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G. E. Moore on Sense-data
and Perception

Paul Snowdon

In 1958, the year of Moore's death, Professor A. R. White published his book *G. E. Moore: A Critical Exposition*.¹ White's study, though now, presumably, rarely read, is extremely acute and based on a close reading of Moore's work as he knew it. In it White says: 'There are three main topics dealt with in Moore's writings, namely, philosophical method, ethics, and perception.'² As a general description, the only reservation that can be felt about this remark is that it would be more accurate to add epistemology as a fourth main topic. Moore obviously grappled in a variety of ways with the problems raised by scepticism. Now, it might be that White included epistemology under the title of 'perception', and it is, indeed, not uncommon to think of the name 'philosophy of perception' as covering epistemology. But another, and I think more likely, possibility is that White underestimated Moore's epistemological concerns, perhaps because when White was writing a number of Moore's essays on the subject were not widely known (or, at least, not known to White).³ However, what is undoubtedly correct in what White says is that perception is one of the topics about which Moore both thought, and wrote, a great deal. His last published work in 1958 was entitled 'Visual Sense-data', and it is obvious that Moore was, at that stage,

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¹ A. R. White (1958) *G. E. Moore: A Critical Exposition* (Oxford: Blackwell). ² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ White hardly mentions Moore's 'proof of the external world', and does not cite the group of articles on epistemology that were published in Moore's *Philosophical Papers*, itself published in 1959. Presumably, White was writing his book before they came to his attention. Significantly, White's list corresponds to the three categories into which Moore himself grouped his Replies in the Schlipp volume.

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as fully engaged with problems raised by perception as he had been in such an early publication as ‘The Nature and Reality of Objects of Perception’, published fifty-three years earlier, and also as he was in the lectures he delivered in 1910 (published later under the title *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*.)

It would be misleading to describe Moore as simply interested throughout his life in the nature of perception. Rather, he repeatedly engages, with his characteristic intensity of focus and single-mindedness, with just a small cluster of problems. More or less every time he writes about perception Moore asks the same questions, scrutinizes the same arguments and examples, and embeds his discussion within the same set of assumptions. In fact, I think that it is no exaggeration to say that Moore’s obsession with perception is really an obsession with two questions, the second of which has the rather special status of being a hard question only if the first one is answered a certain way. The first question, leaving out certain elements that Moore regards as crucial, is: what is the relation between sense-data present in our experience when we perceive our environment and the perceived physical objects? Moore’s view is that in all perceptual experiences, e.g., seeing an ink-pot or hearing a piano, the subject directly perceives, or apprehends, a sense-datum. The question that concerns Moore is: how does the sense-datum involved in the experience relate to the physical object perceived? Moore, like many philosophers, thought most about visual experience, and in relation to the visual case Moore poses this question in the following distinctive way: what is the relation between the sense-datum and the *surface* of the object that is seen? The second general issue is: what is the correct analysis of what Moore calls ‘judgements of perception’?⁴ They are, roughly, judgements such as ‘That is an ink-pot’, in which a perceived object is described as being of a certain kind. Moore’s view is that if the sense-datum involved in the (visual) experience can be counted as identical to the surface of physical objects then the analysis of such judgements is not difficult to give, but if it is not then the analysis is very difficult to give. In fact, Moore’s main point about the analysis of such judgements, granting the assumption that makes the question difficult, is that it is so difficult that no satisfactory full analysis has been given! It is, therefore, really only the first question about perception that is the one Moore agonized about his entire philosophical life.

I have tried to capture the questions to which Moore repeatedly returns. From our perspective, two questions stand out as demanding a more extensive treatment than Moore provides in relation to the theory he develops. First, Moore says remarkably little as to the *nature* of that relation, which he calls ‘apprehending’, in which we

⁴ I have chosen to formulate the second question along the lines that Moore adopted in ‘Some Judgements of Perception’, see 228. At other times, he puts what is, in effect, the same question in the words: what is the analysis of ‘S sees (e.g.) an ink-pot’?

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stand, according to him, to sense-data. What is it? How does it *work*?⁵ Second, Moore does not explain how an occurrence which is the apprehending of a sense-datum (as conceived by him) can be the core element in something that ultimately amounts to the gaining of knowledge of our *environment*. How exactly does it fit into this broader occurrence? Moore does not explain how the apprehending of a sense-datum can yield an experience with the right character to generate the right epistemological consequences.

Whenever Moore discusses the central question that I have identified, he standardly expresses considerable uncertainty about the answer he is at that time inclined to give. Here are two typical passages by Moore, expressing his uncertainties about the matter. The first is from ‘The Status of Sense-data’, published in 1913–14: ‘I now pass to the question how sensibles [i.e., sense-data] are related to physical objects. And here I want to say, to begin with, that I feel extremely puzzled about the whole subject. I find it extremely difficult to distinguish clearly from one another the different considerations which ought to be distinguished; and all I can do is to raise, more or less vaguely, certain questions as to how certain particular sensibles are related to certain particular physical objects, and to give the reasons which seem to me to have most weight for answering these questions in one way rather than another. I feel that all that I can say is tentative.’⁶

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Here, again, is Moore, in 1925, expressing a similar uncertainty in ‘A Defence of Common Sense’: ‘Am I, in this case, really knowing about the sense-datum in question that it itself is part of the surface of a human hand? Or, just as we found in the case of “This is a human hand”, that what I was knowing about the sense-datum was certainly not that it *itself* was a human hand, so, is it perhaps the case, with this new proposition, that even here I am not knowing, with regard to the sense-datum, that it is *itself* part of the surface of a hand? And, if so, what is it that I am knowing about

⁵ There is, it seems to me, a gap at this point in Moore’s account, but perhaps a number of things need saying to soften somewhat the rather blunt nature of that complaint. (1) Moore does not fail to fill out what the relation of apprehending is more conspicuously than anyone else. In this failure, he simply resembles other philosophers. (2) It should also be pointed out that he does try to get clear about various aspects of nature of the relation. Thus, in section I of ‘The Status of Sense-data’, Moore distinguishes what he there calls ‘direct apprehension’ from that link a subject has to something when he or she remembers it, and he also agonizes about its relation to attention. (3) Further, in the ‘Refutation of Idealism’ (24), although his language there is different, he can be taken to be saying that apprehending is itself what he calls a transparent element, that is one not manifest to the subject (or at best manifest only with the greatest difficulty), and that it can be thought of as a form of awareness or knowing. In so far as he offers a cognitive analysis, Moore is endorsing what Sellars, in Part I of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, called ‘the mongrel classical concept of a sense datum’. This would open up Moore’s account to the difficulties that Sellars brings out in that conception, as well as, of course, to others. It is not, though, clear whether Moore stuck by such a cognitive approach after that.

