

ARTICLE

OXFORD REALISM: KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION II*

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6. THE LATER PRICHARD ON PERCEPTION

Although Cook Wilson, Prichard, and Joseph are usually considered as the three main figures of the Oxford Realist movement, there were noticeable, key differences in their positions on epistemological issues: while Prichard sided with Cook Wilson at the time of writing his book on *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*,¹ it seems that Joseph never really gave up idealism but tried instead to accommodate some of Cook Wilson's theses.² For example, in a series of papers on 'The Psychological Explanation of the Development of the Perception of External Objects', Joseph criticized the thesis that knowledge of external objects begins by a separate knowledge of one's own sensations – the term 'sense-datum' had not been introduced at the time.³ However, even after acknowledging his debt to Prichard on the previous page, he wrote that:

I am not happy about supposing that space is real independently of all consciousness: I do not understand what I mean by solidity, nor by what fills space; nor what by the real magnitude of anything. Nevertheless I still think that to be is one thing, to be perceived is another.⁴

So, although Joseph was ready to reject Bradley's identification of the known with the process of knowing, he could only half-heartedly adopt a direct realist stance about primary qualities. In 'A Comparison of Kant's

* Part I of this paper is in BJHP 8(2) pp. 299–338.

¹ H. A. Prichard, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909).

² On Joseph's struggle to accommodate idealism and realism, see R. K. Tacelli, 'Things in Space: Realism and Idealism in the Philosophy of H. W. B. Joseph', doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1980.

³ H. W. B. Joseph, 'The Psychological Explanation of the Development of the Perception of External Objects', *Mind*, 19 (1910): 306–21 & 457–69; 20 (1911), 161–80. This series of papers was mainly an attack on views expressed by Stout. See G. F. Stout, 'Reply to Mr. Joseph', *Mind*, 20 (1911): 1–14.

⁴ H. W. B. Joseph, 'The Psychological Explanation of the Development of the Perception of External Objects', p. 468.

Idealism with that of Berkeley', reprinted in his *Essays in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Joseph further concluded that 'we cannot be so easily quit of the idealist' and argued that even the reality of space is not mind-independent.⁵ As for Prichard, he sketched in his later papers the rough contours of a different and highly original approach, which is rather unorthodox from a Cook Wilsonian viewpoint and to which I shall presently turn.

Prichard published only one paper on perception in the later part of his career, 'The Sense-Datum Fallacy'.⁶ It was his inaugural address to the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association, which took place at Oxford in 1938, the year of his retirement. He also left behind a few manuscripts, including the text of a lecture on 'Perception' to the Cambridge Society some time in the early 1930s. Some of these manuscripts are posthumously published in *Knowledge and Perception*.⁷ In these papers, Prichard abandoned his earlier theory of appearing (see section 4, in part I of this paper) and began developing a new theory, with which he was reportedly never wholly satisfied,⁸ and which can be summarized by this sentence: 'in the special cases of seeing and of feeling or touching, what is ordinarily called perception consists in *taking*, i.e. really *mistaking*, something that we see or feel for something else'.⁹

Prichard's reasons for abandoning his earlier theory seem weak. One finds an argument in another related, short manuscript from the middle 1920s entitled 'Seeing Movements'. It opens with a distinction between 'seeing something move' and 'judging that something moved'. The clock is a good example: one sees the second hand move but ordinarily does not see the hour hand move; one judges that it has moved after seeing it in two different positions after, say, an hour's interval. From this, Prichard infers that one ought to consider seeing 'as an apprehension of a special kind' which is not judging.¹⁰ Now does one really see a body move, in this sense of 'seeing'? Prichard argues that it is not the case, because there are cases where one is under the illusion that one is seeing a body move, although one is in fact moving. His example is that of an elevator shaft: 'as we descend in a lift there occurs what we should call seeing the shaft of the lift going up'.¹¹ It is no use

⁵ H. W. B. Joseph, 'A Comparison of Kant's Idealism with that of Berkeley', in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 209–31.

⁶ H. A. Prichard, 'The Sense-Datum Fallacy', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. Supplementary Volume 17* (1938), 1–18.

⁷ H. A. Prichard, *Knowledge and Perception. Essays and Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1950.

⁸ H. H. Price, 'Critical Notice: *Knowledge and Perception*. Essays and Lectures by H. A. Prichard', *Mind*, 60 (1951), 103–21, p. 103. Price's critical notice is one of the rare discussions of the later Prichard on perception. His obituary of Prichard is another valuable source: H. H. Price, 'Harold Arthur Prichard. 1871–1947', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 33 (1947), 331–50.

⁹ H. A. Prichard, *Knowledge and Perception*, p. 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹¹ *Idem.*

to argue here against Prichard that what one sees is real relative motion because Prichard believed that all motion is absolute: 'in spite of what the followers of Einstein say, motion is, and is always really thought of as, absolute, relative motion being a contradiction in terms'.¹² As a matter of fact, Prichard even insists that one of the few things one 'knows' – in the specific meaning attached to that word by Cook Wilson (see the end of section 2, in part I of this paper) – is that motion is absolute! We may grant to Prichard, for the sake of understanding his argument, that illusions of motion are enough to do the job. Prichard then argues that if in such cases the body was not moving, 'it cannot be true that we really see a body move'¹³ and that, moreover, 'we cannot possibly really *see* a body move, or, for that matter, see a body at rest'.¹⁴ Furthermore, if this is indeed the case, then 'it cannot be true that in the process so-called we really see *bodies* – for we cannot separate the 'bodily-ness' of what is seen from the moving of what is seen'.¹⁵ In short: we never see bodies.

In 'Perception', Prichard comes back to the question raised in *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*: How can a thing look other than what it really is? (See section 3, in part I of this paper.) Citing typical cases of illusion such as the 'field on the slope of a distant hill that looks vertical', he argues that 'if we press this question home to ourselves we can only answer, as before, that it cannot'.¹⁶ Whatever the weakness of such arguments, it seems that they forced Prichard to give up his theory of appearing. Prichard was in the end convinced by the argument from illusion. Worse, he made the typical move of assuming that if in some cases (those of illusion) what one is seeing is not a material object (or body), then it is never the case that one sees material objects: 'I, of course, take it for granted that if it can be shown in certain cases that what we see cannot be a body, the same thing must be true of all cases'.¹⁷ (As will be shown in section 9, these are the moves against which Austin was to argue in *Sense and Sensibilia*.)¹⁸

Prichard was then left with the question: If we do not see bodies, what do we see? So far, his reasoning had been parallel to that of sense-datum theorists. Their answer would now be that we see sense-data but Prichard's aversion for the notion remained as strong as ever and he argued that this will not do. His reason was the old one, i.e. speaking of appearance presupposes seeing the body:

Where in ordinary life we speak of something as presenting a certain appearance to us, we always presuppose that the something is a body and that we see

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁸ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1962.

the body, and not the appearance which it is said to present; and in fact the term appearance is only appropriate so long as we do presuppose that we see bodies.¹⁹

Since it is now assumed that one does not see bodies at all, one cannot see their appearances either. Prichard does not stop here, however, but draws one further conclusion, namely that the question 'What do we really see when we are said to see a body?' involves the fallacy of 'thinking that to see something is to know or apprehend something in a particular way'.²⁰ From this, he is led to abandon an earlier thesis: seeing truly is not seeing 'as an apprehension of a special kind', it is not an apprehension at all. Since seeing is considered by Prichard to be a species of the common genus of 'perception' (along with hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, etc.), Prichard concludes that perception is not knowledge.

Again, there is little, in Prichard's texts, in the way of sound arguments in favour of this further conclusion. It seems that, having granted that the argument from illusion rendered any form of direct realism untenable and wishing to avoid the introduction of such bogus entities as sense-data, Prichard saw that the only way out of this dilemma was to deny that we 'know' what we immediately perceive. He seemed thus to have come to the conclusion that only by denying that perception is knowledge could one avoid the false alternatives of direct realism and sense-datum theories.

What is perception, if it is not apprehension? Prichard's answer, I already quoted: 'perception consists in *taking*, i.e. really *mistaking*, something that we see or feel for something else'.²¹ And what is it that we see or, rather, systematically *mistake*? The 'only obvious answer' is, according to Prichard, 'to say that it consists of colours, and to add, to prevent misunderstanding, that a colour is as such extended, or at least through and through involves extension'.²² Prichard could have spoken of colour-expanses, since he sees colours as having extension, being in space, etc. Again, Prichard has in mind the one Euclidean space and by 'a space' he meant 'a portion of that one space parts of which are occupied by bodies, if there are bodies'. (He still firmly rejected Russellian ideas of private spaces, which he describes as 'words to which no thought corresponds'.)²³

Prichard had to admit that the view that seeing a body really is seeing colour-expanses seems *prima facie* untenable since it involves the 'impossibility of thinking or judging something which is not a body to be a body'.²⁴ But this is in turn implying that in perception 'we are necessarily apprehending the character of what we perceive' and 'there is the possibility that

¹⁹ H. A. Prichard, *Knowledge and Perception*, p. 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²³ *Idem.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

we can perceive something without *apprehending* its character *at all*.²⁵ If so:

It might be possible that when seeing something we, so to say, straight off *mistake* it for something else, and that in particular what we call seeing bodies, instead of consisting in seeing colours and judging them to be bodies on the strength of the apprehension of them as colours involved in seeing them, consist in seeing colours and without apprehending them as colours at all mistaking them for bodies.²⁶

So this is, in a nutshell, Prichard's later theory of vision: seeing consists of *straight off* mistaking colour-expanses for material objects. This view is based on an important distinction taken from Cook Wilson between 'seeing an *X*' and 'seeing a *Y* and *being under the impression of seeing an X*'. (See section 2, in part I of this paper.) If one sees the back of a man and judges it to be that of Jones, then one is *under the impression of seeing Jones*; one *mistook* the back of a man for Jones. Prichard claims that something similar happens in our perception of physical objects: in the case of seeing, we actually see colour-expanses but we are *under the impression of seeing* physical objects, i.e. we straight off and systematically mistake them for physical objects; only after critical reflection do we realize that we had seen only colour-expanses but have 'taken for granted' that they are objects.

In 'The Sense-Datum Fallacy', Prichard again attacked sense-data theories. He argued that Russell and his ilk (Moore, Price, etc.) had simply substituted sense-data for Berkeley's secondary qualities as objects of perception and that 'this substitution is fallacious, as being based on the mistaken idea that perceiving is a form of knowing'.²⁷ Although he was not ready to accept that perceiving is a form of knowing for reasons just expounded, he also argued in this paper that secondary qualities are in some way dependent on their being sensed, i.e. that a colour depends on being seen, a sound depends on being heard, etc. Those holding that 'perceiving is a form of knowing' must claim that secondary qualities exist independently of our perceiving them but, Prichard claimed, '[w]e must . . . admit that it is self-evident that some sound which we are hearing depends on our hearing it' and that 'we have to admit that it at once follows that to perceive something is *not* to know it'.²⁸ With this argument, the main one of the paper, Prichard isn't standing on high ground. In his critical notice to *Knowledge and Perception*, H. H. Price pointed out the obvious: 'Is it self-evident that some sound which we hear is dependent on our hearing of it?'.²⁹

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ *Idem.*

²⁷ H. A. Prichard, 'The Sense-Datum Fallacy', p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁹ H. H. Price, 'Critical Notice: *Knowledge and Perception*. Essays and Lectures by H. A. Prichard', p. 116.

