By the same author

*Intention*

*An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*

*Three Philosophers* (with Peter Geach)

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G. E. M. ANSCOMBE

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# *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*

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### I *Intentional Objects*

Berkeley calls "colours with their variations and different proportions of light and shade" the "proper" and also the "immediate" objects of sight.[1] The first at any rate long seemed obvious to everyone, both before Berkeley and since his time. But Berkeley's whole view is now in some disrepute. Sense-data, a thoroughly Berkeleyan conception given that name by Russell, have become objects of ridicule and contempt among many present-day philosophers.

That word "object" which comes in the phrase "object of sight" has suffered a certain reversal of meaning in the history of philosophy, and so has the connected word "subject", though the two reversals aren't historically connected. The subject used to be what the proposition, say, is about: the thing itself as it is in reality – unprocessed by being conceived, as we might say (in case there is some sort of processing there); objects on the other hand were formerly always objects *of* —. Objects of desire, objects of thought, are not objects in one common modern sense, not indivdual things, such as *the objects found in the accused man's pockets*.

I might illustrate the double reversal by a true sentence constructed to accord with the *old* meanings: subjectively there must be some definite number of leaves on a spray that I see, but objectively there need not: that is, there need not be some number such that I *see* that number of leaves on the spray.

When Descartes said that the cause of an idea must have at least as much formal reality as the idea had objective reality, he meant that the cause must have at least as much to it as what the idea was of would have, if what the idea was of actually existed. The "*realitas objectiva*" of an idea thus meant what we should call its "content" – namely what it is of, but considered as belonging purely to the idea. "What a picture is of" can easily be seen to have two meanings: what served as a model, what the picture was taken from – and what is to be seen in the picture itself, which may not even have had an original.

Thus formerly if something was called an object that would have raised the question "object of what?" It is hardly possible to use the word "object" in

[1] Throughout this paper I use double quotes for ordinary quotations (and so singles for quotes within quotes) and singles I use as scare quotes.

From R. J. Butler (ed.), *Analytical Philosophy*, second series (Oxford, 1965).

this way nowadays unless it actually occurs in such a phrase as "object of desire" or "object of thought". Suppose somebody says that the object of desire, or desired object, need not exist, and so there need not be any object which one desires. He is obviously switching from one use of the word "object" to another. If, however, we speak of objects of sight, or seen objects, it will usually be assumed that "objects" has the more modern sense: these will be objects, things, entities, which one sees. Now to prevent confusion I will introduce the phrase "intentional object" to mean "object" in the older sense which still occurs in "object of desire".

"Intentional" in these contexts is often spelt with an s. This was an idea of Sir William Hamilton's; he wanted to turn the old logical word "intention" into one that looked more like "extension". I prefer to keep the older spelling with two ts. For the word is the same as the one in common use in connection with action. The concept of intention which we use there of course occurs also in connection with *saying*. That makes the bridge to the logician's use.

There are three salient things about intention which are relevant for my subject. First, not any true description of what you do describes it as the action you intended: only under certain of its descriptions will it be intentional. ("Do you mean to be using that pen?" – "Why, what about this pen?" – "It's Smith's pen." – "Oh Lord, no!") Second, the descriptions under which you intend what you do can be vague, indeterminate. (You mean to put the book down on the table all right, and you do so, but you do not mean to put it down anywhere in particular on the table – though you do put it down somewhere in particular.) Third, descriptions under which you intend to do what you do may not come true, as when you make a slip of the tongue or pen. You act, but your intended act does not happen.

Intentionality, whose name is taken from intention and expresses these characteristics of the concept *intention*, is found also in connection with many other concepts. I shall argue that among these are concepts of sensation. Like many concepts marked by intentionality, though unlike intention itself, these are expressed by verbs commonly taking direct objects. I shall speak of intentional verbs, taking intentional objects. I have mentioned the history of the word "object" to forestall any impression that "an intentional object" means "an intentional entity".

Obvious examples of intentional verbs are "to think of", "to worship", "to shoot at". (The verb "to intend" comes by metaphor from the last – "*intendere arcum in*", leading to "*intendere animum in*".) Where we have such a verb taking an object, features analogous to the three features of intentionalness in action relate to some descriptions occurring as object-phrases after the verb.

The possible non-existence of the object, which is the analogue of the possible non-occurrence of the *intended* action, is what has excited most attention about this sort of verb. "Thinking of" is a verb for which the topic of the non-existent object is full of traps and temptations; "worshipping" is



less dangerous and may help us to keep our heads. Consider the expression "object of thought". If I am thinking of Winston Churchill then he is the object of my thought. This is like "What is the object of these people's worship?" Answer: "The moon." But now suppose the object of my thought is Mr Pickwick, or a unicorn; and the object of my worship is Zeus, or unicorns. With the proper names I named no man and no god, since they name a fictitious man and a false god. Moreover Mr Pickwick and Zeus are nothing but a fictitious man and a false god (contrast the moon, which, though a false god, is a perfectly good heavenly body). All the same it is clear that "The Greeks worshipped Zeus" is true. Thus "*X* worshipped —" and "*X* thought of —" are not to be assimilated to "*X* bit —". For, supposing "*X*" to be the name of a real person, the name of something real has to be put in the blank space in "*X* bit —" if the completed sentence is to have so much as a chance of being true. Whereas in "*X* worshipped —" and "*X* thought of —" that is not so.