⁶ G. E. Moore (1913–14), ‘The Status of Sense-data’, in *Philosophical Studies*, 185.

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the sense-datum itself? This is the question to which it seems to me, no philosopher has hitherto suggested as answer which comes anywhere near to being certainly true. There seems to me to be three, and only three, alternative types of answer possible; and to any answer yet suggested, of any of these types, there seems to me to be very grave objections'.⁷

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In his last article, 'Visual Sense-data' Moore finally, with a fair degree of confidence, declares that visual sense-data are *not* identical to the surfaces of objects. He says: 'But I have to own that I now think that I was mistaken in supposing that, in the case of 'seeing' an opaque object, where in seeing it you are seeing only one visual sense-datum, the sense datum can possibly be identical with that part of the opaque object's surface you are seeing. I now think that it cannot possibly be identical with that part of the object's surface . . .'.⁸ This quotation reveals the final unequivocal re-emergence in Moore's thinking of some sort of confidence as to what to say about his main question, a confidence that he had lost officially towards the end of 'Some Judgements of Perception' (in 1918/19). Moore's confidence in how to answer the first and basic question means, of course, that he has no confidence in how to answer his second once. This passage also illustrates the point, already made, that Moore's discussions over a long period focused on precisely the same question.

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I Moore's Framework

As I have said, Moore's reflections on perception (like those of most philosophers) mainly concerned vision. For that case Moore's main question can be put, perhaps with a degree of looseness that Moore would not have liked, in these words; when an object (of, perhaps the opaque kind) is seen by a subject, what is the relation between the sense-datum involved in the subject's visual experience and the seen surface of the seen object?

There are two features of this Moorean question that would attract immediate scrutiny nowadays. The first is that it is assumed in the question that there are sense-data involved in visual experience. The presence of this assumption in the question is likely to elicit the following complaint. 'Surely the (or a) fundamental question is *whether* there are sense-data. We should not assume in the very formulation of what is supposed to be the central question in the philosophy of perception that there are

⁷ G. E. Moore (1925), 'A Defence of Common Sense', in *Philosophical Papers*, 55. I have eliminated some paragraph breaks in the quotation. For the sake of accuracy, it should be pointed out that in this passage Moore is expressing his uncertainty about the second of his two main questions. But the particular source of the uncertainty is the difficulty of answering the first.

⁸ G. E. Moore (1958), 'Visual Sense-data', in R. J. Swartz (ed.), *Perceiving, Sensing and Knowing*, 136.

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sense-data.' A reply to this complaint which is in the spirit of Moore's approach would run as follows: 'When I assume in posing the question that there are sense-data I am not assuming anything that is objectionable, or, indeed, that is disputable. My notion of sense-datum is a thoroughly neutral one. Given what I mean by "sense-data" no-one can deny that there are sense-data. You might perhaps, given the way the term has come to be used, quibble with my use of the word "sense-data" for these thoroughly unobjectionable items, but that is not a serious philosophical worry, and, moreover my usage is as long standing and as well known as any other.' How, though, are we to understand the *neutral* notion of sense-data that Moore supposedly employed? The way to think of Moore's conception is to contrast the *theory* that is built into Moore's use with the one that is built into a more committal and disputable use. Thus, when it is said that there are sense-data on such a committal use the claim amounts to saying that there are things which satisfy a certain complex theoretical condition. We can say, then, that on this conception to claim that:

Ex (Sense-datum (x))

is equivalent to:

Ex (in accordance with theory C (x)),

(where 'C' stands for committal). Being in accordance with theory C will be equivalent to and will be spelled out in terms of being P1PN, for certain values of those predicates specified by the committal theory as definitive of sense-data. The properties picked out might include being non-physical, being private to the experience of a single subject, and, possessing qualities such as those of colour, shape etc.⁹ For Moore the assertion that:

Ex (Sense-datum (x))

will be equivalent to:

Ex (in accordance with Theory M (x)),

(where 'M' stands for Moorean). Theory M will define the conditions for being a sense-datum as being PM1,PMN, for values of those predicates which are supposedly such that no-one would deny that there are things of this sort involved in perceptual experiences. One central question, therefore, is whether the characterization which is built into Theory M is totally uncontroversial even *in the perceptual case*. A further important question, though, is whether the theory M applies uncontroversially in *all* the cases of experience to which Moore thinks it applies. At this stage, then, it is built into the framework which Moore endorses that there is a property (or properties)

⁹ For one list of this sort, see H. Robinson, *Perception* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1–2.

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which apply to certain objects in perceptual experiences, but also to certain objects involved in some other sorts of experiences as well, which no-one can really deny does (or do) apply to *something or other* in those cases. On Moore's conception the crucial question is what further *real nature* these objects have.

I shall later examine in more detail the theory that is built into Moore's employment of the term 'sense-data'. It is, however, easy enough to say what the central assumption is. Moore's root notion of the sense-datum present in an experience is that it is the item which the experience enables the subject demonstratively to pick out in what might be called an unmediated way. By talking of an unmediated way (which is not Moore's way of speaking) the point is to exclude a type of demonstrative designator which according to Moore exists. The excluded type of demonstrative is one where 'that F' (e.g., 'that cup') is equivalent to the definite description: the F which is R-related to that G. Moore evidently envisages that the R-relation slot in such a description can be occupied by a specification of considerable semantic complexity. Thus 'that F' might be equivalent to: 'the F which is G-related to the H which is I-related to that J'. An unmediated demonstrative is one not equivalent to a designator with this sort of structure. It is not clear, of course, that Moore is right to think that there are demonstratives with this mediated character, but that is not a question that needs considering at this point. Moore's concept of sense-data is that they are the items which experience enables subjects to demonstrate unmediatedly. He thinks that it is undeniable that experience enables us to do this and so there is nothing problematic in defining the category of sense-data in this way. Moore's question is: what sort of thing is that immediately demonstrable object?

There is, however, a second special feature of the way that Moore almost always formulates his central question which would strike most people nowadays as puzzling. Moore's question is whether the sense-datum present in the visual experience is identical with *part of the surface of the seen object* or not. Why does Moore suppose that the visual sense-datum is a candidate for being identical with, at best, parts of the *surface* of the seen object O rather than with the object O itself? That Moore did suppose this is the second ingredient in what I am calling his framework. Moore supposed this because he thought there are powerful considerations to show that even if we are seeing on object O, say an ink-pot, the relation in which we stand to O, the ink-pot, cannot be the same as the relation we are standing to the sense-datum. Hence, according to Moore, the only external candidate we might stand to in that relation (in the case of vision) is (part of) the surface of the seen object.