Prichard also argued that if sense-data are considered as a *sort* of entities, ‘there could be no such thing as a sense-datum’. His argument was one from analogy: if I eat cheese, bread, and jam, the things that I eat form a group – the totality of things that I eat – but membership of that group does not constitute them as having a common character; there is no sort such as ‘things which I am eating’ because ‘[t]he things which I am eating are united simply by my eating them; and my eating them does not constitute them as things of a certain sort’.³⁰ Analogously, ‘the colour, the sound, and the feeling of roughness which I am thus apprehending are united solely by my thus apprehending them’ and ‘[t]here is no such thing as a thing which is being thus apprehended by me’, i.e. no such thing as a sense-datum.³¹ Again this is a weak argument. In *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, Ayer replied:

I take it that Prichard is maintaining that what we may call the relational property of ‘being apprehended’ resembles the relational property of ‘being eaten’ in that possession of it does not logically entail the possession of any special quality But it does not follow, as Prichard seems to think, that ‘there could not be such a thing as a sense-datum’, any more than it follows that there could not be such a thing as food to deny that there were sense-data would be to deny that anything ever was observed.³²

Prichard’s arguments are not, however, widely off the mark. The underlying claim was that there are no reasons to believe that sense-data have any characteristics in common other than the relational property of ‘being apprehended’ and sense-datum theorists never provided an argument to the contrary.³³ At all events, I must emphasize once more the fact that Prichard’s attacks on sense-data as direct objects of perception or apprehension are typical of the realism of his teacher Cook Wilson, which he espoused in his youth. (See part I, section 3 of this paper.) They were also to be echoed later by Austin’s attempt at undermining the distinction between sense-data and material object in chapter II of *Sense and Sensibilia*, which targets in turn Ayer’s *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*. (See section 9, below, for details.)

7. THE SECOND GENERATION OF OXFORD REALISTS: RYLE, PRICE, KNEALE, ETC.

A whole generation of Oxford students and tutors were killed during the Great War and the next generation of Oxford philosophers, educated in the 1920s, found itself separated from the previous one by a huge generation gap

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³² A. J. Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1940) 116.

³³ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for this Journal for having pointed this out to me.

of more than twenty years. Although these new philosophers were moving on the whole in the wake of Oxford Realism, as the influence of idealism practically vanished, it was unavoidable that the new generation's interests would be different from that of a generation educated in the 1890s. As Gilbert Ryle wrote: 'Necessarily our questions, accents and impatiences in the middle 1920s were not those of our pedagogic grandsires'.³⁴ (Ryle is here referring to Prichard and Joseph.) This new generation sought to distance itself from the previous one. One peculiar way of doing so was to organize a discussion group. Such a group was already in existence: the 'Philosopher's Teas' which met every Thursday afternoon. These meetings were usually dominated by senior members of the faculty, especially Prichard and Joseph. According to John Mabbott, 'Joseph sometimes had a niggly issue; and, if there was a silence, Prichard always 'happened to have something' in his pocket'.³⁵ A number of younger faculty members decided to create a new discussion group, which they called the 'Wee Teas', so that they could discuss issues of interest to them. However, as Ryle would later say, this was done 'without any sentiment of secession'.³⁶ Membership of the second generation of Oxford Realists could be taken from attendance at these Teas: G. Ryle, H. H. Price, W. F. Hardie, J. D. Mabbott, T. D. Weldon, W. C. Kneale, etc. (C. S. Lewis was even a member for a while).³⁷ It was this generation of post-war Realists, not yet entirely at home in the linguistic analysis that was to characterize Oxford philosophy after the Second World War, which was to play the role of older brother – Ryle and Price in particular – to another younger generation of philosophers, which includes the major figures of John Austin and 'Freddie' Ayer, eventually helping to turn Oxford into a stronghold of analytical philosophy.³⁸ One striking example is Henry Price's

³⁴ G. Ryle, 'Fifty Years of Philosophy and Philosophers', *Philosophy*, 51 (1976): 381–9, p. 383.

³⁵ J. D. Mabbott, *Oxford Memories* (Oxford: Thornton's of Oxford, 1986) 76.

³⁶ G. Ryle, 'Paper Read to the Oxford Philosophical Society 500th Meeting, 1968', in *Aspects of Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 101–7, p. 102.

³⁷ On the institution of the 'Wee Teas' see G. Ryle, 'Autobiographical', in O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher (eds) *Ryle* (London: Macmillan, 1970) 1–15, pp. 5–6; and J. D. Mabbott, *Oxford Memories*, pp. 73–9.

³⁸ It is only after the Second World War that analytical philosophers made a breakthrough at University level: Gilbert Ryle replaced Collingwood as the Waynflete Professor of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy in 1945 (the chair had been vacant since 1941) and John Austin replaced H. J. Paton as White's Professor of Moral Philosophy in 1952. (Ayer came in later, becoming Wykeham Professor of Logic only in 1958.) Readerships were awarded to S. E. Toulmin in Philosophy of Science (1949), Waismann in Philosophy of Mathematics (1950) and J. L. Ackrill in Ancient Philosophy (1951). The new generation of post-war lecturers included G. A. Paul, H. P. Grice who joined Mabbott at St. John's, P. F. Strawson who was to replace Ryle in 1968 as the Waynflete Professor, and J. O. Urmson, who was close to Austin and who wrote a manifesto of ordinary language philosophy: *Philosophical Analysis. Its Development Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956). It is also during those post-war years that well-known philosophers such as G. E. M. Anscombe – who introduced Wittgenstein to Oxford – P. Foot, R. M. Hare, and G. J. Warnock began lecturing.

defense of Oxford Realism and of the younger generation in his presidential address to the Mind Association, at the first Joint Session after the War, against the dictum ‘clarity is not enough’.³⁹

At the time of the ‘Wee Teas’, Oxford philosophy was isolated. As the following anecdote taken from Mabbott’s *Oxford Memories* shows, its leading figures were little known outside Oxford. It takes place at the time of the World Congress, in 1930:

Oxford’s isolation was brought home to me when the Conference actually came to Oxford. I was conducting a Rumanian philosopher back to his hotel. . . . He said to me ‘Your Doctor Schiller, why nobody mark him? Your Schmidt, who heard of him?’ (J. A. Smith was our senior Professor.)⁴⁰

Members of the Wee Teas sought to break free of the isolation from which Oxford suffered at the time and came to be influenced first by ideas from Cambridge. One particularly interesting case is that of Henry Habberley Price (1899–1984). Educated at Winchester and New College, Price was trained as a Royal Air Force pilot during the Great War. Displaying, according to Ryle, ‘heroic sangfroid’,⁴¹ Price went as a post-graduate to Trinity College, Cambridge to study with Moore and Broad in particular.⁴² It is only when he came back (becoming a Fellow of the other Trinity College) that a debate around the notion of sense-datum was to take place within Oxford. Sense-datum theories were then bitterly opposed by Prichard.⁴³ Price was

³⁹ H. H. Price, ‘Clarity Is Not Enough’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 19 (1945): 1–31. Price wanted to defend Oxford Realists and their offspring against the accusation that, in the inter-war period, they did not fulfil their moral and political role within the society, thus helping the situation to deteriorate. For example, Collingwood in his *Autobiography*, written at the eve of the Second World War, directly accused Oxford Realists of having contributed to the rise of fascism: ‘I know now that the minute philosophers of my youth, for all their profession of a purely scientific detachment from practical affairs, were the propagandists of a coming fascism’ (*An Autobiography*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1939, p. 167). Needless to say, this accusation is completely gratuitous. Price’s lecture was reprinted in a collection of essays of the same title, H. D. Lewis, *Clarity is not enough*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1963.

⁴⁰ J. D. Mabbott, *Oxford Memories*, p. 74.

⁴¹ G. Ryle, ‘Autobiographical’, p. 4.

⁴² For more on the life of Price, see J. Harrison, ‘Henry Habberley Price. 1899–1984’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 80 (1993): 473–91.

⁴³ For Price’s reaction to Prichard’s later views in ‘The Sense-Datum Fallacy’ and ‘Perception’, see the papers cited in footnote 8, above. Sense-datum theories were also criticized during the inter-war period in Cambridge, mainly by Wittgenstein. See, for example, the lecture notes of 1934–6: L. Wittgenstein, ‘Notes for Lectures on “Private Experience” and “Sense-data”’, *Philosophical Review*, 77 (1968): 275–320. George Paul published a noticeable paper in 1936, which bears the influence of Wittgenstein. See G. A. Paul, ‘Is There a Problem about Sense-Data?’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 15 (1936): 61–77. Surprisingly, there is no systematic study of Wittgenstein on sense-data in the extensive secondary literature on the Austrian philosopher. The arguments set forth by Wittgenstein (and Paul) to undermine the notion of sense-data are of a

nevertheless elected Wykeham Professor of Logic to replace Joachim in 1935; a position he held until 1958, only to be replaced by A. J. Ayer, another proponent of sense-datum theories. Gilbert Ryle's philosophical path is another interesting example. He went up to Oxford in 1919 and was made a lecturer in Christ Church in 1924, after obtaining a first in Greats. Originally influenced by his teacher H. J. Paton, the Kant scholar, Ryle began his philosophical life as yet another Oxonian follower of Croce. He very quickly rebelled. He described himself, in later years, as being at the time a '[f]idgetty Cook Wilsonian'.⁴⁴ But he became interested in the demarcation between meaning and meaninglessness and was then deeply influenced by Russell's theory of types and especially by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*; an influence clearly shown in early papers such as 'Systematically Misleading Expressions'.⁴⁵

There was also a willingness from members of the 'Wee Teas' to learn about new schools of philosophy on the Continent. William Kneale attended Husserl's lectures in Freiburg and he kept a lifelong interest in Brentano.⁴⁶ Ryle taught, apparently on Paton's advice, a course on 'Logical Objectivism: Bolzano, Brentano, Husserl, and Meinong', which was affectionately known as 'Ryle's three Austrian train stations and one Chinese game of chance'. He even reviewed Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* in 1928.⁴⁷ Ryle was at the time interested in intentionalist accounts of thinking:

I did not want Price or Moore to have their immediate acquaintance with sense-data, but nor did I want Russell or Meinong or Plato or, I fancied, the author of the *Tractatus*, to enjoy their trout-like apprehendings of universals, objectives, propositions or the constituents of propositions. What was wanted was (a) Realism without additional entities to apprehend or (b) Realism without fabricated apprehendings.⁴⁸

He soon realized, however, that 'what was wanted was not an intentionalist phenomenology but a Nichomacheanised *De Anima* that was also

quite different nature than those found in the writings of Oxonians. As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein was much more sympathetic to the notion than his Oxonian interpreters would like us to believe. Be this as it may, their common rejection of sense-datum theories was one of the points of contact between Oxford Philosophy and Wittgenstein, which facilitated his reception in that University. On the reception of Wittgenstein in post-war Oxford, see P. M. S. Hacker, 'Wittgenstein and Post-War Philosophy at Oxford', in J. Hintikka and K. Puhl (eds) *The British Tradition in 20th Century Philosophy. Proceedings of the 17th International Wittgenstein-Symposium* (Vienna, Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1995) 100–21.

