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The Inaugural Address: The Sense-Datum Fallacy

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THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

THE SENSE-DATUM FALLACY.

By PROF. H. A. PRICHARD.

WHEN Berkeley asserted that the things which we perceive depend on our perception of them, he was undoubtedly using the term "perceive" in its ordinary sense. By "its ordinary sense" I mean that for which in recent times the term "sense" is sometimes substituted, *i.e.* the sense in which it is used to stand for a certain generic mental activity or state of which, when we reflect, we think seeing, feeling or touching, hearing, tasting and smelling to be species. And in considering the use of the term "sense-datum" this is the only sense in which I shall use the term "perceive." No doubt there are two other senses in which some writers on perception use the term which have to be distinguished from the ordinary sense, *viz.* those to which Professor Price refers in the second chapter of his *Perception*.* Of these other senses one is that in which the phrase "my perceiving a certain body" is used to stand for what is really my thinking, *i.e.* thinking without question, that I am perceiving that body—a sense for which Professor Price substitutes the phrase "my being perceptually conscious of the body." In this sense I am in a case of double vision perceiving, for instance, two candles, although in fact there is only one candle to be perceived. The other of these senses is that in which, as Professor Price in effect says, the phrase "my perceiving a certain body" is used to stand not for a mental activity or state but for a combination of three

* pp. 22-24.

things, which together are asserted by those who use the term thus to be a situation in which I am, viz. (1) my perceiving, in the ordinary sense, some secondary quality, (2) a peculiar relation of that quality to the body, and (3) the absence of any such relation of it to every other body. But the first of these senses is open to the objection that it is misleading to designate as perceiving what avowedly has to be distinguished from perceiving in the ordinary sense as thinking. And to the latter it can be objected that it is still more misleading to use the term "perceiving" for something which is avowedly not a mental state or activity, and also, that as the thing meant is a combination of three, or rather, to speak strictly, a very large number, of things which have no unity or connectedness, the term so used is simply arbitrary—just as a term invented for a combination of a sunspot and a sneeze would be arbitrary. And for these reasons it seems to me dangerous to use the term "perceive" in any but its ordinary sense. In any case, however, it is clear that Berkeley was not using the term in either of those other senses.

If, using the term "perceive" in its ordinary sense, we ask, "Of what sort or sorts are the various things which we perceive?" we all, of course, at first give what has been called the Naïve Realist answer, viz., that what we perceive is in all cases a body, that what we see, for instance, is a table, that what we hear is a bell, and so on. If having given this answer, we then go on to ask a second question, viz. "Does what we perceive depend on our perception of it?" we necessarily answer that it does not. For unless we use the phrase "a body" in a Pickwickian sense, or else adopt the device of putting it into inverted commas to avoid responsibility for meaning anything in particular by it, we mean by "a body" a something of a certain kind, which, as we discover when we reflect, cannot by its very nature depend on our perception of it. Berkeley, however, answered the first question differently. He maintained that what we see is a colour, that what we hear is a sound, that what we feel is a feeling of resistance, that what we taste is a flavour, and that what we smell is an odour; and thinking, when he

reflected on these things, that they have a certain common character, that of being sensations, he maintained generally that what we perceive is a sensation. And he then went on to answer the second question by asserting that since a sensation is by its very nature something inseparable from the perception of it, what we perceive necessarily depends on our perception of it, his conclusion when properly stated in his own language being that the *esse* of what we perceive *involves* (not *is*) *percipi*.

Now there have been several writers recently who, though they may express themselves differently, really agree, and, in my opinion, rightly agree, with Berkeley to the extent of thinking that the object of perception in the ordinary sense of "perception" is not a body but a secondary quality of the kind corresponding to the special kind of perception. But among them there have been some who have objected to Berkeley's statement that the secondary quality perceived is a sensation, and have substituted for it the statement that it is a sense-datum; and in consequence they have been led to ask certain questions about the various secondary qualities which we perceive as questions about sense-data. And the object of this paper is to urge that this substitution is fallacious, as being based on the mistaken idea that perceiving is a form of knowing and that, in consequence of the mistakenness of this idea, the questions thus raised about the various secondary qualities which we perceive are also fallacious.