This fact is readily obscured for us because with "*X* thought of —" the more frequent filling-in of the blank is a name or description of something real; for when the blank is filled in so in a true sentence, it is the real thing itself, not some intermediary, that *X* thought of. This makes it look as if the reality of the object mattered, as it does for biting. Nevertheless, it is obvious that vacuous names can complete such sentence-frames. So perhaps they stand in such frames for something with a *sort* of reality. That is the hazy state of mind one may be in about the matter.

A not very happy move to clarify it is to say, "Well, *X* had his idea of Zeus, or unicorns, or Mr Pickwick, and that gives you the object you want." This is an unhappy move on several counts. First, it makes it seem that the *idea* is what *X* was worshipping or thinking of. Second, the mere fact of real existence (is this now beginning to be opposed to existence of some other kind?) can't make so very much difference to the analysis of a sentence like "*X* thought of —". So if the idea is to be brought in when the object doesn't exist, then equally it should be brought in when the object does exist. Yet one is thinking, surely, of Winston Churchill, not of the idea of him, and just that fact started us off. When one reads Locke, one wants to protest: "The mind is not employed about ideas, but about things – unless ideas are what we happen to be thinking about." Whatever purpose is served by introducing ideas, by saying, "Well, they had an idea of Zeus," we cannot say that the idea is the object of thought, or worship. It will not be right to say *X* worshipped an idea. It is rather that the subject's having an idea is what is needed to give the proposition a chance of being true. This may seem helpful for "worshipping", but not for "thinking of"; "thinking of" and "having an idea of" are too similar; if the one is problematic, then so is the other.

Let us concentrate on the fact that many propositions containing intentional verbs are true, and let us not be hypnotized by the possible non-existence of the object. There are other features too: non-substitutability of different descriptions of the object, where it does exist; and possible indeter-

minacy of the object. In fact all three features are connected. I can think of a man without thinking of a man of any particular height; I cannot hit a man without hitting a man of some particular height, because there is no such thing as a man of no particular height. And the possibility of this indeterminacy makes it possible that when I am thinking of a particular man, not every true description of him is one under which I am thinking of him.

I will now define an intentional verb as a verb taking an intentional object; intentional objects are the sub-class of direct objects characterized by these three connected features. By this definition, "to believe" and "to intend" are not themselves intentional verbs, which may seem paradoxical. But, say, "to believe – to be a scoundrel" will accord with the definition, so that it is not so paradoxical as to leave out belief and intention altogether.

But now comes a question: ought we really to say that the intentional object is a bit of language, or may we speak as if it were what the bit of language stands for? As grammarians and linguists use the words nowadays "direct object" and "indirect object" stand for parts of sentences. So if I call intentional objects a sub-class of direct objects, that may seem already to determine that an intentional object is a bit of language.

However, the matter is not so easily settled. Of course I do not want to oppose the practice of grammarians. But it is clear that the concept of a direct object – and hence the identification of the sentence-part now called the direct object – is learned somewhat as follows: the teacher takes a sentence, say "John sent Mary a book" and says: "What did John send Mary?" Getting the answer "A book" he says: "That's the direct object." Now the question does not really suppose, and the pupil, if he goes along with the teacher, does not take it, that any particular people, of whom the sentence is true, are in question, and so we may say that when the teaching is successful the question is understood as equivalent to "What does the sentence 'John sent Mary a book' say John sent Mary?" The grammatical concept of a direct object is acquired by one who can answer any such question. The correct answer to such a question gives (in older usage) or itself is (in more recent usage) the direct object. Now suppose that someone were to ask: "What is communicated to us by the phrase that we get in a correct answer? Is the phrase being used or mentioned?" It is clear that nothing is settled about *this* question by a choice whether to say, following older usage, that the phrase *gives* the direct object or, following more modern usage, that "direct object" is a name for a sentence-part.

I propose – for a purpose which will appear – to adopt the older usage. Then the question "What is the direct object of the verb in this sentence?" is the same as "What does the sentence say John sent Mary?" and the question "What does the phrase which is the answer to that question communicate to us, i.e. is it being used or mentioned?" can be asked in the form "Is the direct object a bit of language or rather what the bit of language stands for?" – and *this* is now not a mere question of terminology, but a substantive-seeming question of curious perplexity. For someone pondering it may argue as



follows: It won't do to say that in this example a book is the direct object. For if we say that we can be asked: "Which book?"; but the sentence isn't being considered as true, and there is no answer to the question "Which book?" except "No book"; and yet without doubt the verb has a direct object, given by the answer "A book". So it must be *wrong*, and not just a matter of terminology, to say that the grammatical phrase "direct object" stands for, not a bit of language, but rather what the bit of language stands for. And, if intentional objects are a sub-class of direct objects, the phrase "intentional object" too will stand for a bit of language rather than what the language stands for; we are evidently not going to have to plunge into the bog made by the fact that in the most important and straightforward sense the phrase giving the intentional object may stand for nothing.

But wait – in that case *must* we not say, "the phrase which *is* the intentional object" rather than "the phrase giving the intentional object"? This is indeed a difficulty. For the intentional object is told in answer to a question "What?" But the answer to "What do they worship?" cannot be that they worship a phrase any more than that they worship an idea. A similar point holds, of course, for direct (and indirect) objects in general.

It may be argued that this is no argument.[2] Perhaps we cannot say "What John is said to have sent is a phrase." But then no more can we say "What John is said to have sent is a direct object" – for the sentence did not say John sent Mary a direct object.

What this shows is that there is a way of taking "The direct object is not a direct object" which makes this true; namely, by assimilating this sentence to "The direct object is not a girl". (One could imagine explaining to a child: "The girl isn't the direct object, but the *book* that John sent.")