⁴⁴ G. Ryle, 'Paper Read to the Oxford Philosophical Society 500th Meeting, 1968', p. 106.

⁴⁵ G. Ryle, 'Systematically Misleading Expressions', in *Collected Papers*, 2 vols., reprint (Bristol, Thoemmes, 1990) vol. 2, 39–62.

⁴⁶ T. J. Smiley, 'William Calvert Kneale 1906–1990', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87 (1995): 385–97, p. 385.

⁴⁷ G. Ryle, *Collected Papers*, 2 vols., reprint (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990) vol. 1, 197–214.

⁴⁸ G. Ryle, 'Paper Read to the Oxford Philosophical Society 500th Meeting, 1968', p. 106.

syntactically circumspect',⁴⁹ and he gave up studying the works of 'analytical' phenomenologists (as they ought appropriately to be called). Ryle met Moritz Schlick when the World Congress of Philosophy took place in Oxford in 1930 and it was on the former's advice that the young Ayer went to study with the latter in Vienna in 1932–3. But, with the exception of Ayer becoming a logical positivist, such ventures outside Oxford had no noticeable consequences; the second generation Realists did not really shake off their Cook Wilsonian heritage.

Cook Wilson's influence on that generation of Oxonians was indeed far from being negligible. I shall briefly present a few examples of it, first in relation to sense-datum theories in the works of Price, Ryle, and Mabbott and secondly in works of Kneale on probability and Ryle on conditionals. The theory of knowledge is the topic where this influence is indeed most pervasive. In this respect, the case of Henry Price is rather interesting. As a student, he was strongly influenced by the Realists. This is witnessed by what I believe was his first paper, 'Reality and Sensible Appearance', which is a defense of the realism of the ordinary man; it purports to defend a theory not far from the theory of appearing previously held by Prichard.⁵⁰ But he came back from Cambridge as a defender of sense-datum theories, rewrote his B.Sc. thesis and published it under the title *Perception*, in 1932.⁵¹ In it, he explicitly rejected the theory of appearing.⁵² In the first chapter, which is entitled 'The Given', he wrote:

When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is any material thing at all. Perhaps what I took for a tomato was really a reflection; perhaps I am even the victim of some hallucination. One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is directly present to my consciousness.⁵³

Adding below:

This peculiar and ultimate manner of being present to consciousness is called *being given*, and that which is thus present is called a *datum*. The corresponding mental attitude is called *acquaintance*, *intuitive apprehension*, or sometimes *having*. Data of this special sort are called *sense-data*⁵⁴

Price sought to explain in detail how a picture of an object such as a tomato

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵⁰ H. H. Price, 'Reality and Sensible Appearance', *Mind*, 33 (1924): 20–43.

⁵¹ H. H. Price, *Perception* (London: Methuen, 1932) sec. ed., 1950.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 61–5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Idem.*

was put together piecemeal from successive glances at it from different points of view – a process that he called ‘syngnosis’.⁵⁵ He began by distinguishing between two levels of perceptual consciousness, ‘perceptual acceptance’ and ‘perceptual assurance’. Perceptual ‘acceptance’ is the most elementary form. It is defined as ‘absence of disbelief’ or as ‘taking for granted’:⁵⁶

What the perceptually conscious subject takes for granted when he senses a particular visual or tactual sense-datum is that there now exists a material thing to which this sense-datum belongs; and that this thing has a front surface of a certain general character, to be more exactly determined by subsequent perceptual acts. What general character the surface is taken to have, and how determinate that character is, does depend upon the nature of the present sense-datum. But it is not true that he takes sense-datum to be identical with the surface, though (his state being an unreflective one) he does fail to distinguish them.⁵⁷

The ‘object’ of perceptual ‘acceptance’ is, according to Price ‘*that so and so is the case – that a material thing exists here and now, that it has a surface of such and such a sort, etc. – in short, what is taken for granted is a set of propositions*’.⁵⁸ From this mere taking for granted, one may, by a series of perceptual acts, *confirm* the existence of the material object. This is the state of perceptual ‘assurance’. Briefly, the relation between sense-data and material objects was explained as follows: when someone stares at a tomato, one knows that at least one sense-datum exists and assumes also that others are obtainable if, say, one is to move around it. By such approaches sense-data can be collected in what Price called ‘distortion’ and ‘differentiation’ series.⁵⁹ These converge on a set of ‘constructible sense-data’ which, in turn, fit together to form a ‘solid’,⁶⁰ whose shape and size are those attributed to the material object. Now such a ‘solid’, together with a set of ‘distortion series’ and a set of ‘differentiation series’ constitute what he calls a ‘family of sense-data’.⁶¹ Such families contain actual and merely ‘obtainable’ – but non-existent – sense-data. (Price believed he could thus avoid the unlikely notion of ‘sensibilia’.)⁶² In the end, the material object was defined by Price, in a manner reminiscent of Locke, as a family of sense-data together with a physical occupant. Perceptual ‘assurance’ cannot be considered as, strictly speaking, knowledge of the external world but Price replied, in a Lockean

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 222f.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 284.

fashion, that 'Nothing 'better' than perceptual assurance can be got, nor is needed, and any one who asks for more is asking for he knows not what'.⁶³

All this may mislead one into believing that Price had shed his Cook Wilsonian heritage entirely but this is not exactly so. It is true that Price's account of perception is first and foremost taken from Moore, Broad, and Russell and that it is firmly a sense-datum theory. But Price consciously blended Oxonian elements into his Cantabrigian epistemology. For example, it is clear from both his paper on 'Some Considerations about Belief'⁶⁴ and from chapter VI of *Perception* that Price took on board Cook Wilson's views on knowledge, belief and 'being under the impression that'. There are certainly other authors referred to in chapter VI of *Perception*, such as Hume, Reid, Broad and Moore – even Husserl is alluded to . . .⁶⁵ But Price's discussion makes it clear that his debt is to Cook Wilson (and Prichard). According to Price, 'perceptual consciousness is not a form of *knowing*' and neither is it 'belief' as Reid would have it;⁶⁶ it 'much more resembles what Cook Wilson calls *being under the impression that* than what he calls belief'.⁶⁷ At any rate, the notion of 'being under the impression that' has simply no equivalent in, say, Reid or Husserl, and that type of analysis of perceptual states of mind – in Brentanian terms: descriptive psychology – which is very typical of Cook Wilson, has no real Cantabrigian equivalent in Moore or Broad. Price's dependence on key ideas of Cook Wilson and Prichard was lost neither on his contemporaries,⁶⁸ nor on later commentators such as Martha Kneale, who mentions it in her introduction to a recent reprint of Price's book,⁶⁹ or John Passmore, who concludes his discussion of Price in *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* by saying that Cook Wilson's soul 'goes on marching on in Oxford's theories of knowledge'.⁷⁰

Moreover, Price was far from being a typical sense-datum theorist, i.e. a phenomenalist. As a matter of fact, it would be outright misleading to label him a 'phenomenalist'. Contrary to causal theorists, Price did not believe that our assurance regarding the existence of material objects is inferred (in this he agreed with Prichard but for other reasons). He claimed instead that it is based on our discovery of 'families' of sense-data. Price further argued against phenomenism that it cannot account for the causal properties of

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁶⁴ H. H. Price, 'Some Considerations about Belief', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 35 (1935): 229–52.

⁶⁵ H. H. Price, *Perception*, p. 152.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁶⁸ See, for example, D. R. Cousin, 'Some Doubts about Knowledge', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 36 (1936): 255–72.

⁶⁹ M. Kneale, 'Introduction', in *The Collected Works of Henry Price*, vol. 2 (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996) xi.

⁷⁰ J. Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968) 257.

material objects and he argued, in chapters IX–X of *Perception*, that there is a ‘system of physical occupants which is public and independent of minds’ and which are the ‘sources’ of the families of sense-data,⁷¹ and thus that material objects are families of sense-data together with their physical occupants. Price gives, among others, the example of a concealed magnetized bar:

When a magnetized bar is concealed in my pocket no actual sense-data of that family exist. But the magnetic field remains actual enough. If a compass is moved near to the place where the sense-data would be if they existed, the needle is still deflected exactly as before.⁷²

This shows that there must be a ‘physical occupant’, which is the causal source of the deflection of the needle:

Such facts as these show that the family [of sense-data] is not the subject of those causal characteristics in terms of which physical occupancy is defined. For how can actual and manifest characteristics be said to characterize something at the time when the alleged *characterizandum* is but a system of potentialities? A compass needle is actually deflected by an unseen magnet. To say that the magnetic attractiveness characterizes a collection none of whose members actually exist at the time is really to say that they characterize nothing.⁷³

Other ‘Wee Teas’ were straightforwardly against sense-datum theories. After the Second World War, Ryle criticized them in chapter VII of *The Concept of Mind*. As he himself would put it later, Ryle was, in his early stages, ‘much more interested in the pros and cons of Realism about the Thinkable’ than ‘those of Realism about the Perceptible’.⁷⁴ But he nevertheless devoted a chapter of his book to the topic.⁷⁵ When he was not merely repeating old arguments such as the ‘predicability argument’ set forth by Prichard in ‘Appearances and Reality’ (see section 3, in part I of this paper),⁷⁶ Ryle argued that sense-datum theories rest upon a ‘logical howler’, that of ‘assimilating the concept of sensation to the concept of observation’.⁷⁷ To say that sense-data are ‘observed’ leads, according to Ryle, to an infinite regress since observing an object means catching at least a ‘glimpse’ of it and:

⁷¹ H. H. Price, *Perception*, p. 320.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 291. For a reply by Ayer, see his *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, pp. 226–8.

⁷⁴ G. Ryle, ‘Paper Read to the Oxford Philosophical Society 500th Meeting, 1968’, p. 106.

⁷⁵ G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, reprint (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) chap. 7. There is also a chapter on perception in G. Ryle, *Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954) 93–110.

⁷⁶ G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, pp. 206–207.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

If having a glimpse of a horse-race entails having at least one sensation, then having a glimpse of a colour patch must involve again having at least one appropriate sensation, which in its turn must be analysed into the sensing of yet an earlier sensum, and so on for ever.⁷⁸

(It is possible, however, for the representationalist to avoid postulating that sense-data are the objects of perception, to avoid the use of ‘observe’ in connection with sense-data and thus the appearance of regress.) John Mabbott is also usually credited for the definitive refutation, in one of his rare papers in epistemology, ‘Our Direct Experience of Time’,⁷⁹ of the notion of ‘specious present’ with which Russell, Broad and others (including Price) tried to account for the continuity of the ‘direct’ awareness of the passage of events; the difficulty being that sense-data are discrete.⁸⁰ The true Oxonian cavalry charge against sense-datum theories would come, however, from a younger philosopher, J. L. Austin; it will be presented and discussed in section 9.

