But I do not propose EI as a position about which it is amusing to think, yet that, ultimately, cannot be taken seriously. On the contrary, I think that, once we sufficiently appreciate the fact that W_E is very different from the manifest world (see sections 2.1 and 2.2), we see that EI is by far the most intuitive view of what we are actually talking about when using object terms. To show this, I will consider various features of our discourse about objects.

Referential intentions. One set of factors thought to be relevant to reference determination is that of speakers' referential intentions. So, to what do we intend to refer, in everyday life, when we use terms like 'the chair'? We do not mean to refer to a dust cloud or a set of dispositions (see section 4.3). We mean to refer to the things with which we are acquainted in experience—objects that exist in 3D space, that have certain sensuous colours, and so on. EI vindicates this completely: we are referring to exactly the kinds of things that we thought that we were referring to all along.

But do we not also intend to refer to items in the *external world*? Certainly, but EI claims that the term 'external world' is context-dependent (see section 5.2). In ordinary contexts, this expression applies to objects in W_M. So, when using this expression with its ordinary sense, EI fully aligns with our referential intentions. Of course, some people might also have the *theoretical* belief that object terms refer specifically to items in W_E. But the Oracle thought experiment shows that these theoretical beliefs are irrelevant to how these terms are ordinarily used. As such, these beliefs are irrelevant to reference determination.

Usage. Given the discrepancies between the manifest world and the external world, it will always be a challenge for the functionalist to accommodate the truth of our object judgments. Perhaps, with sufficient cleverness, the functionalist will be able to do so. But such efforts will always require the forcing of language onto a world that it was never meant to describe anyway. By contrast, with EI, there is no need to accommodate anything. Our object judgments are made with the manifest world directly in mind, and EI says that the manifest world is exactly what we are talking about. EI takes our language at face value, and says that we refer to those items that actually guide the use of our object terms.

Epistemology. In ordinary contexts, it seems trivial to judge 'There is an apple' when one has experiences as of an apple. EI easily explains this triviality. W_M just is the world presented in experience, and so, if we have an experience as of an apple, it is trivial that there is an apple in W_M.[10]

By contrast, for the realist, the truth of object judgments is hostage to fortune. Perhaps W_E contains suitable items to identify with objects, or perhaps not. Either

[10] One caveat is that EI allows for the possibility of illusions: see Smithson [2021].

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way, it is not trivial that such identifications are available. So, there is a worry that realism undermines the triviality of inferences from experience to judgments about objects. But then why think that object terms have the semantic role of referring to items in W_E?

Of course, many philosophers have argued that our object judgments *are* justified under realist assumptions. Still, one advantage of EI is that it provides a very straightforward explanation of the epistemology of perception.

Pragmatic. I think that the proper lesson to learn from the Oracle is that, in everyday contexts, we do not *care* what W_E is like 'in itself'. If we did care, we would not continue in the same way even after receiving the Oracle's testimony. But if this is correct, why should we think that object terms have the semantic role of referring to items in W_E? What we *do* care about is the world presented in experience, the world that we think of ourselves as inhabiting all of the time and every day. And it is because we think of ourselves as living in W_M that it becomes most plausible to say that object terms refer to items *in* W_M. This conclusion supports Goodman's [1978: 20] cryptic remark that '[the] world, indeed, is the one most often taken as real; for reality in a world, like realism in a picture, is largely a matter of habit.'

5.4 The Existence of W_M

Suppose that it is true that EI best aligns with our object discourse. Still, one may worry that the cost of EI's expanded ontology outweighs its explanatory benefits.

To respond, the edenic idealist should adopt a deflationary metaontology (see section 4.2).[11]

Deflationists argue that, given the rules of use governing ordinary discourse, sentences like 'Tables exist' and 'Trees exist' are (often) trivially true. So, at least when we use terms like 'ordinary object' and 'exist' with their everyday meanings, it is trivial that ordinary objects exist.

But now suppose that, as argued in section 5.3, EI provides the best account of what object terms refer to (when used with their everyday meanings). Then, in establishing that ordinary objects exist, deflationism *specifically* establishes that items in W_M exist. (By contrast, in section 4.2, I explained why deflationism does *not* establish the existence of ordinary objects in W_E.)

Put another way, the deflationist's general insight—that we can establish the existence of objects through reflection on ordinary linguistic rules—is neutral on whether objects are located in W_E or instead in W_M. It depends on what we are talking about in everyday discourse about objects. I have argued that we are, in fact, talking about items in W_M. So, deflationism, together with the arguments of section 5.3, implies the existence of items in W_M.[12]

Philosophers have accounted for the triviality of (ordinary) existence claims in different ways. Here are three ways that one might pair EI with such an approach.

In section 4.2, I presented Thomasson's [2007] argument that, in a situation where there are particles 'arranged chairwise', it trivially follows—given the rules of use constitutive of competence with 'chair' and 'exists'—that the sentence 'There exists a chair'

[11] For defence, see, e.g., Hirsch [2005] and Thomasson [2007, 2015].
[12] It is true that the existing literature on deflationism assumes realism. But, as I explain below, deflationism is fully compatible with EI.

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is true, and thus that a chair exists. This style of argument can be adapted directly for EI. The edenic idealist should argue that, in a situation where (roughly speaking) our experiences collectively cohere so as to present a chair, it follows—given the rules of use constitutive of competence with 'chair' and 'exists'—that the sentence 'There exists a chair' is true, and thus that a chair exists (in W_M). Indeed, the Oracle argument from section 3.4 directly supports this claim. The fact that object terms have such constitutive rules of use explains why object sentences are correctly assertible even post-Oracle.