The two assumptions that I have tried to express are the two main ingredients in Moore's framework. There is, however, a third assumption that is very important to Moore and that influences his treatment of these issues. This is the assumption that it is obviously true, and so not a proposition for debate or possible revaluation in

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the course of philosophical discussion, that we do see external physical objects. Here is Moore expressing this attitude right at the beginning of 'Visual Sense-data'.¹⁰ 'It seems to me quite plain that one of the commonest senses in which the word 'see' can be correctly used in English, perhaps the commonest of all, is that in which a particular person can be said, at a particular time, to be seeing such objects as, for example, a particular penny, a particular chair, a particular tree, a particular flower, or a particular horse, his own right hand, the moon, the planet Venus, etc.—objects which I shall call 'physical objects'. I have, indeed, once met a philosopher who told me that I was making a great mistake in thinking that such objects are ever seen. But I think that this philosopher was certainly wrong, and was thinking that the various correct uses of 'see' are limited in a way that they are not in fact limited. . . . I, personally, have in fact often seen pennies and often seen the moon, and so have many other people. But, nevertheless, I think there is a puzzle as to how the word 'see' is being used in this common usage'.¹¹

The two questions raised by this passage are: (1) what exactly is the attitude to which Moore is committing himself here?; and (2) is it an attitude that it is reasonable to endorse? Although I want to say something in response to these questions they are, it seems to me, very difficult in that they concern Moore's conception of philosophy and its tasks. This is both too large an issue to confront properly and also one about which I do not have a definite interpretation to offer. It is also not essential to do so in order to get Moore's account of perception in focus.

The most extreme view that might be ascribed to Moore is that it is not a matter for debate or question that, say, the sentence, 'S sees O' is true at t at p. An acceptable analysis of what 'S sees O' says must, therefore, fit what, on investigation, obtained at t and p. Beyond this constraint, however, mere reflection, unaided by an investigation of what did obtain, gets us no way to an analysis.

It would be natural to object to such a conception that we can in advance at least say that 'S sees O' entails that S exists and that O exists. The analysis of the sentence cannot remain neutral about its commitment to the existence of those two entities. There are, however, two replies to this comment that a proponent of the extreme attitude might make, the first of which, in fact, corresponds closely to something that Moore himself was at one time prepared to say. Consider first what Moore might say about the subject side of the sentence (the side of S). One might assume that if 'S sees O' entails the existence of S, then the sentence 'S directly apprehends the sensible X' would entail the existence of S, too. Moore's attitude to the latter entailment is, though, rather complicated. He says, in his early article 'The

¹⁰ Moore expresses the same attitude to the claim that we see physical objects in 'Some Judgements of Perception', 233.

¹¹ Moore, 'Visual Sense-data', 130.

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Status of Sense-data' the following; 'It is quite possible, I think, that there is no entity whatever which deserves to be called "I" or "me" .;. and hence nothing whatever is ever directly apprehended by me.'¹² Moore himself is, therefore, extremely cautious about admitting what seem to be fairly obvious entailments. The second point is that even if it is conceded that 'S sees O' entails that 'S exists' and 'O exists' are true, this is insignificant if the analyses of the two entailed sentences are themselves completely open. All that is established is that the conditions built into the analysis of the second pair of sentences must be such that they come out true when the conditions built into the analysis of the first sentence is true, which is in effect no constraint at all.

Still, although there are elements in Moore's account which fit this extreme interpretation, it is, surely, not an attractive view, nor one that is forced on Moore by what he says. First, the position contains no satisfactory account of analysis. To offer such an account it is necessary to say both (i) what 'the analysis of P is Q' means; and (ii) how the analysis is to be determined. Now, the previous suggestion says nothing in relation to (i) and so gives no insight at all in to what an analysis is, and, in relation to (ii) the suggestion is purely negative, to the effect that it is not an a priori method. That, however, is both very extreme and incomplete. No indication is given as to how to distinguish those claims which figure in the analysis of 'P' and those claims which also happen to be true at the same time. Second, an explanation is needed, and it is by no means obvious how to provide it, of the epistemological status of the claim that S saw O at p at t. What provides the entitlement to regard it as settled, given the possibly massive ignorance as to what else obtains there and then? Third, there is, I think, nothing in what Moore says that means we have to think that he held such a view. Moore's remarks about the self illustrate how cautious, but also, to some extent, how bold, he is about analysis, but do not suggest that a priori analysis is impossible. The status that Moore ascribes to 'I have seen e.g. a coin' does not, I shall argue, require any such view, but can be interpreted differently.

An alternative interpretation of Moore's approach might be introduced by reflection on the following simple example. I can investigate the number of chairs in a room and determine that it is twelve. I am therefore entitled to affirm that is so, even though I do not know what my claim entails, (for example, I do not know that my claim entails that there is the square root of 144 chairs in the room). The fact that I myself have not yet achieved the a priori insight which is available into what is entailed by my claim does not undermine my entitlement to accept that it. Of course, this example leaves unilluminated what the requirements of the entitlement are, but it reveals that they can exist in the absence of a complete, or

¹² Moore, 'The Status of Sense-data', 174.

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even nearly complete, analysis of entailments. Further, Moore might hold that the determinate analysis is a priori but simply very hard. Or he might hold that what is a priori determinable are claims of the form 'If C then [the analysis of 'P' is 'Q']' and 'If B then [the analysis of 'P' is 'R']', where the choice between C and B is not a priori.

What I have been offering here is not intended to be a vindication of Moore's position, but rather a sketch of options for understanding it. It does need to be pointed out that there is something disingenuous in what Moore says in the quoted passage. Moore certainly insinuates, in the way he writes that there is something very eccentric in the suggestion that maybe we do not actually see such objects as the moon or coins. In fact, this is simply the idea of what Mackie has famously called an 'error theory'. Philosophy is replete with error theories in general, and many have, of course, been tempted by the idea that our thought about perception is an error. It is quite unfair of Moore to represent this view as virtually unknown, and to support his own attitude on that basis. Second, Moore nowhere demonstrates, or even provides the beginning of a reason for believing, that we are entitled to hold, so firmly, that we do actually see such external objects.