Frege's conclusion "The concept horse is not a concept" was based on the same sort of trouble about different uses of expressions. What "*cheval*" stands for is a concept, and what "*cheval*" stands for is a horse; these premisses do not, however, yield the result that if Bucephalus is a horse he is a concept. Similarly, what John is said to have sent Mary is a book, and what John is said to have sent Mary is a direct object; these premisses do not yield the result that if John gave Mary a book, he gave her a direct object.

Frege eventually proposed to deal with the trouble by stipulating that such a phrase as "What 'cheval' stands for" should *only* be used predicatively. A parallel stipulation in our case: "What John is said to have sent Mary is . . ." may only be completed with such expressions as could fill the blank in "John sent Mary . . .".

The stipulation, while harmless, would be based on failure of ear for the different use of the phrase "What John is said to have sent Mary" in the explanation "What John is said to have sent Mary is the direct object of the sentence". But an ear for a different use cannot be dispensed with, as the further course of the argument shows.

The argument began with stating reasons why a direct object can't be

[2] This was argued to me by Mr G. Harman, for which I am obliged to him.

something that the direct-object phrase stands for. Yet one can, one correctly does, say "A book" in answer to the question "What does the sentence 'John sent Mary a book' say John sent Mary?" which asks the same thing as "What is the direct object in that sentence?" Nevertheless the way the phrase "a book" is being used is such that one can't sensibly ask "Which book?"

We must conclude of 'objects' (direct, indirect and likewise intentional) that the object is neither the phrase nor what the phrase stands for. What then is it? The question is based on a mistake, namely that an explanatory answer running say "An intentional (direct, indirect) object is such-and-such" is possible and requisite. But this need not be so. Indeed the only reasonable candidates to be answers are the ones we have failed. But what is the actual use of the term? Given a sentence in which a verb takes an object, one procedure for replying to the question: "What is the object in this sentence?" is to recite the object phrase.

If putting the object phrase in quotes implies that the object – i.e. what John is said to have sent Mary, what the Greeks worshipped – is a piece of language, that is wrong; if its not being in quotes implies that something referred to by the object phrase is the object, that is wrong too. To avoid the latter suggestion one might insist on putting in quotes; to avoid the former one might want to leave them out. One is inclined to invent a special sort of quotes; but the question is how the phrase within such new quotes would function – and if we understand that, we don't need a new sign. So ends the argument.

To repeat, I am not opposing the practice of grammarians and linguists for whom the expression "direct object" is defined as an expression for a phrase; they use that as I use the expression "direct-object phrase". But, as I have argued, the question "What does the sentence say John gave?" is fundamental for understanding either "direct object" or "direct-object phrase" as I am using those expressions; and hence for understanding "direct object" when it is used for a phrase. And though the question is answered (like many questions) by uttering a phrase – in this case "a book" – the phrase has *a special use* in answer to that question "What does the sentence say John gave?" *It* can name neither a piece of language, nor anything that the piece of language names or otherwise relates to, nor indeed anything else. The interest of the question and answer is the rather special interest of getting grammatical understanding. Grammatical understanding and grammatical concepts, even the most familiar ones like sentence, verb, noun, are not so straightforward and down-to-earth a matter of plain physical realities as I believe people sometimes suppose. The concept of a noun, for example, is far less of a physical concept than that of a coin; for someone might be trained to recognize coins with fair success though he knew nothing of money, but no one could be trained to recognize nouns without a great familiarity with language; and yet the concept of a noun is not one which he will automatically have through that familiarity, as he will have that of a coin if he operates with coined money. Indeed the explanations of grammatical



terms are only hints at what is really grasped from examples. Thus no one should think that by merely adopting the usage of modern grammarians, for whom the direct object is a word or words, he has avoided handling difficult concepts and remained in a plain man's world of plain things.

"The direct object is what John sent" (="what the sentence says John sent").
"The intentional object is what *X* was thinking of."

These two sentences are parallel. It is for the sake of parallelism that we opted for the old-fashioned usage of "direct object". For even in that usage, no one will be tempted to think that direct objects as such are a special type of entity. Just this temptation exists very strongly for objects of thought and sensation; that is, for intentional objects, which appear as entities under the names "idea" and "impression".

It may be objected: the context "The sentence says John sent Mary —" is itself intentional. How, then, can my considerations about direct objects throw light on intentional objects? Fully spelled out they are themselves merely examples of sentences whose objects are intentional objects.[3]

The answer is that what is said in the objection is true. But these examples, where we talk about direct objects, are harmless and profitable because certain sorts of suggestion about direct objects are patent nonsense. For example no one would think that if a sentence says John sent Mary a book, what it immediately and directly says he sent her was a direct object, and only in some indirect fashion, via this immediate object, does it say he sent her a book. I want, that is, to use a comparison with patent nonsense about direct objects in order to expose as latent nonsense of just the same kind some very persuasive views about ideas and impressions. Not that ideas and impressions are to be excluded from consideration; but as they enter into epistemology they will be rightly regarded as grammatical notions, whose role is readily misunderstood. And "grammatical" is here being used in its ordinary sense.

We must now ask: does any phrase that gives the direct object of an intentional verb in a sentence necessarily give an intentional object? No. Consider: "These people worship Ombola; that is to say, they worship a mere hunk of wood." (cf. "They worship sticks and stones.") Or "They worship the sun, that is, they worship what is nothing but a great mass of frightfully hot stuff." The worshippers themselves will not acknowledge the descriptions. Their idol is for them a divinized piece of wood, one that is somehow also a god; and similarly for the sun.

An intentional object is given by a word or phrase which gives a *description under which*.