Cook Wilson’s ideas about knowledge, opinion and belief also influenced deeply William Kneale’s major work of the 1930s, *Probability and Induction*, where, for example, Kneale made use of the typically Cook Wilsonian notion of ‘being under the impression of’ in his philosophical criticism of the subjectivist theory of probability,⁸¹ and claimed that knowledge is indefinable, and his own positive, realist theory of probability is based on Cook Wilson’s definition of opinion. As Passmore put it, *Probability and Induction* is ‘thoroughly Cook Wilsonian in atmosphere’.⁸² Perhaps more strikingly, the origins of Ryle’s well-known, controversial stance on indicative conditionals in “If”, “So”, and “Because”⁸³ – Ryle’s claim being that they do not admit of assessment as true or false – are to be traced back to Cook Wilson, in fact to the claim which he made while sparring with Lewis Carroll on the subject of conditionals, that all statements being categorical, hypothetical statements could not really be statements.⁸⁴ They were said by him to relate problems: ‘the assertion in any hypothetical statement is that one problem includes another, or that one question is identical to another’.⁸⁵ Ryle’s paper merits a closer look, as it exemplifies how Oxford Realists

⁷⁸ *Idem.*

⁷⁹ J. D. Mabbott, ‘Our Direct Experience of Time’, *Mind*, 60 (1951): 153–67.

⁸⁰ For a presentation of the notion of ‘specious present’, see C. D. Broad, *Scientific Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) 1923, pp. 348–51.

⁸¹ W. C. Kneale, *Probability and Induction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949) 5.

⁸² J. Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, p. 422.

⁸³ G. Ryle, “If”, “So”, and “Because”, in *Collected Papers*, 2 vols., reprint (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990) vol. 2, 234–49.

⁸⁴ J. Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926) 545.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 541. For brief discussions of Cook Wilson on hypotheticals, see I. Berlin, *Concepts and Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 63; and J. Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, p. 243.

struggled with elementary logical issues. In that paper, Ryle compared conditionals, that is propositions of the form ‘If p , then q ’, to the possession of a railway ticket from London to Oxford, in that the latter gives its possessor a *warrant* to make the journey. This is the well-known notion of an ‘inference-ticket’.⁸⁶ Possession of such a warrant does not mean, according to Ryle, that one will actually make the inference or that one will ever acquire the premises p from which to make it: ‘Neither buying a ticket, nor owning a ticket, nor showing a ticket is travelling’.⁸⁷ Asserting ‘If p , then q ’ is thus not making a report on any inference and such conditionals do not embody statements but what Ryle called ‘statement-indent’; they are, as he said, ‘bills for statements that statements could fill’.⁸⁸ Accordingly, he rejected the code style of the *modus ponens*, i.e. the form ‘If p then q , but p , therefore q ’, claiming that in some way the p in the major premise cannot be the same as p asserted by itself. Ryle’s analysis in terms ‘statement-indent’ is quite close to Cook Wilson’s as Ryle himself noticed: ‘a question does contain a specification of what is required, and what is required is a statement, for an answer to a question is a statement’.⁸⁹ But he insisted against Cook Wilson that there are simply no assertions or questions proper occurring in conditionals.

Not a firm believer myself in the existence of ‘knock-down’ arguments, I ought nevertheless to point out that Peter Geach’s ‘Frege point’ is often cited as decisive against Ryle (and others). The ‘Frege point’ is simply that ‘[a] thought may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition’.⁹⁰ Geach’s argument against Ryle is simply that Ryle’s conception is unable to account for the use of the conditional within a *modus ponens* without committing the fallacy of equivocation, if the ‘ p ’ occurs unasserted in ‘if p , then q ’ and then as asserted as the second premise of the *modus ponens*.⁹¹ Geach also used ‘Frege point’

⁸⁶ A year before ‘“If”, “So” and “Because”’, Ryle published *The Concept of Mind* where he coined the expression: ‘Law-statements are true or false but they do not state truths or falsehood of the same type as those asserted by the statements of fact to which they apply or are supposed to apply. They have different jobs. The crucial difference can be brought out in this way. At least part of the point of trying to establish laws is to find out how to infer from particular matters of fact to other particular matters of fact, how to explain particular matters of fact by reference to other matters of fact, and how to bring about or prevent states of affairs. A law is used as, so to speak, an inference-ticket (a season ticket) which licenses its possessors to move from asserting factual statements to asserting other factual statements’ (*The Concept of Mind*, pp. 116–17).

⁸⁷ G. Ryle, ‘“If”, “So” and “Because”’, p. 240.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 245–6.

⁹⁰ P. T. Geach, *Logic Matters* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972) 254–5.

⁹¹ Geach’s argument is not entirely conclusive, however, since one may succeed in providing a non-truth-functional interpretation of the sentential operators, in particular of the conditional.

against Austin's analysis 'I know', which was mentioned at the end of section 2 (in part I of this paper):

Austin would maintain that if I say assertorically, 'I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery', this is not an asserted proposition about me, but an act of warranting my hearers that the picture is a forgery. Austin never observed that this alleged non-proposition could function as a premise obeying ordinary logical rules, in inferences like this:

I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery.

I am no art expert.

If someone knows Smith's Vermeer is a forgery, and is no art expert, then
Smith's Vermeer is a very clumsy forgery.

Ergo, Smith's Vermeer is a very clumsy forgery.

Still less did Austin discuss *how* a non-proposition could be a premise. But failing such a discussion, Austin's account of 'I know' is valueless.⁹²

Such struggles with elementary logic point to a poor training in logic. H. W. B. Joseph's *Introduction to Logic* was the logic textbook of the time; ⁹³ when, for example, J. O. Urmson was taught logic in his second year (1936), it was by H. H. Price, who was teaching syllogistic using Joseph's book and inductive logic using J. S. Mill's *System of Logic*.⁹⁴ Modern mathematical logic did not really penetrate Oxford until well after the Second World War. It was not taught until Hao Wang came to All Souls and became Reader in Philosophy of Mathematics (1956–61).⁹⁵ Thus, with the exception of William Kneale,⁹⁶ the generations formed in the 1920s and 1930s knew little

⁹² P. T. Geach, *Logic Matters* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972) 268.

⁹³ H. W. B. Joseph, *An Introduction to Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906) 2nd edn., 1916.

⁹⁴ J. O. Urmson, 'Prichard and Knowledge', in J. Dancy, J. M. E. Moravcsik, C. C. W. Taylor (eds.), *Human Agency. Language, Duty, and Value* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) 11–24, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Burton Dreben, who had just obtained his Ph. D. from Harvard under the supervision of W.V.O. Quine, spent the academic year 1951 in Oxford. He should be given credit for introducing logic to a generation of Oxonians, Austin in particular. Together they devised and played a card-game, known as 'Symboli' to help learning formal logic. (For some reason, this card-game is also referred to as 'Case' by Warnock in his obituary to Austin: G. J. Warnock, 'John Langshaw Austin. 1911–60', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 49 (1963): 345–63, p. 356n.) After Dreben left Oxford, Austin continued improving and playing the game, as he was apparently convinced that this was the only way he could teach logic to his colleagues.

⁹⁶ William Kneale, who was White's Professor of Moral Philosophy from 1960 to 1966, knew modern logic, but did not teach it. He wrote in collaboration with his wife Martha an excellent history of logic: W. C. Kneale & M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962. Kneale had studied the theory probability before the Second World War and he published *Probability and Induction* a few years after it. But his book was not, as is clearly stated in the preface, a contribution to mathematics. Kneale never directly contributed to mathematical logic, but recent work in 'multiple-conclusion logic' is inspired by his ideas. On this, see T. J. Smiley, 'William Calvert Kneale 1906–1990', pp. 396–7.

or no mathematical logic. This much is true of analytical philosophers such as Ryle, Ayer, and Austin who, although they shed the aversion to modern mathematical logic of Joseph and Prichard, never really properly learned it. Particularly striking is Ryle's own admission. Even after he 'went all Cambridge' with interest in 'Russell the logician', he did not make himself 'even competent in the algebra of logic'.⁹⁷ Awareness of this fact helps understanding some of the idiosyncrasies of analytical philosophy in Oxford and in particular of ordinary language philosophy.⁹⁸ One lesson readily learned by the likes of Ryle, however, was that the 'new so-called Mathematical Logic chopped both logic and philosophy free from . . . psychology' and that 'we were not doing psychology'.⁹⁹ This anti-psychologism was nothing new and does not have the usual sort of Fregean origin, nor, for that matter, does it bear the mark of neo-kantian influence of the Marburg School or of the works of Brentanians such as Husserl, that are the other main sources of modern anti-psychologism. The origin is parochial: Prichard and Joseph had set the tone by arguing against psychology in, respectively, 'A Criticism of the Psychologists' Treatment of Knowledge' and 'The Psychological Explanation of the Development of the Perception of External Objects'.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ G. Ryle, 'Autobiographical', p. 7. A. J. Ayer also admitted, *en passant*, his lack of technical knowledge in logic, in *Part of my Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 162.

⁹⁸ Michael Dummett, who replaced Wang as Reader in Philosophy of Mathematics from 1961 to 1975 and eventually became Wykeham Professor of Logic at New College from 1979 to 1992, was the first Oxford philosopher with working knowledge of logic; two of his earliest papers were technical ones: M. A. E. Dummett, 'A Propositional Calculus with Denumerable Matrix', *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, 24 (1959): 97–106; M. A. E. Dummett & E. J. Lemmon, 1959, 'Modal Logics between S 4 and S 5', *Zeitschrift für mathematische Logik und Grundlagen der Mathematik*, 5 (1959): 250–64. More importantly, he was the first to assimilate fully the revolution in philosophical logic brought about by Frege. There is a sense in which authors such as Ryle, Austin, and Strawson belong to the old Aristotelian paradigm. Mark Glouberman gives a very good example of this. See M. Glouberman, 'P. F. Strawson and the Ghost of F. H. Bradley', *Iyyun*, 43 (1994): 243–63. His point is that Strawson's reply to Bradley's paradox about predication betrays a pre-Fregean, not to say Cook Wilsonian understanding of predication. According to Strawson there is no infinite regress of the sort argued for by Bradley in *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., 1897, p. 18), because predication is a 'non-relational tie'. See P. F. Strawson, *Individuals. An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959) 167]. Strawson even calls one type of non-relational ties 'attributive' in honour of Cook Wilson (*ibidem*, p. 168). Incidentally, the only other reference to Cook Wilson in *Individuals* occurs in an attempt at criticizing . . . Frege and Geach on subject and predicate (*ibid.*, p. 144). Dummett is perfectly aware of Strawson's pre-Fregean stance, as is clear from a remark in *Frege. Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1981) 32. Dummett was in this sense the first of a new generation of Oxford philosophers; his influence on philosophy at Oxford since the 1960s is perhaps more considerable than that of Cook Wilson in his days. This point, however, cannot be argued for within the context of this paper.

⁹⁹ G. Ryle, 'Fifty Years of Philosophy and Philosophers', p. 386.