Having worked through it somewhat, Moore's framework can be summarized in this way. Every experience puts the subject in relation to an entity in such a way that he or she can pick out the object by direct demonstration as 'that'. This is the supposedly uncontroversial sense-datum assumption. Moore's question is: what is that? Second, it can be shown that that is not identical to an object, say an ink-pot, but it remains open whether it is the surface of such an object. Whether it is or not is the central question. Finally, there are, definitely and without doubt, situations where we count as seeing external objects, and in those situations the sentence 'That is an external object' is true, but this 'that' cannot be a direct 'that' and is equivalent to 'The object which is R-related to that is an external object'. What 'R' is cannot be decided until we know the relation of that and the surface, and even then both in general direction and detail it might be beyond us to say. Moore's interest in perception is, really, an interest in determining the *truth* of certain identity judgements, and in determining the analysis of certain others.

It is what I have called the second element in Moore's framework that I want to investigate first.

II Moore on Surfaces and Seeing

We can attempt to understand and evaluate the line of thought which leads Moore to formulate the basic question in terms of surfaces of objects (rather than solely in terms

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of objects) by studying his last formulation of the argument in 'Visual Sense-data'.¹³ I begin with a fairly extended quotation.

'There are two kinds of physical objects which we may at a particular moment be said to be 'seeing' in this common sense: namely (1) objects which are transparent, like a drop of clear water or any ordinary glass tumbler or wine glass; and (2) objects which are opaque, like a penny or the moon. In the former case it seems possible that you may, in certain cases, see the whole object at once, both every part of its surface and its inside; it is, at all events, not clear that, in certain cases, you don't do this. But in the case of opaque objects, it seems perfectly clear that you can be correctly said to be 'seeing' the object, in cases where (in another sense of 'see') you are *only seeing* one or several sides of the opaque object, i.e., *some* parts of its surface, but emphatically *not* all parts of its surface nor its inside. It seems, indeed, doubtful whether you can be correctly said to be seeing its unless you are seeing a sufficiently large part of its surface, and I am inclined to think that how large a part of its surface is 'sufficient' to entitle you to say you are seeing it is different in the case of different objects: e.g. it is quite plain that you can correctly be said to be seeing the moon when you only see the very thinnest crescent, whereas if you only saw such a small part of the surface of a penny it would be doubtful if it could be correctly said that you were seeing the penny, you would be inclined to say that you did not see it, but only a small part of its rim. But where, for instance, you see the whole 'tail' side of a penny, but don't see the 'head' side there is no doubt whatever that you can correctly be said to be seeing the penny. What is meant by 'seeing' the penny in such a case? There seems to me to be no doubt that, if you said to yourself, as you might, 'That is a penny', the demonstrative 'that' would be short for a phrase of the kind which Russell has called a 'definite description'; and if you only said this to *yourself*, there would, of course, be no need for you to point or touch anything, in order to show which object you were referring to, since you would be able to identify the object without any such gesture. The 'definite description' for which your 'that' would be short would be 'the object of which *this* is part of the surface' . . .'.¹⁴

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This is a difficult passage to analyse. The chief problem is that what we are looking for is a reason for thinking that the sense-datum involved in a visual experience in which S sees O, if it is to be identical with something external, can, at best, be identical with the surface of O, but not with O itself. Moore, however, does not formulate this claim explicitly and so does not properly argue for it. Further, in the passage Moore starts by making assertions about what someone can see, relative, according to him, to various senses of 'see'. However, in the middle Moore shifts focus to discuss the analysis of certain types of demonstrative judgements (which, as I remarked, in an

¹³ An earlier exposition of the same type of consideration is in 'The Status of Sense-data', 185–9.

¹⁴ Moore, 'Visual Sense-data', 130–1.

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earlier period he calls ‘judgements of perception’). He does not properly explain the link between the claims about ‘see’ and the claims about demonstratives. Nor does Moore explain the link between the claims about demonstratives and the limitation on what the sense-datum involved could be identical with.¹⁵

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These two, not properly explained, transitions—the first in the middle of the passage, the second moving on from its end—having been noted, I want to make a few critical or clarificatory remarks about what Moore says. (1) Moore attaches importance to the distinction between opaque objects and transparent objects (Moore 1958: 130), and, having drawn the distinction, he focuses on the case of seeing opaque objects. Why is that distinction of importance to him? The answer is that he is quite sure that in the case of an opaque object when S sees it, S does not see the whole of the object; whereas, in the case of transparent objects, it is not clear that this is so. Moore wants to develop his argument for cases where we do not see the whole of the object. Now, it seems fairly clear that when we see an opaque object we do not see the whole of the object. There are parts, for example, the bits inside it or on the far side of it, which are not then seen. It is wrong, though, to contrast this with the transparent case. On our current understanding of what parts there are to objects there will obviously also be parts of seen transparent objects that are not seen. They are the small microscopic parts, the molecules, atoms, and sub-atomic parts. These are surely parts of the object and they are not seen. There is, therefore, no contrast between the two cases, at least in respect of whether the whole of the object is seen. The distinction between the opaque and the transparent to which Moore attached importance throughout his writings on the philosophy of perception cannot rest on this point.

(2) It seems that Moore is interested in the opaque case because in cases of seeing an opaque object we do not see the whole of the object or, as he also puts it, the whole object. Now, the first claim seems correct, but we can ask why it is true. Compare seeing with the two following cases. If I say ‘put the whole of that chocolate in your mouth’, it seems easy enough to do what I say. If instead I say ‘touch the whole of the cup’ it would be very hard to carry out the command. Even if you touch the whole of the surface you would not have touched the whole of the cup. What about the inside bits? What makes sense of this is that the meaning of the expression ‘the whole of

¹⁵ In order to keep the quotation as short as possible consistent with discussing it properly, I have ended it before the end of the paragraph in question, hence at a point where Moore probably did not think of his line of argument as complete. It may be felt that this is unfair. However, immediately after the end of the quotation, but in the same paragraph, Moore shifts focus on to the different question of whether Russell is right to talk of *knowledge* by description in relation to ways of thinking or talking about objects which pick out the objects by descriptions. This does not engage with either question that I have claimed Moore does not clearly answer, and, I think, it is fair to say that Moore does not return to them.

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X' is: every part of X. The noun phrase 'The whole of . . . ' is a universally quantified expression. The whole of the chocolate can be in your mouth because every part is, in fact, within your mouth, but the whole of the cup has not been touched because you have not touched every part of it (indeed you cannot do so). If this is right then we must deny the X is *identical* to the whole of X. X is not identical to every part of itself. What is confusing here is that there is a use of 'whole X' which means, roughly, an X which has not lost any of its parts. Now, if a particular X has not lost any of its parts it is a whole X, hence X is identical with the whole X. Thus if I see a cup which has not lost any parts, I see a whole cup but I shall not see the whole of the cup. Most importantly, the non-identity between X and the whole of X means that both the following inferences are invalid. First, S does not see the whole of X, so S does not see X. Second, that is not the whole of X, therefore, that is not X. If Moore relied on such inferences, then he is mistaken.