As a second approach, many grounding theorists (see, for example, Schaffer [2009]) argue that we should adopt a permissive view of non-fundamental ontology. Along these lines, an edenic idealist might view objects in W_M as grounded in intentional truths about what experience presents or represents, such that these (non-fundamental) objects are no costly ontological addition.

For some traditional idealists, the redness presented in experience is a quality internal to consciousness, and objects are composed (in some sense) from such mind-dependent qualities. So, we might say that, for traditional idealists, objects are grounded in *qualitative* experiential truths. By contrast, the edenic idealist views the redness in question as a mind-independent edenic property that is *presented* in experience (see section 5.2). So, on a grounding approach to EI, truths about objects are grounded in *intentional* experiential truths.

Sider [2011] provides a third approach. He argues that, even if deflationary arguments are successful, it does not follow that ontological debates are defective. This is because ontological debates employ a metaphysically privileged 'Ontologese' quantifier rather than the ordinary existential quantifier. Supposing that we grant this distinction, there is no need to associate W_M with the Ontologese quantifier, and thus no concern about EI's ontology.

Of course, some philosophers deny that *any* existence statements are trivial. Such philosophers must judge whether EI's explanatory benefits are worth the perceived cost.

6. Objections

It is outside the scope of this paper to provide EI with a full defence. But, to conclude, I will consider two objections.

6.1. Perceptual Variation

In section 2.1, I described two perceptual variation arguments. The first involved spectrum-inverted aliens, while the second involved human perceptual variation. These arguments might seem to challenge the claim that objects in W_M have edenic colours.

As for the former argument, the edenic idealist ought to say that the set of experiences presenting W_M includes only experiences by subjects within our epistemic community. It should not include, for example, experiences by fish. This is because, in everyday life, we are completely indifferent to fish experiences. But then fish experiences are similar to facts about what W_E is like 'in itself': neither is relevant to our everyday judgments, and so neither is relevant to what W_M is like. But, plausibly, the same applies to the experiences of spectrum-inverted aliens.

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Human perceptual variation is more challenging. If something looks unique-green to A-subjects and yellow-green to B-subjects, what edenic colour is the object in W_M? My preferred response is to appeal to indeterminacy. On this response, the experiences supported by W_E are insufficient to present a *unique* world W_M. It is indeterminate whether a term refers to an edenically unique-green object in W_M^A or an edenically yellow-green object in W_M^B. By contrast, it is determinately true that the term refers to something edenically green.

If this seems odd, note that proponents of functional identification must say something similar. If objects with physical property P appear unique-green to A-subjects and yellow-green to B-subjects, which shade of green is identical to P? In response, functionalists (see, for example, Byrne and Hilbert [2003: sec. 3.4]) have claimed that subjects perceive only *determinable* colours veridically.

So, functional identification and EI-with-indeterminacy are on a par with respect to the phenomenon of human perceptual variation.

6.2 Using Epistemic Possibilities

I presented three scenarios where functional identification failed. From these cases, I ultimately concluded that object terms refer to items in W_M. But this inference might seem suspect. The fact that it is epistemically possible for functional identification to fail does not show that functional identification fails in the actual world. So, even if object terms refer to items in W_M in the case of the dust world, why not say that object terms *actually* refer to items in W_E? (Compare that with this case. If it had turned out that the liquid in the oceans was XYZ, the term 'water' would have referred to XYZ. But this does not show that water refers to XYZ in the *actual* world.)

In fact, there are reasons to think that the actual external world is *itself* not amenable to functional identification.[13]

But I claim that, even if functional identification *were* available—for example, even if W_E turned out to be Newtonian—object terms would still refer to items in W_M.

As discussed in section 5.2, the lesson from the Oracle argument is that, in everyday life, we do not *care* about whatever external reality gives rise to our experiences. Indeed, we typically make judgments in complete indifference to such a reality. For this reason, speakers will talk in the same way about objects (and will take themselves to be talking about the *same* objects), no matter what W_E turns out to be like 'in itself.' So, even if it *is* possible to identify objects with items in W_E, this is so only because W_E happens to 'endorse' the ontology of W_M. So, any alleged advantage of identifying objects with items in W_E is idle.

By contrast, I have argued that EI aligns excellently with the various features of object discourse. These arguments made no assumptions about what W_E is like in itself. So, *however* W_E turns out to be, edenic objects are the best candidates for what object terms refer to. Even in the Newtonian world, functional identification would be settling for less.

[13] For example, Ney [2012] argues that 3D space does not exist, because no such space is functionally enacted by the wave function in configuration space. For a second example, eliminative structural realists argue that, in order to address problems relating to the identity and individuality of quantum particles, physical objects should be eliminated in favour of an ontology of structure. For discussion, see Psillos [2001].

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7. Conclusions

I presented various scenarios challenging functional identification. Sometimes, philosophers appeal to exotic cases in order to support surprising or revisionary metaphysical conclusions. But this has not been my intention. Instead, these scenarios interest me because of what they reveal about our practices: they remind us that what matters to us in everyday life is the world presented in experience. In this way, the scenarios in section 3 help to *bring us back* to common sense.

Ultimately, we should endorse edenic idealism because it is the most plausible account of what we are actually talking about when we speak of ordinary objects. In my estimation, everything hangs on this one point. Admittedly, edenic idealism might not at first seem intuitive. But this is because we assume, naively, that W_E is like the manifest world. Once we appreciate that W_E might be very different from the manifest world, we realize that we never meant to be talking about W_E at all.[14]

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Q1 The author(s) reported there is no funding associated with the work featured in this article.

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[14] I thank David Chalmers, Chris Dorst, Krasi Filcheva, Thomas Hofweber, Marc Lange, Matthew Kotzen, Alan Nelson, Ram Neta, Carla Merino-Rajme, Michael Pelczar, John Roberts, Gillian Russell, Helen Yetter-Chappell, and many anonymous referees for helpful comments.

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