I do not of course mean to suggest that the idea which I have implied to be mistaken is confined to those who use the term "sense-datum." It certainly is not. And in any case, to give rise to the term, the idea must have arisen independently of it. Yet once a mistake has received expression in a term or phrase, it is more insidious, because a newcomer to the subject, finding the term in existence is apt simply to take for granted the truth of the idea which has given rise to it.

To prepare the ground I propose first to refer to the idea in question and to its consequences, apart from the use of the term to express it.

The idea that perceiving is a species of knowing has recently become prominent in an alleged refutation of Berkeley which has not infrequently been advanced of late years, and notably by Professor Moore, Mr. Bertrand Russell, and Professor Kemp Smith. Of these the last mentioned, referring to Berkeley's argument that the objects of perception are subjective because they are sensations, states the refutation thus : " Even without questioning that the objects known [*i.e.* known in perception] are sensations, we may dispute the inference that they are therefore subjective. Thanks to Ward, Moore, Stout, and others, it is now very generally agreed that ' sensation ' is an ambiguous term. It is used with two very different meanings, as process of apprehension and as object apprehended. If sensation is mental process, then for this sufficient reason it must fall on the subjective side. But if, on the other hand, sensations have to be regarded not as mental processes, but as objects revealed in and through such processes, this argument will fall to the ground. Though red is known only as sensation, it is undoubtedly an objective content. It is not a state of the subject, but an object to the subject. Similarly, a sound or an odour or a taste is an object apprehended by the mind, and is therefore distinct from the processes in which such apprehension consists. . . . The subjectivist argument, that objects are known as sensations, and therefore are subjective, makes use of this fundamental ambiguity. Only by interpreting sensations as signifying objective contents can it justify the assertion that objects are known as sensations ; and yet only by regarding sensations as mental processes can it legitimate the inference that they are therefore subjective. The ground of the argument involves one interpretation of the term ' sensation,' the conclusion implies the other. It is open to us to propound the counter-argument. Since sensations are only known as objects they are distinct from mental processes, and cannot be mental or subjective."*

Here Professor Kemp Smith is tacitly agreeing with Berkeley that in the case of each kind of perception the

* *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 44-45.

object of perception is not a body but a secondary quality of the sort corresponding to the kind of perception ; but he is maintaining against Berkeley that the statement, for instance, that some colour which we are seeing is a sensation is ambiguous, on the ground that the phrase " a sensation " sometimes means an object of apprehension and sometimes an apprehending of something. And he is adding that while we shall only think the statement true, if in it " a sensation " means an object of apprehension, we shall only think it conclusive if in it the phrase means an apprehending of something. He concludes that such plausibility as Berkeley's argument has comes from failure to distinguish these meanings, and disappears as soon as we distinguish them, as we do when we use different phrases for each, such as " a sensum " or " a sensing." Finally, he is asserting that once the ambiguity is detected we can advance the counter-argument, viz. that a colour which we see, just because it is an object of apprehension and not an apprehension of something, cannot be subjective, *i.e.* dependent on its being sensed, *i.e.* perceived, by us.

Here the basis of Professor Kemp Smith's criticism is clear. It is the idea that seeing a certain colour, for instance, or hearing a certain sound, is an apprehending, a knowing, or a being aware of, that colour or sound. For he is expressly maintaining that in seeing the colour, for instance, the colour is an object of apprehension ; and he certainly does not mean by this that along with our seeing the colour, and to be distinguished from it, there is also our apprehending that colour. He is, therefore, implying the idea that seeing that colour *is* an apprehending of it. Further, if he had been asked " Of what kind is the apprehending ? ", he certainly would have had to answer, " Of that special kind which is perceiving and which differs from other kinds, such as remembering and self-consciousness, by being perceiving—seeing, hearing, etc., being species of this kind of knowing". He is, therefore, implying the idea that perceiving in its various forms is a special kind of knowing, this idea being what he is using in order to refute Berkeley.

Further, this being so, it is also clear that Professor Kemp

Smith should in consistency have gone further and contended not merely that Berkeley fails to establish his conclusion but also that the contrary conclusion is true, viz. that the colours we see, the sounds we hear, etc., are independent of our seeing or hearing them. For we all, including Professor Kemp Smith, think that the existence of what we know is independent of our knowledge of it, on the ground that otherwise our knowledge of it would not be knowledge. Consequently, Professor Kemp Smith, holding as he does that, for instance, to see some colour is to know it in a particular way, should have maintained that the colours or the other secondary qualities which we perceive exist independently of our perceiving them.

