

## Chapter II

## SENSE - DATA

I have said that I shall now begin discussing the various ways in which we know of the existence of material objects—*supposing* that we do know of their existence. I do not want to assume, to begin with, that we *certainly do* know that they exist. I only want to consider what sort of a thing our knowledge of them is, *supposing* that it is really knowledge. I shall afterwards consider whether it *is* really knowledge.

And I said I should begin with the most primitive sort of way in which we commonly suppose that we have knowledge of them—namely, that kind of knowledge, which we should call knowledge *by means of the senses*—the knowledge which we have, for instance, by seeing and feeling, as when we feel an object over with our hands. This way of knowing material objects, by means of the senses, is, of course, by no means the only way in which we commonly suppose we know of their existence. For instance, each of us knows of the past existence of many material objects by means of memory; we remember the existence of objects which we are no longer perceiving by any of our senses. We know of others again, which we ourselves have never perceived by our senses and cannot therefore remember, by the testimony of other persons who *have* perceived them by their senses. And we know also, we suppose, by means of inference, of others which nobody has ever perceived by his senses: we know, for instance, in this way that there is another surface of the moon, different from that which is constantly turned to the earth. All these other ways of knowing material objects, I shall have presently to consider, and to contrast them with sense-perception. But all these other ways do seem, in a sense, to be *based* upon sense-perception, so that *it* is, in a sense, the most primitive way of knowing material objects: it seems, in fact, to be true, that if I had not known of *some* material objects by means of sense-perception, I could never possibly have known of any others in any of these other ways; and this seems to be true universally: no man could ever know of the existence of any material objects at all, unless he first knew of *some*

by means of his senses. The evidence of the senses is, therefore, the evidence upon which all our other ways of knowing material objects seems to be based.

And what I want first to consider is what sort of a thing this evidence of the senses is; or in other words what it is that happens when (as we should say) we see, or feel, a material object, or perceive one by any other sense. And I propose to take as an instance, for the sake of simplicity, a single sense *only*—namely, the sense of sight: I shall use what happens when we *see*, as an illustration of what happens in sense-perception generally. All the general principles which I point out with regard to the sense of seeing, will, I think, be easily transferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to all the other senses by which we can be said to perceive material objects.

My first question is, then: What exactly is it that happens, when (as we should say) we *see* a material object? And I should explain, perhaps, to avoid misunderstanding, that the occurrence which I mean here to analyse is merely the *mental* occurrence—the act of consciousness—which we call *seeing*. I do not mean to say anything at all about the bodily processes which occur in the eye and the optic nerves and the brain. I have no doubt, myself, that these bodily processes *do* occur, when we see; and that physiologists really *do know* a great deal about them. But all that I shall mean by '*seeing*', and all that I wish to talk about, is the mental occurrence—the act of consciousness—which occurs (as is supposed) as a consequence of or accompaniment of these bodily processes. This mental occurrence, which I call '*seeing*', is known to us in a much more simple and direct way, than are the complicated physiological processes which go on in our eyes and nerves and brains. A man cannot directly observe the minute processes which go on in his own eyes and nerves and brain when he sees; but all of us who are not blind can directly observe this mental occurrence, which we mean by seeing. And it is solely with *seeing*, in this sense—seeing, as an act of consciousness which we can all of us directly observe as happening in our own minds—that I am now concerned.

And I wish to illustrate what I have to say about seeing by a direct practical example; because, though I dare say many of you are perfectly familiar with the sort of points I wish to raise, it is, I think, very important for every one, in these subjects, to consider carefully single concrete instances, so that there may be no mistake as to exactly what it is that is being talked about. Such mistakes are, I think, very apt to happen, if one talks merely in generalities;

and moreover one is apt to overlook important points. I propose, therefore, to hold up an envelope in my hand, and to ask you all to look at it for a moment; and then to consider with me exactly what it is that happens, when you see it: *what* this occurrence, which we call the *seeing* of it, *is*.