It will help if we consider shooting at, aiming. A man aims at a stag; but the thing he took for a stag was his father, and he shoots his father. A witness

[3] I am indebted for this objection and the discussion of it to Professors Bernard Williams and Arthur Prior and Mr P. T. Geach.

reports: "He aimed at his father." Now this is ambiguous. In the sense in which given the situation as we have described it, this report is true, the phrase "his father" does not give an intentional object. Let us introduce the term "material object": "his father" gives, we shall say, the *material* object of the verb in the sentence "He aimed at his father" in the sense in which this was true. Not because he hit his father – he might after all merely have gone wide of the mark. But because the thing he took for a stag actually was his father. We can ask what he was doing – what he was aiming at – *in that* he was aiming at a stag: this is to ask for another description "*X*" such that in "He was aiming at *X*" we still have an intentional object, but the description "*X*" gives us something that exists in the situation. For example, he was aiming at that dark patch against the foliage. The dark patch against the foliage was in fact his father's hat with his father's head in it.

Thus, the given intentional object (the stag) being non-existent in the situation, we looked for another intentional object until we found one that did exist. Then the phrase giving that intentional object, and any other true description of the existent thing in question, gives the *material* object of "He aimed at . . .".

Does this account depend on the report's being true? No; but if the witness lies or is quite mistaken, all the same he can be questioned about what his report meant. Does he mean the phrase "his father" to give the intentional, or only the material, object? If only the material object, what does he mean by "He aimed at . . ."? That you could see that the man was taking aim, and where his target lay? There might not be true answers to these questions, but the witness has got to pretend there are or be confounded.

And now, for greater ease of expression, I will speak, as is natural, of the material and intentional objects of aiming, of worshipping, of thinking. This should always be interpretable in terms of the verbs and their objects.

There need not be a material object of aiming. If a man were totally hallucinated, and, shooting at something in his hallucinatory scene, hit his father, that would not make his father the *material* object of his aiming. Similarly, if there is no description, still giving the intentional object of worship, which describes anything actual, the worshippers, materially speaking, worship a nothing, something that does not exist.

Not that it will then do to say "They worship nothing", but only: "What they worship is nothing." For "They worship nothing" would imply that no sentence "They worship such-and-such" will be true; and in the case supposed some such sentence is true.

Questions about the identity of an intentional object, when this cannot be reduced to the identity of a *material* object, are obviously of some interest. How do we decide that two people or peoples worship or do not worship the same god? Again, when a proper name is obscure and remote in its historical reference, like "Arthur", the question may arise whether two people are thinking of the same man – if they have different, incompatible, pictures of him.



But I perceive that my saying "when this cannot be reduced to the identity of a *material* object" may mislead: for by *material* objects I do not mean what are now called "material objects" – tables, planets, lumps of butter and so on. To give a clear instance: a debt of five dollars is not a material object in this latter sense; but given that someone had contracted such a debt, my thought "that debt of five dollars" would have as its material object something described and indicated by the phrase giving the intentional object of my thought. When it is beyond question that the phrase giving an intentional object does describe and indicate a material object in this sense, then the question as to the identity of the intentional object reduces to the question as to the identity of the material object. Are we referring to the same debt? That is, perhaps, not too difficult to establish. But when either there is no real debt or it is very obscure whether there is, the case is altered.

The fact that we can use the concept of identity in connection with intentional objects should not lead us to think there is any sense in questions as to the kind of existence – the ontological status – of intentional objects as such. All such questions are nonsensical. Once more we can clear our heads by thinking of direct objects. The answer to "What is the direct object in 'John sent Mary a book'?" is "A book". This is the right answer as much when the sentence is false as when it is true, and also when it is only made up, as it is in this case, to illustrate a point. It is evident nonsense to ask about the mode of existence or ontological status of the direct object as such: or to ask what kind of thing *a book* is, as it is thought of in answer to the question about the direct object.

## II *Sensation*

In the philosophy of sense-perception there are two opposing positions. One says that what we are immediately aware of in sensation is sense-impressions, called "ideas" by Berkeley and "sense-data" by Russell. The other, taken up nowadays by "ordinary language" philosophy, says that on the contrary we at any rate *see* objects (in the *wide* modern sense which would include, e.g. shadows) without any such intermediaries. It is usually part of this position to insist that I can't see (or, perhaps, feel, hear, taste or smell) something that is not there, any more than I can hit something that is not there: I can only *think* I see (etc.) something if it isn't there, or only in some extended usage of "see" do I see what isn't there. I shall say most about seeing, as most people do in discussing this topic. The other verbs are for good reasons (which aren't very relevant to my topic) often treated rather differently, especially by ordinary language philosophy.

I wish to say that both these positions are wrong; that both misunderstand verbs of sense-perception, because these verbs are intentional or essentially have an intentional aspect. The first position misconstrues intentional objects as material objects of sensation; the other allows only *material* objects of sensation; or at any rate does not allow for a description of what is seen

which is e.g. neutral as between its being a real spot (a stain) or an after-image, giving only the content of an experience of seeing concerning which one does not yet know whether one is seeing a real spot or an after-image.[4]

To see the intentionality of sensation it is only necessary to look at a few examples which bring it out.