Professor Moore, in his *Refutation of Idealism*, in effect offers the same criticism of Berkeley, though perhaps I should have said "seems to offer" rather than "offers" because I confess that I find this article extremely obscure. And it is because of this obscurity that I have not referred to his formulation of the refutation first, although it may have been what originally suggested the refutation to Professor Kemp Smith. Professor Moore speaks of having shown that the Idealist's assertion "Esse is percipi," if it is to be true, must mean "whatever is experienced also *must* be experienced,"*—the term "experienced" here being plainly Professor Moore's equivalent for Berkeley's "perceived." And if I follow him rightly, he holds that this statement can be refuted by considering the nature of a sensation. He implies that a sensation is always a sensation of a secondary quality, for instance, of a blue colour or of a green colour. And he holds that every sensation has two elements or constituents, viz. (1) consciousness in respect of which all sensations are alike, (2) the object of the sensation in respect of which one differs from another.† By the term "consciousness" he afterwards explains that he means the "knowing" or "being aware of" or "experiencing" something, a sensation, he says, being really a case of "knowing"

* *Philosophical Studies*, p. 16.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 25.

or being "aware of" or "experiencing" something.* And by "the object of a sensation," *e.g.* a blue colour, he implies that he means the object of that knowing or experiencing. How, holding as he does that, for instance, the sensation of a blue colour is a knowing that colour, he can also maintain that the colour known is a constituent of that knowing, it is difficult to understand. But at least we must allow that he is maintaining that what he calls our having a sensation of a blue colour, *i.e.* that what Berkeley called, and what is, our seeing a blue colour, is a kind of knowing that colour. And it is this idea which Professor Moore uses to refute Berkeley in a passage the last part of which Professor Kemp Smith quotes with approval. "Idealists," Professor Moore says, "admit that some things really exist of which they are not aware . . . They are, therefore [they hold] sometimes aware of something which is *not* an inseparable aspect of their own experience. . . . And what my analysis of sensation has been designed to show is, that whenever I have a mere sensation or idea, the fact is that I am then aware of something which is equally and in the same sense *not* an inseparable aspect of my experience. . . . There is, therefore, no question of how we are to 'get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations.' Merely to have a sensation is already to be outside that circle."† Consequently Professor Moore's refutation of the Idealists, *i.e.* of Berkeley and his followers, is the same as Professor Kemp Smith's.

We may now consider the consequences of the idea that perceiving is a species of knowing for anyone who, like Professor Moore or Professor Kemp Smith, agrees with Berkeley that what we perceive is in the case of each kind of perception a secondary quality of the corresponding sort. Since, to take the case of hearing, he thinks that when we are hearing something on a given occasion, what we are hearing is a sound, and also that for us to hear something is to know or apprehend it in a particular kind of way, he will necessarily come to think of the sound which he thinks of as

* *Ibid.*, p. 24. The inverted commas are Professor Moore's.

† *Philosophical Studies*, pp. 26-27.

what we are hearing as something the existence, and therefore also the nature, of which is independent of our hearing it, since otherwise our hearing it would not be knowing it. And for the corresponding reason he will come to think generally of any secondary quality which he thinks of as being what we are perceiving as independent of our perceiving it, though possibly dependent on us in some other way. He will therefore be led to ask questions about the various secondary qualities which he considers are what various individuals perceive on various occasions on the assumption that, though they are perceived, their existence and their character is independent of their being perceived. And as he will think that, since these secondary qualities do not require to be perceived, no others can require it, he will necessarily come to think of the secondary qualities generally as not depending on being perceived for their existence and their character. Hence he will further be led to ask questions about the secondary qualities such as we ask about things of any kind the existence of which we think we know and so which we think of as existing independently of our and of others knowing them. Of these questions, one, strictly speaking, concerns not the qualities themselves but our power of perceiving them. It is the question: "Can, for instance, some sound which I am hearing be heard by another, or must it be different from any sound which another hears?" The question is usually expressed in the form: "Are the various secondary qualities which we perceive private to us, or are they public?" *i.e.* really, "Is the *perceiving* some sound which I am perceiving private to me, *i.e.* possible only for me, or is it public, *i.e.* possible for anyone?" And it is inevitably raised by anyone who thinks of perceiving as a species of knowing, because on the one hand, since he thinks of the sound which I am hearing as independent of my hearing it, it does not seem to him something which it is *impossible* for another to hear, and on the other hand, he finds it hard to believe that sounds heard by two people can be numerically identical. At the same time it should be noted that the only answer which he is *entitled* to give is that the secondary qualities are public, since