I hold up this envelope, then: I look at it, and I hope you all will look at it. And now I put it down again. Now what has happened? We should certainly say (if you have looked at it) that we all *saw* that envelope, that we all saw *it*, *the same* envelope: I saw it, and you all saw it. We all saw *the same* object. And by the *it*, which we all saw, we mean an object, which, at any one of the moments when we were looking at it, occupied just *one* of the many places that constitute the whole of space. Even during the short time in which we were looking at it, it may have moved—occupied successively several different places; for the earth, we believe, is constantly going round on its axis, and carrying with it all the objects on its surface, so that, even while we looked at the envelope, it probably moved and changed its position in space, though we did not see it move. But at any *one* moment, we should say, this *it*, the envelope, which we say we all saw, was at some *one* definite place in space.

But now, what happened to each of us, when we saw that envelope? I will begin by describing *part* of what happened to me. I saw a patch<sup>1</sup> of a particular whitish colour, having a certain size, and a certain shape, a shape with rather sharp angles or corners and bounded by fairly straight lines. These things: this patch of a whitish colour, and its size and shape I did actually see. And I propose to call these things, the colour and size and shape, *sense-data*,<sup>2</sup> things *given* or presented by the senses—given, in this case, by my sense of sight. Many philosophers have called these things which I call sense-data, *sensations*. They would say, for instance, that that particular patch of colour was a sensation. But it seems to me that this term 'sensation' is liable to be misleading. We should certainly say that I *had* a sensation, when I saw that colour. But when we say that I *had* a sensation, what we mean is, I think, that I had the experience which consisted in my *seeing* the colour. That is to say,

<sup>1</sup>I am so extending the use of the word 'patch' that, e.g., the very small black dot which I directly apprehend when I see a full-stop, or the small black line which I directly apprehend when I see a hyphen, are, each of them, in the sense in which I am using the word, a 'patch of colour'. (1952).

<sup>2</sup>I should now make, and have for many years made, a sharp distinction between what I have called the 'patch', on the one hand, and the colour, size and shape, of which it is, on the other; and should call, and have called, *only* the patch, *not* its colour, size or shape, a 'sense-datum'. (1952).

what we mean by a 'sensation' in this phrase, is my *seeing* of the colour, not the colour which I saw: this colour does not seem to be what I mean to say that I *had*, when I say I *had* a sensation of colour. It is very unnatural to say that I *had* the colour, that I *had* that particular whitish grey or that I *had* the patch which was of that colour. What I certainly did *have* is the experience which consisted in my seeing the colour and the patch. And when, therefore, we talk of *having* sensations, I think what we mean by 'sensations' is the experiences which consist in apprehending certain sense-data, *not* these sense-data themselves. I think, then, that the term 'sensation' is liable to be misleading, because it may be used in two different senses, which it is very important to distinguish from one another. It may be used *either* for the colour which I saw or for the experience which consisted in my seeing it. And it is, I think very important, for several reasons, to distinguish these two things. I will mention only two of these reasons. In the first place, it is, I think, quite conceivable (I do not say it is actually true) but *conceivable* that the patch of colour which I saw may have continued to exist after I saw it: whereas, of course, when I ceased to see it, *my seeing* of it ceased to exist. I will illustrate what I mean, by holding up the envelope again, and looking at it. I look at it, and I again see a *sense-datum*, a patch of a whitish colour. But now I immediately turn away my eyes, and I no longer see that sense-datum: my seeing of it has ceased to exist. But I am by no means sure that the sense-datum—that very same patch of whitish colour which I saw—is not still *existing* and still there. I do not say, for certain, that it is: I think very likely it is not. But I have a strong inclination to believe that it is. And it seems to me at least *conceivable* that it should be still existing, whereas my *seeing* of it certainly has ceased to exist. This is one reason for distinguishing between the sense-data which I see, and my seeing of them. And here is another. It seems to me *conceivable*—here again I do not say it is true but *conceivable*—that some sense-data—this whitish colour for instance—are in the place in which the material object—the envelope, is. It seems to me *conceivable* that this whitish colour is really on the surface of the material envelope. Whereas it does not seem to me that my *seeing* of it is in that place. My seeing of it is in another place—somewhere within my body. Here, then, are two reasons for distinguishing between the *sense-data* which I see, and my *seeing* of them. And it seems to me that both of these two very different things are often meant when people talk about 'sensations'. In fact, when you are