(3) Moore seems to think that from the claim that S does not see the whole of X it follows that the parts S is seeing are *parts of the surface*. He seems to make a contrast between the whole of X and its surface (and the surface's parts). In fact, what should be contrasted with seeing the whole of X (i.e., every part of X) is seeing at most some of the parts of X, which need not be surfaces. Thus, in looking at a two-handled cup I can see the handle towards me, that part, but not the handle away from me. There is, therefore, no obvious route from not seeing the whole of X to seeing at most parts of the *surface* of X. Moore's concentration on surfaces and their parts cannot be justified that way.

(4) In the third sentence of the passage, Moore thinks that he is entitled to say there is a sense of 'see' in which with opaque objects you only see some parts of the object's surface. Moore's reason for asserting that there is a sense of 'see' in this usage is presumably the following: (i) the sentence 'S sees O' is true (an assumption that Moore repeatedly endorses); (ii) there is a truth expressed in the words 'S sees only parts of the surface of O'; (iii) in the same sense of 'see' it cannot be that S sees O and also only sees parts of the surface of O; so, (iv) there are at least two senses of 'see'. This looks to be a cogent argument if the premises are true. However, the second premise is not obviously strictly true. Why cannot we say, more carefully than Moore, that strictly S saw O itself, as well as the part S also saw? Moore has no reason to affirm the ambiguity.

We can also ask what the relevance would have been if there had been a sense of 'see' in which we do not see opaque objects but merely parts of the surfaces of those objects. Whatever the answer in general, it does not seem to be something that in itself could imply that the demonstrative contact we have to objects has to be analysed in such a way that the contact reduces to homing in on the object via a description containing demonstrative reference to something else. The existence of a separate

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sense could not imply that. Although, therefore, we need not accept the ambiguity thesis, nothing of relevance would have followed from its existence.

(5) Moore, it will be remembered, begins the paper from which the passage being analysed comes, by affirming that we do see physical objects. Moore has to claim, therefore, that if we merely see (in his supposed second sense of 'see') a part of the surface of an opaque object O, we might also see O. Moore assumes that there will be conditionals linking seeing objects and seeing parts of their surfaces. In fact, Moore fairly obviously assumes that we should analyse seeing objects, where they are opaque, in terms of seeing parts of their surfaces. His suggestion is that we count as seeing O when we see a *sufficiently large part* of the surface of O, where what is sufficiently large varies from case to case. He claims that seeing only a small part of the surface of a coin would not amount to seeing the coin, whereas a proportionately small part of the surface of the moon does amount to seeing the moon. Moore does not pursue the questions that arise for this view, as to why there is such variation, and as to what determines what amount of a surface needs to be seen in each case for the object to be seen.

However, the claims that Moore makes which lead to these questions need not be accepted. Consider first that non-perceptual relation of touching. Even if S touches, ever so gently, a very small part of O, S can be said to have touched O. If someone is ordered to touch each college in Oxford, he carries out the order if he touches a part, however small, of each college. So there are some relations R such that if S stands in relation R to any part, however small, of O then S stands in relation R to O. There is, surely, evidence that 'seeing' is such a relation. Consider this example: I order you to bury O so that it cannot be seen. If you leave a small part visible, then you have failed to carry out the order. I can say; 'O is still visible'. Consider this second example: S, who is dying, wishes to see England for a last time. He is so seriously ill that we fly him to a field in England, open the door, and allow him to see a tiny patch of the ground. We have, it seems reasonable to me to say, enabled him to fulfil his last wish, however small the patch. These examples fit the suggestion that 'see' has the same logic as 'touch'.¹⁶

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There are certain counter-examples which are often suggested when this proposal is made. It is sometimes said that you do not see a person if you see a small part of them, say the tip of the little finger on their left hand. Consider, though, this case: S is looking through a keyhole into a room where there is a meeting. If S can see the tip of

¹⁶ Assuming that it is correct to say that 'see' has this logical property, then it is a property that provides a reason for saying about statements to the effects the S sees O that they contain little information about what one might call the character for the subject of the perceptual episode being reported by them. Thus if I say that S saw O, then it is consistent with what is said that S saw a tiny and unrecognizable part of O.

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a moving little finger, then if he is asked whether he can see anyone he can, surely, say that he *can* see someone, even if he cannot make out who it is. There is also a tendency to suppose that other perceptual verbs do not have the logic specified, which, if true, would make one doubt that it could apply to 'see'. Thus, it is said that one does not hear a Beethoven symphony if one only hears just one chord from its performance. However, if a deaf person has his hearing restored for a second and during that second merely hears the first chord of the symphony, it can be said that for a second he was able to hear a Beethoven symphony. It seems to me that examples like this do not count against the proposal.

Two more general points can be added. (i) There is an incentive to avoid the type of approach that Moore suggests because, as I pointed out above, it raises difficult supplementary questions. (ii) We can explain why there is a reluctance to *say* in some of these cases simply that S perceived in some way or other O. It would be more helpful for a speaker who knows that S's perception was of such a small part of O to inform the hearer that that was so, since there will be some tendency for the hearer to make mistaken assumptions if told merely that there was perceptual contact between S and O.

(6) It seems to be an element in Moore's view that 'S sees O', where O is an opaque object, entails 'S sees (part of) the surface of O'. Moore indicates that he thinks we could analyse seeing opaque objects in terms of seeing the surfaces of opaque objects. Such a proposed analysis could not be correct if the entailment did not hold, but the entailment might hold even though the analytical proposal was mistaken. Does the entailment hold? It seems to me not to. Here are some counter-examples. (a) You can see a man in silhouette against the night sky without being able to see his surface. (b) You can see the bright glowing filament in a light bulb without being able to see its surface. (c) You can see a far distant object, say a ship, which is just visible, as a black dot, on the horizon, without being able to see its surface. (d) You can see a far distant star in the night sky without being able to see its surface. (e) Staring out of a window you can see a tiny branch on a tree in the near distance without seeing its surface. (f) You can see the dirty water you are swimming beneath without seeing its surface. (g) You can see a thick mist engulfing you without seeing its surface. (h) Consider a kind of object which can be found in gift shops. It consists of glass, the exterior parts of which are transparent, whereas the inner glass is opaque. Looking at it, in certain conditions, one does not see its surface but can see the object.¹⁷

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The conclusion that emerges from these observations is that Moore has not, in 'Visual Sense-data' really assembled any evidence or provided an unconfused reason to

¹⁷ The last example on the list raises questions about Moore's practice of dividing objects into two groups, the opaque and the transparent. Single objects can have both transparent and opaque parts. In which category do such objects belong? Another issue here, though, is what counts as the surface of an object. Consider a human body. Suppose that in an operation a hole is cut in its surface and S sees the heart inside it. Does S thereby see that body? Does he see its surface?