it cannot be impossible for what exists independently of my perceiving it to be perceived by another. Of the remaining questions one concerns the nature of a secondary quality which we perceive, and the other its cause, if it has a cause. The former is the question : " What sort of a thing is it ? " " Is it, for instance, an event either in the mind or in the brain, and so something transitory, or is it something permanent ? " " Is it a substance, or a phase of a substance ? " " Is it physical or mental ? " Again, if it be decided that it is an event, the question is inevitably asked : " How does it originate, *i.e.* how is it caused ? " This question is sometimes asked in the form : " What is the cause of a sensation ? " and it comes to be sharply distinguished from the question : " What is the cause of our apprehension of a sensation in perception ? "

Consequently we are not surprised to find Professor Kemp Smith raising and considering these questions in a chapter which he significantly entitles " The *ontological** status of the secondary qualities." He asks, for instance, whether the secondary qualities [*i.e.* really, the secondary qualities which we perceive] are in themselves transitory, † and he maintains that the question raises many of the most difficult problems of metaphysics. Again, he asks whether they are physical or psychical, and finds that the question admits of no direct answer. He also asks in effect whether those which we perceive are private to us, and gives an answer which from his point of view is surprising, *viz.* that they are. He also asks how are the secondary qualities which we perceive generated and implies that it is important to distinguish the physiological conditions on which their generation depends from those on which our perception of them depends.

For the same reason we are not surprised to find that Professor Price, who also holds that what he calls sensing, *i.e.* that perceiving in the ordinary sense, is a kind of knowing, considers these and cognate questions about the secondary qualities which we perceive, in chapters in *Perception* which

* The italics are mine.

† *Prolegomena to an Idealist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 70.

are stated to deal respectively with the nature of sense-data, their relation to one another, their relation to matter, and their origination. And the importance which he attaches to these questions may be gauged from the fact that his discussion of them occupies almost half of the whole book.

On the other hand, for anyone who holds Berkeley's view these questions are questions which do not arise at all, and which, if asked, are asked under a mistake and can only receive an erroneous answer. For according to him, since a sound, for instance, which we are hearing is inseparable from our hearing it, it is something the hearing of which by another is impossible, and since there is no such thing as a sound which is independent of its being heard, there is nothing of which to ask "What sort of a thing is it?" and "How is it caused?" so that the very questions are mistaken, and if asked, can for this reason only receive a false answer.

If, however, we now go on to consider the truth of the idea which leads to these questions, we find that the idea is mistaken, and, what is more, that the mistake is due to failure to recognize that Berkeley was after all right in contending that the various secondary qualities which we perceive depend on our perceiving them.

We have to admit that Berkeley and his modern opponents are right in thinking that what we perceive in the case of each kind of perception is a secondary quality of the corresponding sort. We have also to admit that Berkeley is right in contending that the various secondary qualities which we perceive are by their very nature dependent on our perceiving them. We must, for instance, in the end admit that it is self-evident that some sound which we are hearing depends on our hearing it. This being so, we have to admit that it at once follows that to perceive something is *not* to know it in a special kind of way, since if it were, the thing perceived could not depend on our perceiving it, as in fact it does. The argument is simple enough: "What we perceive is always some secondary quality or qualities. Any secondary quality which we perceive depends on our perceiving it. Consequently to perceive something cannot be

to know it, because if it were, the thing perceived would be independent of our perceiving it, and yet, being a secondary quality, it is not." To this argument another can be added which also is conclusive. This is that if perceiving were a kind of knowing, mistakes about what we perceive would be impossible, and yet they are constantly being made, since at any rate in the cases of seeing and feeling or touching we are almost always in a state of thinking that what we are perceiving is various bodies, although we need only reflect to discover that in thinking this we are mistaken.