reading any philosopher who is talking about sensations (or about sense-*impressions* or *ideas* either), you need to look very carefully to see which of the two he is talking about in any particular passage—whether of the sense-data themselves or of our apprehension of them: you will, I think, almost invariably find that he is talking now of the one and now of the other, and very often that he is assuming that what is true of the one must also be true of the other—an assumption which does not seem to be at all justified. I think, therefore, that the term 'sensation' is liable to be very misleading. And I shall, therefore, never use it. I shall always talk of *sense-data*, when what I mean is such things as this colour and size and shape or the patch which is *of* this colour and size and shape, which I actually see. And when I want to talk of my seeing of them, I shall expressly call this the seeing of sense-data; or, if I want a term which will apply equally to all the senses, I shall speak of the *direct apprehension of sense-data*. Thus when I see this whitish colour, I am *directly apprehending* this whitish colour: my seeing of it, as a mental act, an act of consciousness, just consists in my direct apprehension of it;—so too when I hear a sound, I directly apprehend the sound; when I feel a tooth-ache I directly apprehend the ache: and all these things—the whitish colour, the sound and the ache are *sense-data*.

To return, then, to what happened to us, when we all saw the same envelope. Part, at least, of what happened to me, I can now express by saying that I saw certain sense-data: I saw a whitish patch of colour, of a particular size and shape. And I have no doubt whatever that this is part, at least, of what happened to all of you. You also saw certain sense-data; and I expect also that the sense-data which you saw were more or less similar to those which I saw. You also saw a patch of colour which might be described as whitish, of a size not very different from the size of the patch which I saw, and of a shape similar at least in this that it had rather sharp corners and was bounded by fairly straight lines. But now, what I want to emphasize is this. Though we all did (as we should say) see *the same envelope*, no two of us, in all probability, saw exactly the *same sense-data*. Each of us, in all probability, saw, to begin with, a slightly different shade of colour. All these colours may have been whitish; but each was probably at least slightly different from all the rest, according to the way in which the light fell upon the paper, relatively to the different positions you are sitting in; and again according to differences in the strength of your eye-sight, or your

distance from the paper. And so too, with regard to the size of the patch of colour which you saw: differences in the strength of your eyes and in your distance from the envelope probably made slight differences in the size of the patch of colour, which you saw. And so again with regard to the shape. Those of you on that side of the room will have seen a rhomboidal figure, while those in front of me will have seen a figure more nearly rectangular. Those on my left will have seen a figure more like this which you in front now see, and which you see is different from *this* which you then saw. And those in front of me will have seen a figure like that which you on the left now see, and which, you see, is different from *this*, which you saw before. Those directly in front of me, may, indeed, have all seen very nearly the same figure—perhaps, even, exactly the same. But we should not say we *knew* that any two did; whereas we should say we did *know* that we all saw the *same envelope*. That you did all see the same envelope, would, indeed, be accepted in ordinary life as a certainty of the strongest kind. Had you all seen me commit a murder, as clearly as you all saw this envelope, your evidence would be accepted by any jury as sufficient to hang me. Such evidence would be accepted in any court of law as quite conclusive; we should take such a responsibility as that of hanging a man, upon it. It would be accepted, that is, that you had all seen me, *the same man*, commit a murder; and not merely that you had all seen some man or other, possibly each of you a different man in each case, commit one. And yet, in this case, as in the case of the envelope, the sense-data which you had all seen, would have been different sense-data: you could not swear in a court of law that you had all seen exactly the *same sense-data*.

Now all this seems to me to shew very clearly, that, *if we did* all see the same envelope, the envelope which we saw was not *identical with* the sense-data which we saw: the envelope cannot be exactly the same thing as each of the sets of sense-data, which we each of us saw; for these were in all probability each of them slightly different from all the rest, and they cannot, therefore, *all* be exactly the same thing as the envelope.