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believe that we cannot make unmediated demonstrative reference to opaque objects as opposed to their surfaces. There is, as far as I can see, no reason to adopt the second part of Moore's standard framework.

A remark in one of his earlier papers provides a significant insight into the roots of Moore's thinking about objects and surfaces. In 'A Defence of Common Sense', Moore says: 'That what I know with regard to the sense-datum, when I know that "This is a human hand", is not that it is itself a human hand, seems to me to be certain because I know that my hand has many parts (e.g., its other side, and the bones inside it) which are quite certainly not parts of this sense-datum.'¹⁸ The question this little argument raises is how Moore knows that the sense-datum in question does not have the other parts that he mentions. If Moore wishes to be as neutral as possible about sense-datum talk, then there is, I believe, no answer to that question. Thus, if the sense-datum is just that thing, whatever it is, that is unmediatedly demonstrable by, say, Moore then unless he has already proved that it is not his hand he has no grounds for saying the thing has no other parts. The basis for Moore's claim that the sense-datum lacks these other parts must be that he is *assuming or stipulating* certain further things about it. One possible stipulation might be that the sense-datum is the unmediatedly demonstrable item which has no other parts which are themselves not currently unmediatedly demonstrable. This stipulation, though, runs the risk of guaranteeing that nothing fits it. It would probably rule out an identity between the sense-datum and the actual surface. The reason is that looking at a surface in normal conditions from a normal distance means that there are parts of the surface that are not there and then perceived. This is why getting closer, etc. reveals more of the surface and its details. Alternatively, Moore might be stipulating that the sense-datum must be, as one might say, surface-like. The question is: why should such a stipulation be made? It seems to me that it must be that the insidious conception of sense-data as fundamentally two-dimensional is having an influence. It does not, of course, actually fit Moore's neutral conception of sense-data. The insight from this passage, then, is that Moore often slips into assumptions about sense-data with which his neutral conception is inconsistent.

The overall conclusion remains that the second element in Moore's framework is without support.

III The Status of Sense-data

I argued, so far, that Moore's conviction that visual sense-data could, at best, be identical to external surfaces is not properly justified. But I wish to ask now whether

¹⁸ Moore, 'A Defence of Common Sense', in *Philosophical Papers*, 55.

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Moore advances any arguments that determine whether this crucial identity does hold or not.

In the published work that I am concentrating on Moore advances, from time to time, a number of arguments aimed at establishing the non-identity. I want to look briefly at two such arguments, before analysing in a little more detail the argument that moved Moore at the end of his life in 'Visual Sense-data'.

In 'The Status of Sense-data', Moore says that it is certain that the 'visual sensible', which is the term he was there using for what elsewhere he calls the 'sense-datum', which he apprehends when he is seeing a coin, is not identical with the upper side of the coin.¹⁹ The reason is that if two people, say Moore himself and S, see the same coin, it cannot be that the sensibles apprehended by both are identical to the upper surface, because there is one surface but two sensibles, Moore's and S's, which are not identical. As Moore points out, some extra work is needed to get from this to a definite conclusion about the status of Moore's own individual sensible. However, the major mistake in this argument is that Moore is not entitled to claim that his and S's sensibles are not identical. If the sensible is simply that thing, whatever it is, which the experience makes apprehensible by the subject, who is to say that the experiences of the two people do not make exactly the same thing apprehensible by both of them? Moore is, surely, under the influence again of a more committal notion of sensible (or sense-datum) according to which such an item is *private* to the apprehender.

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In 'A Defence of Common Sense', Moore proposes what he calls a 'serious objection' to the identity (between sense-datum and the seen surface of the seen object) based on the occurrence of double vision.²⁰ This resembles the previous argument in its general structure, except that the two supposedly distinct sense-data are apprehended by a single subject, rather than by two. The assumption is that double vision involves two sense-data, at least one of which cannot, in consequence, be identical to the surface (since there is only one surface). Moore does not explain how a general conclusion about sense-data can be elicited from the occurrence of such a case (although it is true that such cases are very common.) However, the more serious problem is that Moore is not entitled to the claim that there are two sense-data in the double vision case. Maybe there are two apprehendings of a single entity. Maybe, that is, the total experience enables the subject to apprehend the same entity twice, so there is no need for two things to be one.

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Moore's problem in these arguments is that they work by affirming a non-identity at the level of sense-data between two items as a basis for proving a non-identity of at least one (and ultimately both) of these items with a single external thing. But

¹⁹ This is stated in 'The Status of Sense-data', in *Philosophical Studies*, 187.

²⁰ This is presented in 'A Defence of Common Sense', in *Philosophical Papers*, 56.

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the non-identity affirmed in the premises is not something that Moore is entitled to affirm while being genuinely neutral as to the nature of the 'apprehensibles'.

In such debates about the identity with external items of certain 'presented' or 'apprehended' things, those who deny the identity suppose they can prove their position by locating property differences between the apprehended item and the external thing. Those who wish to affirm the identities cannot, usually, demonstrate them, but must rather render acceptance of the objections non-obligatory and make some other sort of case for their identity.²¹ To render acceptance of the objections non-obligatory, it is necessary to explain how the property ascriptions to which the non-identity affirmer is appealing need not be accepted. Now, in 'Some Judgements of Perception', Moore made a suggestion which, it seems to me, must form a component in any view that claims to defend these identities. Moore made his suggestion in the course of weighing up a style of argument commonly known as 'Arguments from Illusion'. Within the Moorean framework one such argument might run thus. Suppose that at t S is seeing a coin, viewing it from above. S moves and at $t + n$ views the same coin from an angle. The sense-datum apprehended by S at t is (perceptibly) different (in its shape) from the sense-datum apprehended by S at $t + n$. However, the coin itself, and its surface, has not changed (and is no different) between those two times. It follows that at least one of the sense-data is not identical with the coin's surface. Moore commented, though, that it maybe that the sense-datum at t and the sense-datum at $t + n$ are not really different, but merely that they *seem* different. If there has actually been no change, but it merely seems as if there has, between the different times with the sense-data, then the fact that the surface itself has not changed would not show that there is a non-identity between the sense-data and the surface. Let us, because we shall need a name for it, call this suggestion the Seems Idea. Moore puts the point this way: 'The great objection to such a view [that is, the Seems Idea] seems to me to be the difficulty of believing that I don't actually perceive this sense-datum to *be* red, for instance, and that other to *be* elliptical; I only perceive, in many cases, that it *seems* so. I cannot, however, persuade myself that it is quite clear that I do perceive it to be so.'²² Now, I am not claiming that the Seems Idea originates with Moore, but, rather, that it represents a resource on which any defender of the identity between sense-datum and surface must rely. Further, once this possible response was acknowledged by Moore, he became very (and properly) cautious about accepting arguments against the identities of visual sense-data and surfaces.