Further, once we reach the conclusion that perceiving is not a kind of knowing, there are various other conclusions which we are forced to draw. One is that Berkeley's opponents are really arguing the wrong way round. Instead of arguing, as they should, that because the secondary qualities which are what we perceive necessarily depend on our perceiving them, perceiving cannot be a kind of knowing, they are arguing that because perceiving is a kind of knowing, the secondary qualities which are what we perceive cannot depend on our perceiving them. And to discover their mistake we need only recognize, as in the end we must, that the secondary qualities which are what we perceive do depend on our perceiving them. A second is that the alleged refutation of Berkeley does not establish the contrary of his conclusion, simply because its premise that perceiving is a kind of knowing is false. A third is that the alleged refutation fails to refute Berkeley's argument. For a supporter of the argument can reply thus: "When, following Berkeley, I say, for instance, that a sound which I am hearing is a sensation, I do *not* mean by "a sensation" either of the things one of which you say it must mean. I do not mean by it either a something which is being apprehended or an apprehending of something. I mean by it a something having a certain character which we recognize as common to the various secondary qualities which we perceive and which is such as to involve that what has it is perceived. And I am not refuted by the assertion that perceiving is a kind of knowing, because it is not". Lastly, we have to conclude that since

Berkeley was after all right in contending that the objects of perception as being sensations depend on their being perceived, all the questions recently referred to about the secondary qualities which we perceive which are based on the idea that they are independent of perception are based on a mistake, and that, in consequence, if they are answered, they can only receive a false answer.

We are now in a position to consider the use of the term "sense-datum." To do this, I propose to refer mainly to Mr. Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* in which, so far as I am aware, the term first occurs. For unless I am mistaken, with one exception, the others who use it do so in the same way. In particular, Professor Price, finding the term ready to hand, introduces* it in a similar way, differing from Mr. Russell only in using the term "sensing" instead of "immediately experiencing" for perceiving. Consequently what can be said of Mr. Russell can also be said of Professor Price. The one exception to which I have referred is Professor Moore in his article entitled "The status of sense-data."† But as in my opinion his use of the term is open to the same comment as those to which the usual use of the term is open, as well as an objection peculiar to it, I do not propose to refer specially to it.

Mr. Russell, after giving reasons for holding that when we seem to ourselves to be seeing a table in front of us, the table, if there be one, is not what we immediately experience by sight, or touch, or hearing, says: "The real table, if there is one, is not *immediately* known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known. Hence two very difficult questions at once arise; namely, (1) Is there a real table at all? (2) If so, what sort of object can it be?" And he then goes on to say: "It will help us in considering these questions to have a few simple terms of which the meaning is definite and clear. Let us give the name of 'sense-data' to the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses,

* *Perception*, p. 3.

† *Philosophical Studies*, Ch. V.

roughnesses, and so on. We shall give the name 'sensation' to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation *of* the colour, but the colour itself is a sense-datum, not a sensation. The colour is that *of* which we are immediately aware, and the awareness itself is the sensation."*

Here certain things are clear : (1) The phrase "immediately experience by sight or touch or hearing" is Mr. Russell's phrase for perceive in the ordinary sense. Also (2) he is implying that what we thus experience, *i.e.* what we perceive, is one of the secondary qualities, *i.e.* a colour in the case of seeing, a sound in the case of hearing, and so on. Hence (3) he is showing himself here at one with Professor Moore and Professor Kemp Smith in agreeing with Berkeley that what we perceive is not, as we ordinarily think, a body, but a secondary quality. (4) Since he implies that what we immediately experience by sight or touch or hearing, *i.e.* that what we perceive, is a secondary quality, and since he speaks of our immediately experiencing something, *i.e.* some secondary quality, as our being immediately *aware of* that quality, he is also showing himself at one with Professor Moore and Professor Kemp Smith in thinking perceiving a special kind of knowing, his term for the special kind being "immediately knowing in sensation." (5) He is saying that it will help the consideration of the questions raised about the table, if we choose the term "sense-data" to stand for the things that are immediately known in sensation. But (6) here the phrase "*the* things that are immediately known in sensation" must be a slip for "*things* immediately known in sensation." For he says of some colour which we are seeing that it is a sense-datum, and to say this is to imply that "sense-data" is a term not for what is really only a certain numerical group consisting of all the things which are being immediately known in sensation at a given moment, but for things of a certain sort, *viz.* things being thus apprehended. Mr. Russell therefore is here really giving "sense-data" the meaning of *things* imme-