(1) "When you screw up your eyes looking at a light, you see rays shooting out from it."
(2) "I see the print very blurred: is it blurred, or is it my eyes?"
(3) "Move these handles until you see the bird in the nest." (Squint-testing apparatus; the bird and the nest are on separate cards.)
(4) "I see six buttons on that man's coat, I merely see a lot of snow flakes framed by this window-frame – no definite number."
(5) ". . . a mirage. An approaching pedestrian may have no feet (they are replaced by a bit of sky)."[5]
(6) "With this hearing aid, when you talk I hear some screeching noises; no low tones and the consonants are very indistinct."
(7) "I hear a ringing in my ears."
(8) "I heard a tremendous roaring noise outside, and wondered with alarm for a moment what great machine or floodwater could be making it. And then I realized that it was only my little dog snoring close at hand."[6]
(9) "Do you know how a taste can sometimes be quite indeterminate until you know what you are eating?"
(10) "I keep on smelling the smell of burning rubber when, as I find out, there is no such thing."

Someone who wishes to say that the verbs of sense are used right in normal cases *only* with real things as objects, and even with real things correctly characterized, may say that these are exceptional uses. Either the context (eye-testing apparatus) or what is said, with the tone of voice and special emphasis appropriate to it, shows this. There was presumably a definite number of snowflakes falling so as to be seen from a certain position, and that was the number seen; only the subject did not know how many there were, was not able to tell by looking as he could tell the number of buttons on the coat. He expressed this by saying he did not *see* a definite number of snowflakes; but this is an odd use of "see", different from the more normal use we get in the following example:

(11) "I saw someone in the study just now." "Nonsense! You can't have, because there isn't anyone there." "Well, I wonder what I saw, then."

Now this may be; on the other hand the oculist testing the degree of a

[4] I am obliged to Professor Frank Ebersole for telling me of an experience of his which supplied this example.
[5] Example from M. Luckiesh.
[6] Example from W. James.



squint does not have to teach a new use of "see" or of "I see a (picture of a) bird in a nest" before he can ask "Do you see the bird in the nest?" – the bird-picture and the nest-picture being in fact spatially separated. To call such a use "new" simply means that some difference between it and what is being called the old use strikes us as important.

There is indeed an important difference; though it is wrong to regard the uses which it marks as, so to speak, *deviant*, for our concepts of sensation are built up by our having *all* these uses. The difference we are attending to is that in these cases, object phrases are used giving objects which are, wholly or in part, merely intentional. This comes out in two features: neither possible non-existence (in the situation), nor indeterminacy, of the object is any objection to the truth of what is said.

Now 'ordinary language' views and 'sense-datum' views make the same mistake, that of failing to recognize the intentionality of sensation, though they take opposite positions in consequence. This failure comes out clearly on the part of an ordinary-language philosopher if he insists that what I say I see must really be there if I am not lying, mistaken, or using language in a "queer", extended (and therefore discountable) way.

The Berkeleyan sense-datum philosopher makes the same mistake in his insistence that, e.g., one sees visual impressions, visual data. I would say that such a philosopher makes an incorrect inference from the truth of the grammatical statement that the intentional object, the impression, the visual object, is what you see. He takes the expression "what you see" materially. "The visual impression is what you see", which is a proposition like "The direct object is what he sent", is misconstrued so as to lead to "You see an impression", as the other never would be misconstrued so as to lead to "He sent her a direct object".

This is a more interesting and permanently tempting mistake than the other, whose appeal is merely that of a common-sense revolt against a Berkeleyan type of view. But both doctrines have a great deal of point. To take the 'ordinary language' doctrine:

First, what I shall call the material use of verbs of sense exists. The material use of "see" is a use which demands a *material* object of the verb. "You can't have seen a unicorn, unicorns don't exist." "You can't have seen a lion, there wasn't any lion there to see." These uses are quite commonplace. It is not merely that the object-phrase is taken materially – as we have seen, that may be the case with an intentional verb without reflecting on its intentionality. Here the verb "to see" is not allowed to take a *merely* intentional object; non-existence of the object (absolutely, or in the situation) is an objection to the truth of the sentence. We see the double use of the verb "see" by contrasting it with "worship". No one would ever say: "They cannot have worshipped unicorns, because there are no such things."

Second, the words giving the object of a verb of sense are necessarily most often intended as giving *material* objects of sense: for this is their primary application. To see this, consider the following. Suppose a bright red plastic

toy elephant looks greyish-brown to me in a certain light. Only if I do not know that the greyish-brown colour is mere appearance do I say without any special context (e.g. that of describing impressions), or apology, or humour: "I see a greyish-brown plastic toy elephant." This is because we understand the description-of-an-appearance "greyish-brown" by understanding the description "greyish-brown": this describes what the appearance is of. To do that, it must in the first instance be a description of such a thing as it would be true of (for the appearance is an appearance of that) – really, and not merely in appearance: this will be its primary application. But, being a description of a sensible property, it must also in its primary application enter into the object phrases for the appropriate verbs of sense, since we get to know sensible properties by the appropriate senses.

Further, we ought to say, not: "Being red is looking red in normal light to the normal-sighted," but rather "Looking red is looking as a thing that *is* red looks in normal light to the normal-sighted." For if we ought rather to say the first, then how do we understand "looking red"? Not by understanding "red" and "looking". It would have to be explained as a simple idea; and so would looking any other colour. It may be replied: These all are simple ideas; "looking yellow" and "looking red" are the *right* expressions for what you show someone when you show him yellow and red, for he will only learn "yellow" and "red" from the examples if they look yellow and look red; so it is *looking-yellow* and *looking-red* that he really gets hold of and has been introduced to, even though you *say* you are explaining "yellow" and "red". This would come to saying that in strictness "looking" should be part of every colour word in reports of perception: it will then cease to perform the actual function of the word "looking". It was plausible to say: Only if it looks red to him will he learn what is meant; but wrong to infer: What he then grasps as the correlate of the word "red" is a red look. Even granted that he knows he is to learn the name of a colour, still it invites misunderstanding to rely on something that only *looks* red to teach him the word; if he notices that it only looks red, how natural for him to suppose that "red" was the name of the colour that it actually *is*. If you tell him: "It's the colour that this 'looks'," this presupposes that "looks *C*" and "*C*" are originally, and not just subsequently, distinct: that, in short, "being red" is not after all to be explained as a certain looking-red.