It is, of course, in 'Visual Sense-data' that Moore eventually decides that the Seems Idea can be rejected. Why does Moore (in 1958) think that it is inadmissible? Since this

²¹ For example, it may be said that non-acceptance of the identity involves postulating an extra range of objects and, moreover, renders the explanation of perception more difficult.

²² 'Some Judgements of Perception', in *Philosophical Studies*, 246.

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is a major development in Moore's thinking, one would have expected the reason to be advanced clearly, but, in fact, it is not entirely obvious what Moore's reasoning is. There are, as far as I can see, possibly three routes that Moore took to the conclusion. In the first place, Moore says that 'it seems to me quite plain that the proposition that a physical surface looks bluish-white to me, entails that I am directly seeing an entity that *is* bluish-white.'²³ This claim is simply a straight affirmation of what the Seems Idea denies, and in itself it offers no reason why we should accept the 'plainness' of the entailment. In the second place, Moore raises the following question: 'If I am not directly seeing a bluish-white expanse which has some relation to the wall which is not bluish-white, how can I possibly know that the wall is looking bluish-white to me?'²⁴ The person who accepts the Seems Idea does, of course, accept that a subject can know that, for example, that thing looks bluish-white, without directly seeing a bluish-white thing. The weakness in Moore's response is that he merely asks the question as to how such knowledge is possible, and really provides no reason to think it is not possible.

What I read as Moore's third point is both richer and more interesting. Moore says this: 'Until very recently I had thought that, although some of the arguments that purported to show it [namely, the claim that the sense-datum is identical to the surface of the seen object] cannot [be true] were very strong, yet they were not conclusive, because I thought that e.g. in the case where you directly see an 'after-image' with closed eyes, it is just possible that the after-image only looked to have certain colours . . . and did not really have them. . . . I well remember that, at the Aristotelian meeting at which I read that paper, Russell said that the suggestion certainly was nonsensical. I now feel that he was right . . .'.²⁵ Although this reason is fuller than either of the other two, there is significant compression in its presentation. Moore does not explain why he now thinks, nor attempts to persuade us that, Russell's judgement is correct. We are expected to concur.

Moore's line of thought raises two fundamental questions. The first is whether Russell is right in claiming that it is nonsense to suggest that an after-image might, for example, look reddish but actually be bluish. The second question is this: if Russell's claim is correct, what does that imply about the Seems Idea?

In response to the first question, it seems to me that Russell's verdict is correct. The argument in favour of saying this is that where we can make a genuine distinction

²³ 'Visual Sense-data', 135. I have ignored part of Moore's discussion at this point. He distinguishes two sorts of looks-judgements, and restricts the thesis that he is suggesting is plain to one of them. Having the distinction provides no reason, though, for supposing that it is plain in relation to the one that Moore is talking about.

²⁴ 'Visual Sense-data', 134.

²⁵ 'Ibid.', 136. There is something very charming in Moore's recollection of an Aristotelian meeting where Russell told him that he was speaking nonsense!

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between an object's being F and its seeming F (say, its looking F), in such a way that it can seem F and not be F, and also can be F without seeming F, there needs to be *enough* involved in the relation or relations in which a subject stands to the object to account for these possibilities. Thus, a tree can be brown without seeming brown to a subject S because the tree might fall outside the subject's range of experience, by being, for example, on the other side of a mountain. Again, it might be perceived by S but conditions of viewing be sub-optimal, because the light is bad or itself coloured. Again, S's sense organs might be defective, and so distort the tree's appearance. Similar factors, of course, ground the possibility that the tree might look F and not be F. Ultimately these possibilities are grounded in the huge complexities built into the causal relation between the object and the experiencer. Now, these complexities are not present in the experience of after-images. Nothing can come between a subject and his or her after-images, there is no space for sub-optimal viewing conditions, nor can the subject's sense organs distort appearances. It would not be right to put this point by saying that a subject's view of his or her after-images is guaranteed perfect; rather it is the negative point that there is nothing in the experience of after-images which can ground this is-seems distinction.

If this is a good reason to agree with Russell, then the second question, in effect, answers itself. We can first ask why Moore thinks that if after-image experience does not contain enough to ground the is-seems distinction then the kind of experiences that Moore is interested in, namely seeing an external object, cannot ground such a distinction. The reply that Moore would make is that he *does* think that the overall experience in seeing an external object contains enough, because it grounds a contrast between how the external object is and how the sense-datum is. This response is not, however, adequate, and merely prompts us to ask why the experience of the directly apprehended thing, that is to say of the sense-datum, *in itself* does not actually contain enough to ground the possibilities. Moore's problem at this stage is that he is simply working with the notion of the sense-datum as the unmediatedly demonstrable thing. The item's nature, and equally importantly, the real nature of its relation to the subject, aside from its enabling unmediated demonstrative contact, has *not been determined*. Moore has, therefore, as yet no reason for thinking that the relation to that thing does not contain enough to ground the is-seems distinction. The answer, then, to the second question is that from the fact (if it is a fact) that the experience of after-images does not contain enough to ground that contrast, it does not follow that there is not enough in the experience of the directly demonstrable item in vision.

My conclusion, then, is that Moore's final renunciation of the Seems Idea is ungrounded, and that with the Seems Idea in play the types of arguments that at various times he advanced against the identity in vision of surfaces and sense-data totally fail. I do not mean to say that there are not other sorts of arguments here

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which cannot be defused simply on the basis of the Seems Idea. However, these are not arguments that particularly attracted Moore.²⁶

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IV Moore's Neutral Conception of Sense-data

We have arrived at a point where we need to put Moore's neutral conception of a sense-datum under the microscope. In effect, though, much has emerged about it in the previous discussion and so it is possible to be brief at this point.

Although there are variations over time in the way that Moore speaks and in what he stresses, Moore's idea is that it is right to talk of a sense-datum as involved in an experience so long as that experience relates the subject to an entity or thing in such a way that the subject can demonstratively think about that object in an unmediated way. Moore takes this, rightly I suspect, to be what Russell means by acquaintance. Moore himself talks about apprehending or directly seeing the item.