* *The Problems of Philosophy*, pp. 16-17.

diately known in sensation. (7) In giving this term this meaning he is, of course, taking for granted the existence of the thing meant, since otherwise he would consider it useless to invent a term for it. But (8) there cannot really be such a thing as the thing meant, viz. things immediately known in sensation, unless there really is such a thing as immediately knowing in sensation, *i.e.* unless immediately experiencing, *i.e.* perceiving, something really is knowing it in the special way called immediately knowing in sensation. Hence the introduction and use of the term "sense-data" cannot be justified unless Mr. Russell is right in agreeing with Professor Moore and Professor Kemp Smith that perceiving is a special kind of knowing. And although here Mr. Russell is ostensibly only inviting his readers to accept a piece of terminology, he is in fact at the same time inviting them to accept a certain theory, viz. the theory that perceiving is a kind of knowing, a theory without the truth of which the use of the term is illegitimate.

This, however, is not all. For when we consider the matter we find that even if this theory were true, there could not be such a thing as a sense-datum, as Mr. Russell, and therefore also as Professor Price, uses the term. For grant for the sake of argument that on some occasion I am apprehending in the form of perceiving a particular colour, a particular sound, and a particular feeling of roughness. Then, no doubt, any one of them is being thus apprehended by me. Nevertheless it is not *a* something which is being thus apprehended. If I am eating a number of things, say, some cheese, some bread, and some salt, they together form a certain numerical group, viz. the totality of the things which I am eating. But their membership of this group does not constitute them things having a certain common character, and so things of a certain sort for which the term would have to be "things which I am eating," or "things which are being eaten by me," or perhaps "things which are being eaten by someone." There is no such sort. The things which I am eating are united simply by my eating them; and my eating them does not constitute them things of a certain sort. Indeed to speak of *a* something which is

being eaten by me, or of *a* something which is being eaten by someone is merely verbal, because to be being eaten is not a character of anything. Similarly the colour, the sound, and the feeling of roughness which I am thus apprehending are united solely by my thus apprehending them; and though each is one of the things which are being thus apprehended by me, none is *a* something which is being thus apprehended by me. There is no such thing as a thing which is being thus apprehended by me, nor again such a thing as a thing which is being thus apprehended by someone.

The truth is, of course, that when Mr. Russell and Professor Price state, as they do, that some colour which I am seeing is a sense-datum—and the statement is typical of their use of the term—they are not really expressing, as ostensibly they are, an idea of theirs about the colour which I am seeing; they are expressing an idea about my perceiving it, viz. that it is knowing it in a special kind of way; and they are expressing it in a misleading way, by expressing it as if it were an idea about the colour. Consequently if we go behind the mere verbal form of the statement: “The colour which I see is a sense-datum” we have to allow that it is only a misleading way of saying: “My seeing the colour which I am seeing is a special kind of way of knowing it.” And, this being so, the question: “Is it legitimate to assert of some colour, for instance, which I am seeing that it is a sense-datum?” reduces to the question: “Is perceiving a kind of knowing?”

We can now notice a radical difference between Berkeley's statement that the various secondary qualities which we perceive are sensations and the statement which Mr. Russell and Professor Price prefer as a substitute, viz. that they are sense-data. While the former attributes to them a certain common character, the latter does not; and it even leaves the question open whether they have a common character. All that it does is to state that in perceiving them we are knowing them. Indeed, Professor Price is not only aware of this difference, but regards it as an important reason for preferring the latter statement. He says that the

admission that there are sense-data [*i.e.* really, that the secondary qualities which we sense (*i.e.* perceive) are sense-data], commits us to very little ; and that in particular it does not commit us to any view about what is called " the status " of sense-data in the universe, *i.e.* as to whether they are events, or substances, or states of substances, or as to whether they are physical or mental or neither, or, again, to any view about their origin, *i.e.* as to whether they result from physical or from mental processes or from both.* He then adds : " The term ' sense-datum ' is meant to be a *neutral* term. The use of it does not imply the acceptance of any particular theory. The term is meant to stand for something whose existence is indubitable (however fleeting), something from which all theories of perception ought to start, however much they may diverge later." He considers that all past theories have in fact started from the idea that there are sense-data ; and he maintains that Locke and Berkeley in calling them *ideas of sensation*, Hume in calling them *impressions*, and Kant in calling them *Vorstellungen*, were using question-begging terms, and that in particular that they were thereby committing themselves to the view that sense-data [*i.e.* really, the secondary qualities which we perceive], are mental events.