¹⁰⁰ H. A. Prichard, 'A Criticism of the Psychologists' Treatment of Knowledge', *Mind*, 16 (1907): 27–53; H. W. B. Joseph, 'The Psychological Explanation of the Development of the Perception of External Objects' *op. cit.*

8. A THIRD GENERATION: ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

A new generation of Oxford philosophers was educated in the 1930s: Ayer, Berlin, Hart, Austin, Urmson, etc. This was the generation that was to 'take over' Oxford after the Second World War and turn it into an analytical stronghold. It is to some (but not all) members of this generation that the labels 'Oxford philosophy' or 'ordinary language philosophy' attach. Berlin and Austin organized a famous discussion group, 'Saturday Mornings' which played a role analogous to that of the 'Wee Teas' of the previous generation. These meetings were attended by H. P. Grice, H. L. A. Hart, R. M. Hare, S. G. Hampshire, G. Paul, P. F. Strawson, J. O. Urmson, G. Warnock, etc. John Austin, who was White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Corpus Christi, 1952–60, was definitively the centre of gravity of that group of philosophers.¹⁰¹ To this new generation, idealists and Oxford Realists alike were considered as *passé*. Their books were seldom opened and any influence, such as there may have been on the likes of Austin or Urmson remained, if not hidden, at least unadvertised. There was also quite a lot of mockery. A good example of this is the following anecdote told by Ayer in *Part of my Life*, concerning the publication of his book *Language, Truth and Logic*:¹⁰²

Gilbert Ryle told me that on a visit to Blackwell's he had overheard Prichard and Joseph saying that it was scandalous that the book had found a publisher. This does not imply that they had read it. Collingwood, who happened also to be in the shop turned to them and said, 'Gentlemen, this book will be read when your names are forgotten.' I suspect that this was less a tribute to me than an expression of his contempt for them.¹⁰³

Another telling story is that of Wittgenstein's sole public appearance at Oxford, in May 1947. He was to reply to a paper by Oscar Wood to the Jowett Society on the validity of Descartes's cogito but he apparently disregarded it entirely and instead freely discussed the cogito, in his typical fashion. Prichard, who was, according to a witness, 'extremely old and deaf with a terrible cough' – he was to die a week later – and 'totally tactless', kept interrupting him:

Wittgenstein: If a man says to me, looking at the sky, 'I think it will rain, therefore I exist,' I do not understand him.
Prichard: That's all very fine; what we want to know is: is the cogito valid or not.

¹⁰¹ For an account of Austin's life, see G. J. Warnock, 'John Langshaw Austin. 1911–1960', *op. cit.*

¹⁰² A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936).

¹⁰³ A. J. Ayer, *Part of my Life*, p. 166.

After retorting that what Descartes was concerned with was far more important than any problem that Wittgenstein had discussed, Prichard, according to the same witness, 'shuffled out in disgust'.¹⁰⁴ It is not difficult to imagine that younger members of the audience, feeling offended, must have thought that Prichard lacked the intellectual powers to raise to the level of Wittgenstein's discussion.

It would be misleading to assume, however, that there was thus no influence from or respect for Oxford Realists. They had been the influential teachers of that generation: Prichard, Joseph Price, and Ryle in particular. One only needs to scratch a little bit to find them just below the surface. This is not to deny the originality and importance of authors such as Austin, it is merely to record their Oxford Realist roots. Sometimes, the influence of their teachers is negligible as perhaps in the case of H. L. A. Hart,¹⁰⁵ but not always. In this section I would like briefly to discuss Berlin. I shall discuss Austin in the next. The point that I would like make is that the 'ordinary language philosophy' of this third generation was, in some aspects, *a continuation of Oxford Realism by other means*.

In a recent conversation, Isaiah Berlin described his philosophical history in the following terms:

I was not brought up as a Positivist. I was brought up originally as an English Hegelian. I rebelled against that, because I couldn't understand Hegelian language, and when I read the English Hegelians I found myself floating about in a land of mist which I really did not and still do not enjoy. . . . I derived no light from such prose. So I became what is known as an Oxford Realist. That meant acceptance of the philosophical approach of thinkers like Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore, Henry Price, Gilbert Ryle, William Kneale, and four or five others.¹⁰⁶

It is worth noticing that Berlin's list of Oxford Realists does not include names from the pre-war generation such as Cook Wilson, Joseph, or Prichard but merely names of the first post-war generation Price, Ryle, and

¹⁰⁴ R. Monk, *Wittgenstein. The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991) 496–7.

¹⁰⁵ Hart, perhaps the greatest British legal philosopher of the century, came up to New College with a scholarship in 1926 and was tutored in philosophy by Joseph and Smith, who steered him towards Cook Wilson's realism. He returned to New College after the war (where he gave tuition from 1945 to 1952) but at that time he moved towards analytical philosophy under the influence of his friends Austin, Berlin, Hampshire, Ryle, and Waismann. Along with many others of his generation, he attended the famous 'Saturday Mornings' discussion group organized by Berlin and Austin. Closer to them, he remained distrustful of logical positivism, his style remained more Aristotelian. On the other hand, he, at least, took over from Waismann the notion of 'open-textured concepts'. On this see P. M. S. Hacker, 'Wittgenstein and Post-War Philosophy at Oxford', p. 103.

¹⁰⁶ R. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: Peter Halban, 1992) 153.

Kneale (members of the ‘Wee Teas’) and of their Cantabrigian heroes, Russell and Moore. But Berlin added to this that Oxford Realism:

Sprang initially from the writings of a forgotten Oxford philosopher at the turn of the century, aimed at refutation of the prevailing Hegelian philosophy in dry Aristotelian terms.¹⁰⁷

The ‘forgotten Oxford philosopher’ must undoubtedly be Cook Wilson.

As a tutor in philosophy at New College, Berlin became an active member of ‘Oxford philosophy’; he related the story of his involvement in ‘J. L. Austin and the Early Beginnings of Oxford Philosophy’.¹⁰⁸ His first major papers were ‘analytical’, they form together Berlin’s contribution to ‘Oxford philosophy’: ‘Verification’ (1939), ‘Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements’ (1950), ‘Logical Translation’ (1950).¹⁰⁹ As is also well known, Berlin bid farewell to philosophy sometime after the Second World War.¹¹⁰ I shall concern myself here only with his early ‘analytical’ papers and Berlin’s Realist heritage. His philosophy is a complex blend and I do not wish to imply that Berlin was a sort of orthodox Oxford Realist. It is clear, for example, that in the philosophy of history Collingwood largely influenced Berlin.¹¹¹

In typically Oxonian fashion, philosophers of Berlin’s generation saw themselves as opponents of a more mainstream but non-indigenous form of analytical philosophy such as the Cambridge school of analysis (Russell, Wittgenstein, Ramsey, Braithwaite) and the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle. According to Berlin, ‘[in] Oxford, even after the war, Positivism had to struggle against something that was called ‘Oxford Philosophy’, a kind of undoctrinaire empiricism, united with an analysis of language’.¹¹² As a matter of fact, Berlin’s first philosophical essays were openly against logical positivist claims. For example, Berlin argued in ‘Empirical propositions and Hypothetical Statements’ against the possibility of a ‘translation’ or ‘reduction’ of (what he referred to as) ‘commonsense language’ of the kind

¹⁰⁷ *Idem.*

¹⁰⁸ I. Berlin, ‘Austin and the Early Beginnings of Oxford Philosophy’, in *Essays on J. L. Austin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

¹⁰⁹ These papers are reprinted in I. Berlin, *Concepts and Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

¹¹⁰ For Berlin’s own explanations, see, e.g. *Concepts and Categories*, pp. vii–viii. I have discussed Berlin’s move away from philosophy in ‘Berlin on Historical Understanding and Values’, to appear.

¹¹¹ On Berlin’s philosophy of history and the influence of Collingwood, see my ‘Berlin on Historical Understanding and Values’, to appear.

¹¹² R. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p. 14.

required by sense-datum theories and phenomenalism;¹¹³ in ‘Verification’ he attacked the logical positivists’ ‘principle of verifiability’.¹¹⁴

Logical positivism was represented in Oxford by one of its expatriates, Friedrich Waismann and by its eminent English propagandist, Sir Alfred Jules Ayer. Waismann came to England in the late 1930s, where he was finally able to take refuge in New College (later Wadham), after a short stay at Cambridge where Wittgenstein, with whom he had collaborated earlier in the decade but with whom he had fallen out of favour, refused even to see him.¹¹⁵ He became lecturer in Philosophy of Science and Mathematics (1946–50) and later Reader in Philosophy of Mathematics. When Wang arrived in Oxford, he was made Reader in Philosophy of Mathematics and Waismann became Reader in Philosophy of Science, a position he held until he committed suicide in 1959.

As already mentioned, sense-datum theories coming out of Cambridge were represented in Oxford by Henry Price who was Wykeham Professor of Logic at New College until 1958 and A. J. Ayer, who succeeded him in 1959 and held the Chair until his retirement in 1978. Ayer’s book *Language, Truth and Logic*, written at the age of 26, after he went to Vienna at Ryle’s suggestion, was a kind of manifesto of logical positivism. It had a tremendous influence on British philosophy, which should not confuse one into believing that logical positivism was the main philosophical current in Oxford in the 1930s. As Berlin pointed out:

The dominant philosophy in Oxford before the war was a kind of philosophical realism, directed mainly against Hegel and Idealism –inspired by the British Empiricists. . . . The idea that the 1930s were dominated by Logical Positivism is not accurate –groups met in London and elsewhere: but the domination came later. I think the main cause of this was Ayer’s book.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ I. Berlin, ‘Empirical propositions and Hypothetical Statements’, in *Concepts and Categories*, pp. 32–55. This paper, which originally appeared in *Mind*, represents Berlin’s contribution to a debate about phenomenalism which took place largely in the pages of the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. See R. B. Braithwaite, ‘Propositions about Material Objects’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 38 (1938): 269–90; G. F. Stout, ‘Phenomenalism’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 39 (1939): 1–18; R. I. Aaron, ‘How may Phenomenalism be Refuted?’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 39 (1939): 167–84; D. G. C. Macnabb, ‘Phenomenalism’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 41 (1941): 67–90; W. F. R. Hardie, ‘The Paradox of Phenomenalism’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 46 (1946): 127–54; A. J. Ayer, ‘Phenomenalism’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 47 (1947): 163–96.

¹¹⁴ I. Berlin, ‘Verification’, in *Concepts and Categories*, pp. 12–31.

¹¹⁵ The source of this story is M. A. E. Dummett, ‘Views of Wittgenstein’, *The Tablet*, October 10th, 1992.

¹¹⁶ R. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p. 13.

The ‘undoctrinaire empiricism, united with an analysis of language’ against which positivism had to struggle in Oxford is ‘ordinary language philosophy’. According to Berlin, it was:

An examination of how various expressions were used to convey what, and how confusions were caused by mistaken identification or distinctions of words and expressions intended to be understood, without any dogmatic rules of what was valid and what was not; the ultimate object of enquiry was the function of words derived from that for which people used them in ordinary life.¹¹⁷

The Oxford Realist tradition is owed much here. It was indeed Cook Wilson, Prichard and Joseph, with their Aristotelian respect for ordinary usage, their insistence on finding the correct idiom, who had sown the seeds of ordinary language philosophy – with Reid and Moore undoubtedly not very far behind. Cook Wilson wrote that ‘distinctions in language are never unimportant’ and that:¹¹⁸

It is not fair to condemn the ordinary view wholly, nor is it safe: for, if we do, we may lose sight of something important behind it. Distinctions current in language can never be safely neglected.¹¹⁹

One should recall also Cook Wilson’s comment (quoted in section 2, part I of the paper) about language being ‘true to distinctions which have value in our consciousness’.¹²⁰ One finds more than echoes of these remarks in Austin, as we shall see in the next section. One may at least be reminded here of the following well-known passage from ‘A Plea for Excuses’:

Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon – the most favoured alternative method.¹²¹

One also finds similar claims in Berlin, when, for example, mid-argument against the now standard interpretation of existential statements in terms of conditionals, in *Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements*, he wrote:

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

¹¹⁸ J. Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference*, p. 101.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 102.