This conception of sense-datum is correctly called neutral, in that in supposing that an item qualifies as a sense-datum so explained nothing more is being supposed about it other than that it is available for unmediated thought in virtue of an experience of the subject. There is no commitment as to its nature or existence conditions. Indeed, it would not even be legitimate to assume in advance that all sense-data have the same nature, or existence conditions. Professor Baldwin in his discussion of Moore has, following Ayer, suggested that this possibility, that maybe some sense-data (in Moore's sense) have one nature and others another, is not really available, because 'as far as the content of experience goes, the two experiences, one hallucinatory, the other perceptual, can be as similar as on likes; so, whatever reasons there are for supposing that in the hallucinatory experience subjective sense-data are apprehended apply equally to the perceptual experience'.²⁷ This argument is, though, too quick to eliminate the possibility. It invites a two-sided reply. First, the similarity to the subject between one type of experience and another is quite consistent with their having a different nature. Second, the reason for introducing what Baldwin is calling subjective

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²⁶ There is, I am inclined to think, a difference between the account offered here and that offered by Professor Baldwin. The question is why Moore abandoned what I have been calling the Seems Idea. Baldwin selects as crucial Ducasse's paper which made it clear to Moore that 'his sense-datum theory is inconsistent with direct realism' (Baldwin 1990: 250). But if by the 'sense-datum theory' Baldwin simply means Moore's idea that experience involves the presentation of an object of some kind or other (available, therefore, for demonstrative thought), it cannot be said that the emergence of what is now called adverbial theories of experience reveals any such inconsistency. That does reveal a new way of thinking of experience, not properly considered by Moore, but it does not demonstrate that there cannot be object-involving experiences which permit an is-appears contrast.

²⁷ Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, 244.

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sense-data might precisely be the unavailability in the relevant cases of the so called objective sense-data.

There are three respects in which Moore's use of 'sense-datum' is not neutral. The first is that its explanation relies, ultimately, on what I am calling the idea of unmediated demonstrative thought. This is clearly a theoretical notion, which needs to be properly explained, and its employment may be disputed, say on grounds of obscurity, incoherence, or possible lack of application. Now, it has to be conceded that I have not here properly investigated whether some such notion is in good conceptual standing and does sometimes apply.²⁸ I wish myself not to object to Moore's employment of such a notion, and here shall restrict myself to two remarks in its favour. The first is that I know of no grounds for being sceptical of its coherence, or querying its application. The second is that there is a very strong intuition that some such notion does have application. Both Russell's and Moore's practice is evidence of this intuition. If this is granted to Moore, what further issues can be raised about his neutral notion?

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Another respect in which Moore's approach is not neutral is the range of experiences which he thinks involve sense-data. At the beginning of 'the Status of Sense-data' Moore, in effect, says this about having ordinary images, having dreams, hallucinations, after-images, and also when having what he calls 'sensations proper'.²⁹ Moore is evidently counting, from the very beginning, perception as 'sensation proper'. There is, though, an issue or a question here: is it right to think of all these cases as involving the presentation to the subject of an item that the subject can directly demonstrate? The first point to make here is that the fact, if it is a fact, that these cases *seem* to involve (or to be) the presentation of an object does not mean that they do (or are). This is, in effect, the re-application of the Seems Idea to the description of the general structure of the experience. Maybe it seems to be the presentation of an object even though it is not. Appearance cannot settle this question, and there is nothing for it but to work out the requirements for, and the consequences of, thinking of an experience as object-involving, as opposed to thinking of it in some other way.³⁰ The point is that there are, or maybe there are, significant theoretical commitments in analysing an experience as the apprehending of an object. It is not, therefore, a neutral matter to think this way.

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²⁸ This question is, in effect, one that I have tried to investigate elsewhere, without, however, there relating it, except in a very small way, to Moore. See P. Snowdon, 'How to Interpret "Direct Perception"', in T. Crane (ed.), *The Contents of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. sections 5–7.

²⁹ Moore, 'The Status of Sense-data', 168.

³⁰ A gigantic step in this debate was made by Ducasse in his engagement with Moore in his paper 'Moore's Refutation of Idealism', in A. Schlipp (ed.), *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (La Salle, Ill.). Moore failed to appreciate this, but the emergence of adverbialism, as we call it, supplied an alternative way of thinking about experience.

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The third non-neutral aspect of Moore's conception of sense-data is an extension of the previous point. According to some, it is wrong to think even of the experience in a perceptual occurrence as being, or involving, on its own the presentation of an object. On this view, which is the most extreme application of the conception begun by Ducasse, no experience consists in a relation to an object. According to such an account, it is not that there are no direct demonstratives, rather, they are not possible solely on the basis of experiences, but require experiences in the right object-involving context. Again, it has to be agreed that such a conception cannot be ruled out as a possibility. Since Moore's notion of sense-data in his application of it does rule this out, it is not properly neutral.

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These remarks are in agreement with Professor Baldwin's judgement that 'Moore's conception of a sense-datum is grounded in the act/object philosophy of mind'.³¹ Such a conception is not neutral. The most important thing to add, though, is that it is one thing to think of experiences as relations to objects (which thereby become available for demonstrative thought) and another to explain the character of the experience in terms of the actual features of the presented objects. Moore throughout his reflections seems to have subscribed to the former, but to the latter only in his early and then in his late accounts.

Finally, there is another sense in which Moore's own discussion is not neutral. In tracing the details of his arguments, we have seen a number of occasions on which he makes assumptions about sense-data, importing features into his premises which a properly neutral conception would require him to argue for.

My aim in these remarks about Moore's conception of sense-data has not been to settle how we should think about experience, but rather to display the assumptions built into Moore's conception.

V Conclusion

There are obvious limitations to Moore's writings about perception. First, he really only discusses one question: are sense-data identical to external objects? He totally neglects the myriad other questions which perception as a phenomenon raises. Second, his formulation and discussion of this central question incorporates a number of assumptions, both general and specific, which seem not to be properly grounded. An abiding distorting influence (as one might say, a snare and delusion), which I hope the analysis has made clear, is Moore's employment of the sense-datum vocabulary. Third, and as a result, Moore has really nothing to say in relation to

³¹ Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, 250.

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certain research programmes about perception currently being pursued. One such programme involves commitment to the total renunciation of the act-object analysis of experience, an analysis Moore himself sustained at all times. The other involves providing an act-object analysis of perceptual experience (but not other types of experience), with, however, what I have been calling the Seems Idea built into the model. Moore cannot contribute to that approach. However, if it is right to think that some of the central philosophical questions about perception can be formulated as questions about the truth of certain identity judgements involving demonstratives, as Moore evidently thought, and as I also think, Moore's engagement with those questions displays such concentration, ingenuity, care, and intelligence that his writings are, and will continue to be, of major importance.³²

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