This ground for preference, however, seems to me wholly unjustified. In Professor Price's sense of " begging the question," viz. that of committing oneself to a certain view, undoubtedly when Berkeley asserted of some colour which we are seeing that it is a sensation, he is begging the question both about its character and about its relatedness to our perception of it. And undoubtedly when Professor Price states, as in effect he does,† that the colour is a sense-datum, he is at least not begging the question in this sense about its character. But also undoubtedly, though he fails to notice it, he, in making this statement, is equally with Berkeley begging the other and the really important question, viz. that about its relatedness to our perception of it. For as he is really saying that our seeing the colour is *knowing* it in a

* *Perception*, pp. 18-19.

† *Perception*, p. 3.

particular way, and so is implying that the colour seen is independent of our perception, he is just as much begging the main question at issue between Berkeley and his opponents as is Berkeley when he asserts that it is a sensation, although, of course, he is begging it in the opposite direction.

Further, since, as we must allow, perceiving is not a kind of knowing, Professor Price and Mr. Russell, in asserting that a colour which we see is a sense-datum, are not only begging the main question, but begging it in the wrong direction. Indeed, any such statement must be false ; and to discover that it is false we need only consider what those who make it really mean by it. So far then from its being, as Professor Price asserts,* certain that there are sense-data, it is certain that there are not. Consequently, too, to refer, as Mr. Russell and Professor Price do, to the various qualities which we perceive as sense-data, and to ask and to answer questions about them, as Professor Price and certain others do, as questions about sense-data is to be involved in a mistake, that of thinking of perceiving as a kind of knowing. The procedure, therefore, is one which needs to be abandoned altogether.

One remark may be added by way of conclusion. Readers of Mr. Russell and Professor Price can hardly fail to be struck by their readiness to admit the existence of unperceived secondary qualities—an admission of which they make use when, not satisfied that there really are such things as bodies, and yet wanting to find a substitute for them which can be represented as that with which physics deals, they seek to find it in certain combinations of perceived and unperceived secondary qualities. This readiness is shown by Mr. Russell in the passage already quoted from his *Problems of Philosophy*. For there he illustrates sense-data, not as we should expect by colours we are seeing, and sounds we are hearing, but by colours and sounds, *i.e.* by colours and sounds whether perceived or not, and even if we ignore the inconsistency, since even on his own view an unseen colour cannot be something which is being immediately

* *Perception*, p. 282.

known in sensation, we must allow that since here he is including unperceived secondary qualities among sense-data, he is admitting their existence. This readiness, however, is more obvious in his *Mysticism and Logic*,* where after illustrating sense-data by particular patches of colour and particular sounds, he says : “ I shall give the name *sensibilia* to those objects which have the same metaphysical and physical status as sense-data, without necessarily being data to any mind.” Professor Price, too, shows this readiness when he allows the reality of certain what he calls “ possible ” or “ obtainable ” sense-data as, together with certain actual sense-data, forming a family of sense-data.† For although he explains that he means by “ a possible sense-datum ” a sense-datum which would be actual if certain events occurred in the observer, and so something which is not actual, and although he even says that obtainable sense-data do not exist at all,‡ he is there implying the reality of what he refers to as those obtainable sense-data which are members of families of sense-data. And plainly what he is here referring to, and implying the reality of, is certain secondary qualities which, conditions being what they are, are not, and indeed cannot be, being perceived. He is, therefore, here tacitly admitting the reality of certain secondary qualities which are not being perceived. This readiness, no doubt, at first strikes us as surprising. But, in view of what has been said, the explanation is surely obvious. For once anyone who thinks that the object of perception is always a secondary quality has convinced himself that perceiving is a kind of knowing, it is inevitable that he will go on to think of a secondary quality as independent of perception. Indeed Professor Price himself practically says this when he says of the secondary qualities : “ Of course there was never any reason for thinking that these entities depended in any manner upon the sensing of them, for sensing is a form of knowing.”§

* p. 148.

† *Perception*, pp. 262-3, 53.

‡ *Perception*, p. 284.

§ *Perception*, p. 41.