Again, things do not always look the same shape, colour, size and so on, but we commonly look at and describe them, saying, e.g., "It's rectangular, black and about six foot in height," without paying attention to how they look – indeed we might say that often things *look* to us, strike us, not as they look but as they are! (Conviction that *only* so is "looks" used rightly was the cause of confusion to an over-confident ordinary-language philosopher on an occasion famous in Oxford: F. Cioffi brought in a glass vessel of water with a stick in it. "Do you mean to say", he asked, "that this stick does not look bent?" "No," said the other bravely: "It looks like a straight stick in water." So Cioffi took it out and it *was* bent.)



So much at least there is to be said on the side of the "ordinary-language" philosopher. But, turning to the sense-impression philosophy, how much it points out and can investigate which often gets querulously dismissed by the other side! There is such a thing as simply describing impressions, simply describing the sensible appearances that present themselves to one situated thus and thus – or to *myself*.

Second, the sense-impression philosophy will be right in its way of taking the Platonic dictum: "He who sees must see something." Plato compared this to "He who thinks must think something," and has sometimes been criticized on the ground that "seeing" is a relation of a subject to an object in the modern sense of that last word, while thinking is different: that such-and-such is the case isn't a thing. But "He who sees must see something" is being wrongly taken if taken as meaning: "Whenever anyone can rightly be said to see, there must be something there, which is what he sees." Taken in that sense, it is not true; to say it is true is to legislate against all except the material use of "see". The sense in which it is true is that if someone is seeing, there is some content of his visual experience. If he says he can see ("can see" is English idiom for "is seeing") we can ask him "What can you see?" He may say "I don't know". Perhaps that means that he doesn't know what the material object of his seeing is; perhaps simply that he is at a loss to make out *what* what he (in any sense) sees *looks like*. But then we can say: well, at any rate, describe what colours, what variation of light and dark you see. He may say: "It's frightfully difficult, it all changes so fast, so many colours shifting all the time, I can't describe it, it doesn't stay long enough" – and that's a description. But he cannot say: "How do you mean, what I see? I only said I could see, I didn't say I could see something – there's no need of a '*what*' that I see." That would be unintelligible.

This brings out the third point in favour of the sense-impression philosophy, which offers it some support even in its strict Berkeleyan form. The minimum description that must be possible if someone can see, will be of colours with their variations of light and darkness. One cannot say "Colour, light and dark? No question of any such things," in response to a *present* enquiry about what one sees.

That is to say, it is so with us. Perhaps we could imagine people whose language has no colour vocabulary, though they are sighted, i.e. they use eyes and need light to get about successfully, etc. A man of such a people, taught to read by sight, learns names of letters, could read out words which were black on white, but could not understand the words "black" and "white". We'd say we do not know 'how he tells' the words, the shapes. But is that to say anything but that for us appeal to colours is used in an account of how we tell shapes? Whereas perhaps for him there is in this sense no such thing as a 'how he tells' – any more than there is for us with the colours themselves. We don't ask for a 'how we tell' it's red, as we ask for a 'how we tell' it's the word "red" and accept as part of the answer "by seeing these shapes, i.e. colour patches of these shapes". We may wonder "How could

there be such recognition of a thing like the pattern of a word – *unmediated* recognition? How could it but be mediated by perception of colour?" (One of the origins of the notion of simple ideas, elements.) But although in this case we have an account of the perception of the pattern as mediated by the perception of colour, think of our recognition of human expressions. We feel that this is the *kind* of thing to be mediated, but fail in our attempts to describe the elements and their arrangements, seeing which we recognize a cheerful or ironical expression. But, one may say, optically speaking he must be being affected by light of the wavelengths belonging to the different colours. Yes – but does that show that, so to speak, the content of a colour concept is pushed into him, so that all he has to do is utter it in a name, whose use he will later make to fit with other people's in its range of application? I believe this is thought. (cf. Quine about "square" and each man's retinal projection of a square tile.)[7] Formulated, this loses its plausibility. For one thing, the optical process does not exhibit anything to the man in whom it takes place. For another, no concept is simply given; every one involves a complicated technique of application of the word for it, which could not just be presented by an experience-content. The fact that there is no 'how we tell' about colour-recognition does not mean that training in practices – most strikingly the practices comprising that technique of application – is not as necessary for the acquisition of colour concepts as those of substances or square roots.

Pursuant to this false conception of the primitively given, Berkeley – and Russell – thought that all else in description of the seen, all besides the arrangement of colour patches in the visual field, was inference and construction. This is not acceptable. There are impressions of distance and size, for example, independent of assumptions about what a thing is. One may be utterly perplexed what a thing is just because one is seeing it as at a different distance from the right one, and hence as the wrong size. Or vice versa. I once opened my eyes and saw the black striking surface of a matchbox which was standing on one end; the other sides of the box were not visible. This was a few inches from my eye and I gazed at it in astonishment wondering what it could be. Asked to describe the impression as I remember it, I say: "Something black and rectangular, on end, some feet away, and some feet high." I took it for three or four feet distant, and it looked, if anything, like a thick post, but I knew there could be no such thing in my bedroom. Or I have taken a small black prayer book for a great family Bible sort of volume, judging that it lay on a footrest some feet away instead of a nearby ledge nearer eye-level. These were not judgements of distance based on identifications of things – the supposition of what thing it might be was based on an impression of size which went with a false impression of distance.