¹²¹ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) 182.

For this is the central point of this entire issue: that the translation of categorical existential statements into hypotheticals (of whatever 'level') is a dangerous operation and cannot be left to the mechanical operation of 'syntactical' rules, because different types of sentences have certain normal uses in ordinary language – at any rate in most modern European languages – which we ignore at our peril.¹²²

It is fitting to notice here that Berlin's appeal to ordinary language was meant to support the Aristotelian view that existential statements, being categorical, cannot be translated into conditionals; one is here not very far from Cook Wilson.¹²³ One should further notice appeals to the 'plain man' in Berlin's texts, e.g. in a passage from *Empirical Propositions and Hypothetical Statements* where Berlin argues against the phenomenalist thesis that 'for every statement about a material object a complex statement can be found which is logically equivalent to it and mentions no material objects but only sense-experiences',¹²⁴ by arguing against the possibility of translating a past tense empirical proposition such as 'there was a bridge standing here in pre-historic times' in terms of a conditional of the sort 'if someone had been . . . , then there would have been a sense-data . . .'. Berlin's argument consists of pointing out that the 'plain man' would feel 'cheated', because

These data appear to depend on the activity of observers; so that the material object becomes analysed into a series of either purely hypothetical, i.e. non-existent or at best intermittent, data occurring and disappearing as the observer observes and ceases to observe. And this seems empirically a different picture of the world from that which he started by believing; and in no sense merely a description of the old picture though in different words.¹²⁵

¹²² I. Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, pp. 41–2.

¹²³ On the other hand, Berlin explicitly rejected Cook Wilson's views on hypotheticals, discussed in the previous section, in 'Logical Translation' (*Concepts and Categories*, p. 63).

¹²⁴ D. G. C. Macnabb, 'Phenomenalism', p. 68. Phenomenalism can be taken here, and in the debate referred to in footnote 113 above, as the theory that states 'that a proposition about material objects (e.g. there is a clock on the mantelpiece now) is to be analysed into a conjunction (an infinite conjunction) of hypothetical propositions of the form If certain conditions are fulfilled, sense-data belonging to a certain 'family of sense-data' will be sensed' (R. B. Braithwaite, 'Propositions about Material Objects', p. 275). It should be pointed out that this view has an ancestor in some remarks by Moore in his 1914 paper on 'The Status of Sense-Data' (*Philosophical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922) 168–96), where Moore claims that 'our knowledge of physical propositions can be based on our experience of sensibles' (p. 190). When discussing knowledge that given coins 'existed before I saw them', Moore remarked that 'All that I know will be simply that, if certain unrealised conditions had been realised, I should have had certain sensations that I have not had' and that, therefore, 'to say of a *physical object* that it *existed* at a given time will always consist merely in saying of some sensible, *not* that it existed at the time in question, but something quite different and immensely complicated' (p. 191). Moore remained, however, uncommitted to this sort of position and phenomenism should not be attributed to him. See T. Baldwin, *G. E. Moore* (London: Routledge, 1990) 190.

¹²⁵ I. Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, p. 39.

The 'plain man' can be seen as a disguised Cook Wilson: the picture that the 'plain man', whose uses of ordinary language one can never safely neglect, 'started by believing' corresponds to Cook Wilson's view that reality never consists of 'what might have been', etc. and the consequent claim of Berlin that empirical propositions can never be rendered as conditionals, because of the 'plain man' feeling cheated is in serious danger of being nothing more than a *hysteron proteron*. Such appeals to the 'plain man' are, in this century, typically Oxonian; in Cambridge, Moore spoke instead of 'common sense' and, furthermore, he did it in order to defend the very sort of theories criticized by the Oxonians. My claim here is that under the disguise of the 'plain man', authors such as Berlin and Austin were merely hiding realist positions derived from the tradition of Aristotle, Reid, Cook Wilson, and Prichard.

9. AUSTIN AS AN OXFORD REALIST: HOW TO READ *SENSE AND SENSIBILIA*

Austin clearly had a great deal of respect for the 'old gang', Prichard and Joseph in particular. It was Austin, for example, who edited Joseph's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Leibniz* posthumously.¹²⁶ Austin was not alone in this. J. O. Urmson, who matriculated in 1935, also had much respect for them. He wrote in his 1968 introduction to Prichard's *Moral Obligation* that '[as] a member of the very last generation of undergraduates to attend Prichard's lectures and informal instruction, I learnt to admire his patience as a teacher, his philosophical acuity and, above all, his quite exceptional intellectual honesty and independence'.¹²⁷

The connections between Austin and Prichard are numerous. For example, Austin's interest in performatives and illocutionary forces is attributed to an exchange of letters with Prichard in the late 1930s about promising.¹²⁸ It is very interesting to read, in connection with this, Prichard's posthumously published piece dated c. 1940: 'The Obligation to Keep a Promise'.¹²⁹ It is true that Prichard's and Austin's interest in promises were quite different but, as Urmson pointed out in his introduction to *Moral Obligation*, where this piece is reproduced, Prichard 'often showed a very remarkable sensitivity and respect for the features of ordinary language. Anyone who reads "The Obligation to Keep a Promise" will see that Prichard, at least, did not need to be told that a promise was a performative, a kind of action, rather than constative'.¹³⁰ In the same text, Urmson

¹²⁶ H. W. B. Joseph, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Leibniz*, J. L. Austin (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949).

¹²⁷ H. A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) vii.

¹²⁸ G. J. Warnock, *J. L. Austin* (London: Routledge, 1989) 105.

¹²⁹ H. A. Prichard, 'The Obligation to Keep a Promise', *Moral Obligation*, pp. 169–79.

¹³⁰ H. A. Prichard, *Moral Obligation*, pp. viii–ix.

provides another example of a connection between Austin and Prichard:¹³¹ Austin's famous distinction, in 'Ifs and Cans', between expressions such as 'I can, if I choose' and ordinary conditionals which was already *in nuce* in Prichard's 'Duty and Ignorance of Fact' (1932).¹³²

One frequent but incorrect assumption is that the later Wittgenstein influenced Austin. The fact that there was no real influence was noted by all who knew him well, for example by Ryle who pointed out that 'Austin took as little as he could after Wittgenstein, a lot after Moore'.¹³³ As a matter of fact, Austin and Wittgenstein disliked each other. Wittgenstein's only recorded remark about Austin is in a letter to Moore dated 1946: 'Price at the last Mor[al] Sc[iences] Cl[ub] meeting was *by far* better than Austin had been. Price was willing to discuss important points'.¹³⁴ On the other hand, Austin is on the record for saying that 'Some people like Witters, but Moore is *my man*'.¹³⁵

Moore probably influenced Austin more than any other philosopher and it is not my intention to underrate this. It is clear that his influence extends even to his remarks on knowledge – for example, readers of Moore's 'The Nature and Reality of Objects of Perception' and Austin's 'Other Minds' will have noticed parallels extending further than to discussions of the question 'How do you know?' – but a proper account falls outside the scope of this paper. A limited but important point should be made, however, regarding the notion of sense-data. First, it should be noticed that Moore's remarks on knowledge are quite distinct from his views about sense-data; he never provided an explanation of perceptual knowledge in light of his stance on sense-data.¹³⁶ Secondly, Moore, who championed the notion of sense-data throughout his career, could not have been the key influence on Austin on perception. If Austin was apparently sympathetic to the notion of sense-data in the early 1930s,¹³⁷ he later developed the strongest aversion to it. This aversion, shown in Austin's lectures on perception, is the undeniable

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹³³ G. Ryle, *Collected Papers*, vol. 1, p. 273. Warnock also writes: 'That Wittgenstein influenced his views has been sometimes suggested, but is certainly untrue' ('John Langshaw Austin. 1911–1960', p. 353). More recently, Hacker writes that of the leading figures in post-war Oxford, 'Austin was the least influenced' by Wittgenstein. But the confusion is explainable: 'Although Austin did not share Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy, his practice did not conflict with Wittgenstein's. Philosophers at Oxford may have been diverted by Austin into close examination of linguistic minutiae, which Wittgenstein would have passed by, but when it came to the application of such results to specific philosophical questions, there was often little discernible difference between their tactical moves. In practice, *both* could be assimilated' (P. M. S. Hacker, 'Wittgenstein and Post-War Philosophy at Oxford', p. 108).

¹³⁴ L. Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 325.

¹³⁵ H. P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) 381.

¹³⁶ This conclusion is taken from T. Baldwin, *G. E. Moore*, p. 268. See also footnote 124, above.

¹³⁷ A. J. Ayer, *Part of my Life*, pp. 151–2.

hallmark of the influence of Cook Wilson and Prichard. These lectures, first given in 1947 and posthumously published under the title *Sense and Sensibilia*, form a sort of rear-guard action of Oxford Realism against sense-datum theories. Austin's main target was the work of 'renegade' Oxonians: Price's *Perception* and Ayer's *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*.¹³⁸

Again, without putting a veil on the influence of Moore, I would like to suggest that one looks at the connections between Oxford Realists and Austin in order to shed light on a corner of his philosophy that has hitherto remained mainly in obscurity. I shall take my cue from the preface to Charles Travis's *The Uses of Sense*, where he writes:

Unfortunately, I think, Austin has generally been read in quite the wrong way, so that in so far as he has been influential at all, it is quite peripheral aspects of his work which have captured the attention. That is a shame. There is nothing wrong with the idea of illocutionary forces, though not much has ever been done with it. But what matters most in Austin is his views on epistemology and on more central parts of semantics – views which are the culmination of a tradition beginning with Cook Wilson, and moving (by way of reaction) through H. A. Prichard, and largely echoed today in the writings of such philosophers as John McDowell. (So, one might say, an Oxford tradition despite itself.)¹³⁹

In this passage, Travis makes these two interesting points regarding Austin: first, he points out that it is not Austin's much publicized work on performatives and illocutionary forces but his work in epistemology which is central to his philosophy. (The link between these two aspects is to be found in Austin's discussion of 'If I know, I can't be wrong' in 'Other Minds'.) If this controversial claim is true, the orthodox reading of Austin, from Searle to Warnock,¹⁴⁰ gives us a distorted image of Austin's philosophy. Secondly, Travis adds – and this seems perfectly right, regardless of the truth of the previous claim – that Austin's work in epistemology is 'the culmination of a tradition', namely the tradition of Oxford Realism. I share Travis's insight: the Realist heritage is clearly there in Austin's text, especially in passages where he *paraphrases* Cook Wilson; for example, when claiming that '[one] can't abuse ordinary language without paying for it'¹⁴¹ or when saying that any word that has a fixed meaning in ordinary language 'can't, any more than can any other word which is firmly established, be fooled around with *ad lib*'.¹⁴² Also very striking is Austin's claim in 'Other Minds' that it is

¹³⁸ The last chapter of *Sense and Sensibilia*, which contains peripheral material of lesser importance, is a critique of some remarks by G. J. Warnock in his *Berkeley* (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1953).