Departing, then, from Berkeley, we can note that descriptions of visual impressions can be very rich and various. There can be impressions of depth and distance and relative positions and size; of kinds of things and kinds of

[7] *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 7.



stuff and texture and even temperature; of facial expression and emotion and mood and thought and character; of action and movement (in the *stationary* impression) and life and death. Even within the compass of the description "colours with their variations of light and shade" there are diverse kinds of impression.

It remains to sort out the relations between the intentional and material objects of sensation; as I have done most of the time, I will concentrate on seeing.

While there must be an intentional object of seeing, there need not always be a material object. That is to say "*X* saw *A*" where "saw" is used materially, implies some proposition "*X* saw —" where "saw" is used intentionally; but the converse does not hold. This leads to the feeling that the intentional use is somehow prior to the material use. The feeling seems to run contrary to the recognition, the feeling, that for descriptions of objects of sight the material application is the prior one. Both feelings are – legitimately – satisfied by allowing that an intentional object is necessarily involved in seeing, while granting that this does not confer epistemological priority on purely intentional sentences, which indeed, in a host of the most ordinary cases of reported seeing, are never formulated or considered.

John Austin, who opposed the view that there are two senses of "see" according as the seeing has to be veridical or not, remarked casually that there were perhaps two senses of "object of sight". I think it was in this connection that he contrasted "Today I saw a man born in Jerusalem" and "Today I saw a man shaved in Oxford" – both said in Oxford. At any rate, one says, you didn't *see* him born today; perhaps you did see someone being shaved. So the one description, while true of what you saw, in a sense does not give what you saw. A description which is true of a material object of the verb "to see", but which states something that absolutely or in the circumstances "you can't have *seen*", necessarily gives *only* a material object of seeing.

In speaking of the material object of aiming, I said that if a man aimed at that dark patch against the foliage, and that patch was his father's hat with his father's head in it, then his father was a material object of his aim; but if he aimed at some patch in a totally hallucinatory scene, and hit his father, you could not say that.

Now if we try to apply this explanation to the case of seeing we run into difficulties which reflect back on the case of aiming. But in the case considered the material object of aiming was arguably an *intentional* object of seeing. For what else – it might be asked – is a dark patch against the foliage?

This may seem to plunge us into confusion. For surely what is *only* an intentional object of seeing can't be a material object of aiming? Then when does a description give a material object of sight? One kind of case we have seen: when a description is true of what is seen, but does *not* give an intentional object. "I see a man whose great uncle died in a lunatic asylum" – the relative clause gives an absolutely non-intentional description. "I see a girl who has a mole between her shoulder-blades" – in the circumstances it gives

a non-intentional description. For she is facing me, etc. "You can't have *seen* that," one says.

But why? If I can't see that, why can I see Professor Price's tomato? It has a backside that I don't see. Mr Thompson Clarke draws our attention to the fact that a view of a tomato and a half-tomato may be exactly the same. That is so; but it is not like the fact that a view of someone with and without a mole between his shoulder blades may be exactly the same. If you look at a tomato and take only a single view, you *must* see what *might* be only a half tomato: that is what seeing a tomato is. Whereas there is a view of the mole; and no front view *is* a view of a mole between the shoulder blades. Such a mole does not stamp the front view as may approaching death or a load of troubles, and so there is no impression of it – just as there is no "born-in-Jerusalem" look about a man.

But a material object of seeing is not necessarily given by a description of what is before my eyes when they are open and I am seeing; if I am totally hallucinated, then in no sense do I see what is before my eyes. Thus it is essential to a material object of seeing that it is given by a description which is true of *what is seen*; and we have to enquire into the significance here of this phrase "*what is seen*".

The problem is this: there is a material object of $\varphi$-ing if there is a phrase giving an intentional object of $\varphi$-ing which is also a description of what exists in a suitable relation to the $\varphi$-er, Now this can't be a description of what exists merely by describing the intentional object of some *other* act (he aims at the dark patch that he sees); if simply describing an intentional object of $\varphi$-ing will not – as of course it will not – guarantee that we have described a material object of $\varphi$-ing, then how can it give a material object of some other verb, $\psi$-ing?

All would be plain sailing if we could say: we have a material object of sight only if *some* intentional description is also true of what really – physically – exists. And perhaps we can say that the dark patch against the foliage is not merely an intentional object of seeing; there really is a dark object or a region of darkness there.

But this is not always the case when we see. Suppose I have defective sight: all I see is a shiny blur over there. That blur, we say, is my watch. We therefore say I see my watch, though very indistinctly; and I want to say that my watch is the material object of seeing. But I may not be able to see it as a watch; all I see is a shiny blur. But the description "a shiny blur" is not true of anything that phsyically exists in the context. Supposing the father had a dark hat on, it would follow that, to mention the puzzle that perplexed Moore for so long, the dark patch against the foliage was *part of the surface of a material object (modern sense)*; but certainly 'a blur' is no part of the surface of my watch. But it may be I have no other description of what I see than "a shiny blur over there". So is there any intentional description which is also a description of a material object of sight?

Yes; for even if my watch is not a blur, it is a shiny thing and it is over there.



Suppose I had said: I see a roughly triangular red blur here, and some causal connection via the visual centres in the brain could have been discovered between that and the presence of my watch over there – would it have been right to say: "What I am seeing is my watch"? I believe not.

An interesting case is that of *muscae volitantes*, as they are called. You go to the doctor and you say: "I wonder if there is something wrong with my eyes or my brain? I see" – or perhaps you say "I *seem* to see" – "floating specks before my eyes." The doctor says: "That's not very serious. They're there all right" (or: "You see them all right") – "they are just the floating debris in the fluids of the eye. You are a bit tired and so your brain doesn't knock them out, that's all." The things he says you see are not *out there* where you say you see them – *that* part of your intentional description is not true of anything relevant; but he does not say that what you are seeing is that debris *only* because the debris is the cause. There really are floating specks. If they caused you to see a little red devil or figure of eight, we should not say you saw them. It may be possible to think of cases where there is nothing in the intentional object that suggests a description of what is materially being seen. I doubt whether this could be so except in cases of very confused perception – how could a very definite intentional description be connected with a quite different material object of seeing? In such cases, if we are in doubt, we resort to moving the supposed material object to see if the blurred, not colour-true and misplaced image of it moves.

When you said: "I see" – believing that the objects were quite illusory – you *intended* your description purely as an intentional one; you were giving the words "floating specks" a secondary application. It came as a surprise to you that you would have had the right to intend the words materially. In the well-known case of H. H. Price's mescaline illusion, when without any derangement of his judgement he was able to describe what he saw – a great pile of leaves on his counterpane, which he knew not to be there – we again have a secondary application: the words "a pile of leaves" were intended *only* as a description of an impression.

It is important to notice that very often there is no answer to the question whether people intend the word "see" in its *material* use or not: that is, whether they are so using the word "see" that they would have to take it back supposing that what they said they saw was not there. If they were mis-seeing something that was there, they would usually want to correct themselves, finding out 'what they really saw'. But what if the seeing were hallucinatory?

The question would be: supposing that turned out to be the case, would you claim that you mean "see" in such a way that all you have to do is alter your intentions for the description of the object, from intending it in its *primary* application as a description of the *material* object of sight to intending it in a *secondary* application as a description of a mere *impression*?

Faced with such a question, we have in general the right to reject it, saying like Tommy Traddles: But it isn't so, you know, so we won't suppose it if you don't mind. And even if we have not this right, we generally entertain no

such supposition and *therefore* are unprepared with an answer. We need not have determinately meant the word "see" one way or the other.

We may make a similar point about 'phantom limb'. I take the part of the body where pain is felt to be the object of a transitive verb-like expression "to feel pain in —". Then when there is, e.g., no foot, but *X*, not knowing this, says he feels pain in his foot, he may say he was wrong ("I did not see a lion there, for there was no lion") or he may alter his understanding of the phrase "my foot" so that it becomes a purely intentional object of the verb-like expression. But it need not be determined in advance, in the normal case of feeling pain, whether one so intends the expression "I feel pain in —" as to withdraw it, or merely alters one's intentions for the description of the place of the pain, if one should learn that the place was missing.

# 2 The First Person

Descartes and St Augustine share not only the argument *Cogito ergo sum* – in Augustine *Si fallor, sum* (*De Civitate Dei*, XI, 26) – but also the corollary argument claiming to prove that *the mind* (Augustine) or, as Descartes puts it, *this I*, is not any kind of body. "I could suppose I had no body," wrote Descartes, "but not that I was not", and inferred that "this I" is not a body. Augustine says "The mind knows itself to think", and "it knows its own substance": hence "it is certain of being that alone, which alone it is certain of being" (*De Trinitate*, Book X). Augustine is not here explicitly offering an argument in the first person, as Descartes is. The first-person character of Descartes' argument means that each person must administer it to himself in the first person; and the assent to St Augustine's various propositions will equally be made, if at all, by appropriating them in the first person. In these writers there is the assumption that when one says "I" or "the mind", one is naming something such that the knowledge of its existence, which is a knowledge of itself as thinking in all the various modes, determines what it is that is known to exist.

Saul Kripke has tried to reinstate Descartes' argument for his dualism. But he neglects its essentially first-person character, making it an argument about the non-identity of *Descartes* with his own body. Whatever else is said, it seems clear that the argument in Descartes depends on results of applying the method of doubt.[1] But by that method Descartes must have doubted the existence of the man Descartes: at any rate of that figure in the world of his time, that Frenchman, born of such-and-such a stock and christened René;

[1] *Principles of Philosophy*, I, LX, contains Descartes' best statement, which is I think immune to the usual accusation of substitutional fallacy: "Each of us conceives of himself as a conscious being, and can in thought exclude from himself any other substance, whether conscious or extended; so from this mere fact it is certain that each of us, so regarded, is really distinct from every other conscious substance and from every corporeal substance. And even if we supposed that God had conjoined some corporeal substance to such a conscious substance so closely that they could not be more closely joined, and had thus compounded a unity out of the two, yet even so they remain really distinct" (*Philosophical Writings*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe and P. T. Geach). Rendering Descartes' premise here as "I can conceive myself not to include or be my body", we come close to Kripke's version (but in the first person) "Possibly I am not *A*", where "*A*" means my body. But why can I so conceive myself if not because I can doubt the existence of my body?

But "doubting" here does not mean merely reflecting that I am ignorant of the existence of my body though not of myself. So understood, the argument would indeed involve the substitutional fallacy. "Doubting" means clearly understanding that the existence of my body is not guaranteed by something which is throughly understood, and is all I am sure of: the existence of myself. We see the importance of the premise supplied by St Augustine "The mind knows its own substance".

From Samuel Guttenplan (ed.), *Mind and Language: Wolfson College Lectures 1974* (Oxford, 1975).