¹³⁹ C. Travis, *The Uses of Sense* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) xii.

¹⁴⁰ J. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) G. J. Warnock, *J.L. Austin*, op. cit.

¹⁴¹ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p. 15.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

'futile' to embark on a theory of knowledge¹⁴³ and the corresponding claim, in *Sense and Sensibilia*, that there is 'no such thing' as the theory of knowledge.¹⁴⁴ The claim that a 'theory' of knowledge is impossible or futile was, at the time, rather confined to Oxford Realism and Austin was clearly defending, in *Sense and Sensibilia*, the Oxford Realism of Cook Wilson and Prichard against renegade Oxonians such as Price and Ayer, who were importing waters from the Cam.

There is no place here to develop a detailed reading of *Sense and Sensibilia* as the swan-song of Oxford Realism but a few more examples will help the reader to see my point. First, some of Austin's arguments are directly borrowed from the Realists and clearly stated. One example is the 'background argument', which was already in Prichard's 'Appearances and Reality' of 1906 (see section 4, part I of this paper):

It is important to remember that talk of deception only *makes sense* against a background of general non-deception. (You can't fool all of the people all of the time.) It must be possible to *recognize* a case of deception by checking the odd case against more normal ones. If I say, 'Our petrol-gauge sometimes deceives us', I am understood: though usually what it indicates squares with what we have in the tank, sometimes it doesn't – it sometimes points to two gallons when the tank turns out to be nearly empty.¹⁴⁵

Secondly, the reader has to do a little bit of work in other places to figure out that Austin's arguments covertly rely on or boil down to typically Realist positions. Chapter X provides us with a good example of this, the sole one that I wish to present here. In that chapter Austin provides a number of arguments against the idea, which is part of all sense-datum theories, that propositions can be divided into two classes, the class of experiential sentences which are incorrigible and provide the evidence for sentences of the other class, and that of sentences about material objects, such sentences being in need of verification, etc. In the course of arguing against the point about evidence, Austin writes:

The situation in which I would properly be said to have evidence for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more *evidence* that it's a pig, I can now just *see* that it is, the question is settled. And of

¹⁴³ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 98.

¹⁴⁴ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

course I might, in different circumstances, have just seen this in the first place, and not had to bother with collecting evidence at all.¹⁴⁶

It is not for me to evaluate this argument. To see my point, one has to go back to Cook Wilson on knowledge and opinion. To speak in the manner of Cook Wilson, the opinion that a pig is living in the immediate surroundings (although it is not seen) is ‘founded on evidence we know to be insufficient’, since the evidence is compatible with the fact that another animal is about, whereas ‘it is of the very nature of knowledge not to make its statements at all on grounds recognized to be insufficient’ and knowledge has ‘nothing to do with the so-called ‘greater strength’ of the evidence on which the opinion is grounded’.¹⁴⁷ This is the view that has set Realists apart from the whole of the empiricist tradition and twentieth-century epistemology and, bearing it in mind, we see that Austin’s argument relies on it. For Austin simply says that the seeing of the pig settles the question because he is assuming that one therefore *knows* that the animal dwelling in the surroundings is a pig. He also clearly states that when one sees or knows that it is a pig, one does not need to collect further evidence – the grounds are obviously sufficient. Furthermore Austin is implying that collecting evidence is needed in order to form the *opinion* that it is a pig that lives around (again, this being compatible with the case that it was not in the end a pig that was living about). It is therefore implied that the cases of opinion and knowledge are two and that in the latter case ‘greater strength’ of the evidence does not intervene (otherwise the question would not be settled). This example shows how Austin is surreptitiously relying on Cook Wilsonian arguments and that arguments where he does are, however witty, in the end worth no more and no less than Cook Wilson’s.

Finally, it ought to be pointed out that Austin was in a definite sense an arch-realist. The main focus of his lectures is the argument from illusion, which has invariably been used in support of sense-datum theories. It seems that Austin realized, on a strategical level, that to concede to the sense-datum theorist any conclusion that they may draw from the argument from illusion is already too much; that the core of sense-datum theories is in fact the unquestioned strength of the argument from illusion and that his main purpose in that series of lectures was ‘to rid ourselves of such illusions as “the argument from illusion”’.¹⁴⁸ But other Oxford Realists such as Prichard or Price never truly questioned the strength of the argument from illusion.¹⁴⁹ They always assumed that the argument refutes once and for all the position of ‘naïve’ realism. For example, the theory of appearance

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁴⁷ J. Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference*, pp. 99–100.

¹⁴⁸ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ It seems that one has to go back as far as Thomas Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Bk. II, chap. xxii to find a detailed attempt at refuting the argument from illusion.

espoused earlier on by Prichard in 'Appearances and Reality' was meant to circumvent the obstacle created by the argument from illusion. When he abandoned it in later stages, he cited the argument from illusion.¹⁵⁰ To attack head-on the argument from illusion as Austin did was not an attempt at bypassing but at removing the obstacle. The result is that the 'plain' or 'ordinary' man defended by Austin is a much more unabashed, straight-forward 'direct' or 'naive' realist. (That Austin would reject such labels is frankly beside the point, as we shall see.)

Uncovering as I did the roots of Austin's *Sense and Sensibilia* in Oxford Realism should not be construed as an attempt at undermining the reputation of Austin as an original thinker. As I pointed out, there were clearly impasses in the stance about knowledge adopted by Cook Wilson and Prichard, about which Austin, Grice, Urmson, and others were fully aware and they moved away from their predecessors (see the end of section 2 of part I of this paper). If Austin relied surreptitiously at times on arguments taken from his Oxford Realist predecessors, he also developed his own. Furthermore, while Prichard moved away from direct realism at the end of his career, I should like to claim that Austin defended a more radical form of realism than ever any propounded by his predecessors. This uncovering of the Oxford Realist roots should at least serve a different purpose, which is to undermine attempts at developing what I would call a 'dialectical' reading of Austin. Reading Austin's book, many will readily admit to being dissatisfied because Austin's treatment of perception at first appears to be mainly negative; he seems not to have been bothered with propounding any theory of his own. Austin preoccupied himself with sense-data theories of perception, which he described thus:

The general doctrine, generally stated, goes like this: we never see or otherwise perceive (or 'sense'), or anyhow we never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, sensa, sense-perceptions, percepts, &c.).¹⁵¹

Then Austin warns the reader:

It is essential, here as elsewhere, to abandon old habits of *Gleichschaltung*, the deeply ingrained worship of tidy-looking dichotomies.

I am *not*, then – and this is a point to be clear about from the beginning – going to maintain that we ought to be 'realists', to embrace, that is, the doctrine that we *do* perceive material things or objects.¹⁵²

And throughout the course of the book, he made claims that indicate clearly that his purpose was mainly destructive, e.g. when he wrote, at the outset

¹⁵⁰ H. A. Prichard, *Knowledge and Perception*, p. 3.

¹⁵¹ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p. 2.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

of his discussion of the traditional argument from illusion, that ‘we are *not* to look for an answer to the question, what kind of thing we perceive. What we have above all to do is, negatively, to rid ourselves of such illusions as “the argument from illusion”’.¹⁵³ In the very last sentence of the book, Austin also presented himself as wanting ‘to dismantle the whole doctrine before it gets off the ground’.¹⁵⁴

One might use such remarks to argue that Austin rejected not only sense-data theories but also their ‘realist’ counterparts. According to such a reading, Austin would not merely reject the claim that we ‘directly perceive sense-data’, he also would reject the claim that we ‘directly perceive material objects’, because he would have wanted to undermine the ‘tidy-looking’ dichotomy between sense-data and material objects. Thus Austin would be seen as questioning the cogency of the dichotomy on which the whole debate about perception was laid out in his times, and thus as overcoming antithetical sets of positions. This is why I wish to call this reading ‘dialectical’. One finds support for that type of claim outside *Sense and Sensibilia*, for example when Ayer recalls, in *Part of my Life*, that during a conversation in the mid-1930s he said to Austin in exasperation: ‘You are like a greyhound that refuses to race but bites the other greyhounds to prevent their racing either’¹⁵⁵ or when David Pears recalls that:

In 1946, at the end of one of Austin’s lectures, I overheard one undergraduate saying to another, ‘Well, he has made phenomenalism impossible for us, but what has he left us in its place?’ They expected another theory and they failed to see that Austin had no theory, unless the classifications that had proved themselves over the centuries and had won recognition in ordinary language amounted to a theory.¹⁵⁶

A tendency to promote this type of reading is almost irresistible from the point of view of, say, those who read Wittgenstein as consciously propounding no ‘thesis’ or ‘theory’. It is also implied by Cavell’s and Putnam’s recent accounts of Austin.¹⁵⁷ I do not wish to cast doubt on Austin’s own perception of himself as undercutting two opposing theories by somewhat ‘deconstructing’ an ill-conceived dichotomy. Historical investigation has, however, its philosophical virtues. I would simply like to make three brief points. First, I doubt that such a reading is faithful to the author of *How to Do Things with Words*. It should be recalled that Austin wrote in ‘A Plea

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

¹⁵⁵ A. J. Ayer, *Part of my Life*, p. 160.

¹⁵⁶ D. Pears, ‘Philosophy and the History of Philosophy’, in E. Margalit & A. Margalit (eds), *Isaiah Berlin. A Celebration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 31–9, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷ See especially Putnam’s second Dewey lecture: H. Putnam, ‘Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind’, *Journal of Philosophy*, 91 (1994): 445–517, pp. 466–87. For Cavell’s reading see, e.g. S. Cavell, *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

for Excuses' that 'ordinary language is *not* the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded'¹⁵⁸ and that he even went as far as writing, at the end of 'Ifs and Cans':

Is it not possible that the next century may see the birth, through the joint labours of philosophers, grammarians, and numerous other students of language, of a true and comprehensive *science of language*? Then we shall have rid ourselves of one more part of philosophy (there will still be plenty left) in the only way we ever can get rid of philosophy, by kicking it upstairs.¹⁵⁹

So Austin's methodology cannot be reduced to the simplistic claim that any distinction not already drawn in ordinary language is to be rejected. He certainly believed that his 'linguistic phenomenology', as he put it in 'A Plea for Excuses',¹⁶⁰ could be put to good philosophical use, especially against shoddy distinctions coming from Cambridge, but he also believed that it would merely be the basis for further positive work – drawing better distinctions – a sort of positive work which, incidentally, would not be akin to what many claim to be the spirit of Wittgenstein's. Even in *Sense and Sensibilia*, Austin spoke of learning 'something positive' and, when speaking of 'dissolving philosophical worries', he felt compelled to add that he meant 'some kinds of philosophical worry, not the whole of philosophy'.¹⁶¹

Secondly, it seems to me that it is clearly impossible to undermine such dichotomies while plainly speaking from nowhere: there is no free lunch. When understood in its most radical sense, the expression 'no-position position' is just a pathetic oxymoron. I do not wish, however, to get bogged down in a painfully sterile debate about this point. I wish merely to point out, and this is my third point – which is related to the analyses in this paper – that Austin *did not argue from nowhere*, that his defense of the common sense of the 'plain man' merely hides a philosophical view, which is that which he inherited from the Oxford Realism of Cook Wilson and Prichard.

There is a sense in which the ordinary man that Austin defends cannot be said to have a 'view', that is the sense in which it would be tantamount to say that he held something similar to a scientific view, a sort of 'folk' theory. Austin would certainly agree that this is incorrect. It remains, however, that to speak of getting rid of the main argument in support of sense-data theories or even to dismantle or undermine such theories is perfectly compatible with Austin holding some other view. None of Austin's pronouncements are in the end incompatible with the fact that he has something positive to say, i.e. that he was not just biting others in order to prevent their

¹⁵⁸ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 185.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹⁶⁰ J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, p. 182.

¹⁶¹ J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, p. 5. I am in general agreement here with the line taken by David Pears in 'An Original Philosopher', in K. T. Fann (ed.), *Symposium on J.L. Austin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 49–58.

racing. To my mind, to conclude that nothing positive may come out of Austin's analyses is plainly an unwarranted move; this is seen from Austin's very reason for rejecting the dichotomy between sense-data and material things: '[t]here is no *one* kind of thing that we "perceive" but many *different* kinds, the number being reducible if at all by scientific investigation and not by philosophy'.¹⁶² In the following chapter, Austin makes the very same point, *attributing it to the 'ordinary man'*.¹⁶³ Clearly, Austin wanted to defend what he took it to be the 'ordinary' or 'plain' man's view; a view which he would claim to find already reflected in ordinary language, which 'embodies distinctions [plain] men have found worth drawing'. But the 'ordinary' or 'plain' man's view plainly is just what it is, i.e. another 'view' and not a non-'view'. It is *not* an *unphilosophical* view, quite the contrary, and it is plainly fallacious to argue that this view is inherently philosophically superior because it is that of the man on the Clapham omnibus.¹⁶⁴ I would further insist that the view in question is, in Austin's case, far from being non-philosophical; it amounts to a disguised, radical version of Oxford Realism. One should indeed read between the lines here and see that behind appeals to the 'ordinary' or 'plain' man, Austin hid a direct realist view, which is rooted in Aristotle, Reid, Cook Wilson, Prichard.¹⁶⁵

As for Austin's explicit rejection of the label 'realism', it is easily explained away: Austin only meant by 'realism' one specific view which is not considered by him to be that of the ordinary man, namely 'the doctrine that we *do* perceive material things'. (This is merely the view, usually labelled 'naive' realism, which, at any rate, no one ever held; certainly not Cook Wilson, Prichard, Price, etc.) Again, this is perfectly compatible with

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

¹⁶⁴ Putnam provides us with another example of this sort of ploy in his Dewey lectures, where he enrols Austin in his own attempt, against his former representationalist self, to revive realism about perception under the name of 'natural realism', which, incidentally, he takes 'from James's expressed desire for a view of perception that does justice to "the natural realism of the common man"' ('Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind', p. 454). The 'common', 'plain', or 'ordinary' man's view of perception, etc., when fleshed out, is merely a philosophical view amongst others. And it is no use here to fabricate vacuous concepts such as Cavell's 'ordinary' or Putnam's 'second naiveté'. Compare Cavell's comment on his own paper as proposing 'Austin's and Wittgenstein's originality in the way they take up the cause of what they call the ordinary against what I have described as philosophy's metaphysical flight from the ordinary' (*Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida*, p. 46).

¹⁶⁵ When Cavell writes that 'there is hardly less doubt in my mind that Derrida had not read *Sense and Sensibilia*, for he would have recognized it to be Austin's dismantling of the English empiricist tradition's view of presence' (*Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida*, p. 71), he is clearly misreading both Austin and Derrida, as Austin's position is rooted in a tradition (Reid, Cook Wilson) leading back to Aristotle, which is, as a matter of fact, not only 'empiricist' but part and parcel of what Derrida claims to be the 'metaphysics of presence' and which he claims to be deconstructing. Such *rap-prochements* are just a travesty.

Austin's believing that the ordinary man is holding another view, which we may wish to label, on other grounds, as 'realist'.

10. REALISM TODAY

Austin's lectures and book *Sense and Sensibilia* influenced a generation of British philosophers, who moved away from sense-datum theories despite a rather convincing reply by Ayer in 'Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory?'; needless to say, his answer had been negative.¹⁶⁶ In the United States, Wilfrid Sellars also dealt a serious blow to the sense-datum theories, at about the same time as Austin, with his criticisms of the 'Myth of the Given' in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*.¹⁶⁷ I should point out that there is also in Sellars' case an historical link with Oxford Realism. Sellars studied at Oxford in the mid-1930s, where he was influenced in particular by Prichard and Price. In his 'Autobiographical Reflections', Sellars wrote:

I soon came under the influence of H. A. Prichard and, through him, of Cook Wilson. I found here, or at least seemed to find, a clearly articulated approach to philosophical issues which undercut the dialectic, rooted in Descartes, which led to both Hume and Nineteenth Century Idealism. At the same time, I discovered Thomas Reid and found him appealing for much the same reasons.¹⁶⁸

Sellars' remark about 'a clearly articulated approach to philosophical issues which undercut the dialectic, rooted in Descartes, which led to both Hume and Nineteenth Century Idealism', reminds one at once of Cook Wilson's letter on 'Primary and Secondary Qualities', quoted at length in section 3 of part I of this paper, e.g. when Cook Wilson spoke of the 'insidious and scarcely "conscious" dialectic' that 'has done much mischief in

¹⁶⁶ A. J. Ayer, 'Has Austin Refuted the Sense-Datum Theory?', *Synthese*, 17 (1967), 117–40. For a debate surrounding Ayer's paper, see L. W. Forgyson, 'Has Ayer Vindicated the Sense-Datum Theory', K. T. Fann, *Symposium on J. L. Austin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 309–341 and Ayer's rejoinder (*Ibid.*, 342–8). For a critical discussion of Austin, see R. Firth, 'Austin and the Argument from Illusion', *Philosophical Review*, 73 (1964): 372–82. Finally, for Price's final stance on sense-data, see H. H. Price, 'Appearing and Appearances', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 (1964): 3–19; and, for a comment on Price's paper, see R. M. Yost, 'Price on Appearing and Appearances', *Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (1964): 328–34.

¹⁶⁷ W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁶⁸ W. Sellars, 'Autobiographical Reflections', in H.-N. Castaneda (ed.), *Action, Knowledge and Reality. Critical Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars*, Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1975, 276–93, p. 284.

modern metaphysics and theories of perception'.¹⁶⁹ It may be that Cook Wilson, and Prichard after him, had few convincing arguments and that some other aspects of their philosophy were untenable. It remains that their diagnosis of the errors of representationalism was a powerful one and, as we see from this remark by one of its most successful critics, Sellars, an influential one. Not to deny the originality of Austin, it is clear that Sellars's arguments in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' were more original and perhaps even more powerful – certainly more influential, in the end – than any put forward in *Sense and Sensibilia*. As for representationalist theories of perception, there are many variants on the market; the notion of sense-data may not be common currency anymore but it has survived, revised, in the current literature under other names such as 'sense-qualia' or 'qualia'.¹⁷⁰ But the sort of 'direct realism' argued for by Oxonians is staging a come back in, e.g. Hilary Putnam's attempt to revive direct realism about perception, under his own name of 'natural realism' in the already mentioned Dewey Lectures.

The influence of Oxford Realist extended to the 1960s and 1970s, when, e.g. the volume of 'Oxford Readings in Philosophy' edited by A. Phillips Griffiths contained excerpts from Cook Wilson's *Statement and Inference* and Prichard's *Knowledge and Perception*, along with a reprint of Price's 'Some considerations about Belief'.¹⁷¹ However, if Price is still read today, Cook Wilson and Prichard are by and large forgotten. One merely finds the occasional reference, for example in Charles Travis's *The Uses of Sense*, mentioned above. Supporters of 'Oxford folly', of refusing to define knowledge in terms of belief, if a minority, could nevertheless take solace in Edmund Gettier's 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?',¹⁷² which provided strong criticisms of the opposite view. A philosophical thesis dies only when no one is left to defend it; recent work by Timothy Williamson builds on insights of Oxford Realists, Prichard in particular.¹⁷³ The work of other prominent Oxonians may be said, at a stretch, to fall within that tradition.

¹⁶⁹ J. Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference*, p. 797.

¹⁷⁰ Peter Hacker's criticisms of David Marr's theory of vision, which he describes as being representationalist – that Marr's theory really is representationalist is in itself a matter of controversy – are a very good example of the actuality of these issues. See D. Marr, *Vision. A Computational Investigation into the Human Representation and Processing of Visual Information*, San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Co., 1980; P. M. S. Hacker, 'Seeing, Representing and Describing. An Examination of David Marr's Computational Theory of Vision', in J. Hyman (ed.), *Investigating Psychology. Sciences of the Mind after Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 1991) 119–54.

¹⁷¹ A. Phillips Griffiths (ed.), *Knowledge and Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹⁷² E. L. Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis*, 23 (1963): 121–3.

¹⁷³ T. Williamson, 'Is Knowing a State of Mind?', *Mind*, 104 (1995): 533–65; 'Knowing and Asserting', *The Philosophical Review*, 105 (1996): 489–523; 'Knowledge as Evidence', *Mind*, 106 (1997): 717–41. I certainly do not wish preposterously to bind Williamson's work solely with Oxford Realist motivations.

If Anthony Kenny's *Metaphysics of the Mind*¹⁷⁴ is plainly a reworking of some of Ryle's ideas, Peter Hacker's *Appearance and Reality*¹⁷⁵ is, however, inspired by Wittgenstein, while John McDowell takes his lead mainly from Sellars in *Mind and World*.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, none of these authors refer to Oxford Realists. However, Peter Hacker on many issues takes an even stronger realist stance, e.g. when he defends the view that colours are intrinsic, non-relational, and non-reducible properties of objects. At times, he sees himself as pressing on 'a little farther down the path' pioneered by Austin, e.g. when discussing the ordinary language uses of 'looks', 'appears', etc.¹⁷⁷ As for John McDowell, his attempts at escaping from the dialectic of 'Coherentism' and the 'Myth of the Given' have not only a predecessor in Sellars; I have just pointed out that Sellars's ideas are rooted in Prichard, Cook Wilson, and Reid. McDowell's resolution of this dialectic ends up in the claim that when not misled by experience 'we are directly confronted by a worldly state of affairs itself, not waited on by an intermediary that happens to tell the truth'.¹⁷⁸ This sort of direct realist claim about perception appears to me to fall straightforwardly within the tradition of Oxford Realism. I hope that my rescuing a few Oxonian philosophers from oblivion will have served its purpose. Not only will it, as I claimed, help us avoiding wild readings of Austin, it will – I hope – give some authors, namely Cook Wilson and Prichard, their justly deserved place in the history of British philosophy.¹⁷⁹

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¹⁷⁴ A. Kenny, *The Metaphysics of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹⁷⁵ P. M. S. Hacker, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

¹⁷⁶ J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

¹⁷⁷ P. M. S. Hacker, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 207n.

¹⁷⁸ J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 143.

¹⁷⁹ I would like to thank for very helpful comments the students in my graduate seminar at the University of Ottawa, in 1997, Graeme Hunter, and an anonymous referee for the journal. My biggest debt goes to David Raynor, without whose intimate knowledge of Oxford philosophy this paper would have been found lacking in many respects.