But it might be said: Of course, when we say that we all saw the envelope, we do not mean that we all saw the *whole* of it. I, for instance, only saw *this* side of it, whereas all of you only saw *that* side. And generally, when we talk of seeing an object we only mean seeing some *part* of it. There is always more in any object which we see, than the *part* of it which we see.

And this, I think, is quite true. Whenever we talk roughly of seeing any object, it is true that, in another and stricter sense of the word *see*, we only see a *part* of it. And it might, therefore, be suggested that why we say we all saw this envelope, when we each, in fact, saw a different set of sense-data, is because each of these *sets of sense-data* is, in fact, a *part* of the envelope.

But it seems to me there is a great difficulty even in maintaining that the different sense-data we all saw are parts of the envelope. What do we mean by a *part* of a material object? We mean, I think, at least this. What we call a part of a material object must be something which occupies a part of the volume in space occupied by the whole object. For instance, this envelope occupies a certain volume in space: that is to say, it occupies a space which has breadth and thickness as well as length. And anything which is a *part* of the envelope at any moment, must be *in* some part of the volume of space occupied by the whole envelope at that moment: it must be somewhere within that volume, or at some point in the surfaces bounding that volume.

Are, then, any of the sense-data we saw *parts* of the envelope in this sense?

The sense-data I mentioned were these three—the colour—the whitish colour; the *size* of this colour; its *shape*.<sup>1</sup> And of these three it is only the colour, which could, in the sense defined, possibly be supposed to be a *part* of the envelope. The colour might be supposed to occupy a *part* of the volume occupied by the envelope—one of its bounding surfaces,<sup>2</sup> for instance. But the size and shape could hardly be said to *occupy* any part of this volume. What might be true of them is that the size I saw *is* the size of one surface of the envelope; and that the shape *is* the shape of this surface of the envelope. The side of the envelope which I say I saw certainly *has* some size and some shape; and the sense-data—the size and shape, which I saw as the size and shape of a patch of colour—might possibly *be* the size and shape of this side of the envelope.

Let us consider whether these things are so.

And, first, as to the colours. Can these possibly be parts of the envelope? What we supposed is that each of you probably saw a slightly different colour. And if we are to suppose that *all* those

<sup>1</sup>I had here forgotten that one of the sense-data mentioned was the *patch* which *has* that colour and shape and *size*—the *patch* which, I should now say, is the *only* 'sense-datum', having to do with the envelope, which I then saw. (1952).

<sup>2</sup>I should now say that any part of the *surface* of a volume is *not* a part of the volume, because it is not itself a volume. (1952).

colours are parts of the envelope, then we must suppose that *all* of them are in the same place. We must suppose that ever so many different colours all of them occupy the same surface—this surface of the envelope which you now see. And I think it is certainly difficult to suppose this, though not absolutely impossible. It is not absolutely impossible, I think, that all the different colours which you see are really all of them in the same place. But I myself find it difficult to believe that this is so; and you can understand, I think, why most philosophers should have declared it to be impossible. They have declared, chiefly, I think, on grounds like this, that none of the colours which any of us ever see are ever parts of material objects: they have declared that none of them are ever in any part of the places where material objects (if there are any material objects) are. This conclusion does, indeed, go beyond what the premisses justify, even if we accept the premiss that several different colours cannot all be in exactly the same place. For it remains possible that the colour, which some *one* of you sees, is really on the surface of the envelope; whereas the colours which all the rest of you see are *not* there. But if so, then we must say that though all of you are seeing the same side of the envelope, yet only one of you is seeing a sense-datum which is a part of that side: the sense-data seen by all the rest are *not* parts of the envelope. And this also, I think, is difficult to believe. It might be, indeed, that those of you who are seeing a colour, which is *not* a part of the envelope, might yet be seeing a size and a shape which really *is* the size and shape of one side of the envelope; and we will go on to consider whether *this* is so.

And, first, as to the size. I assumed that the sense-given sizes, which you see, are all of them probably slightly different from one another. And, if this be so, then certainly it seems to be absolutely impossible that they should *all* of them be the size of this side of the envelope. This side of the envelope can only really have *one* size; it cannot have several different sizes. But it may not seem quite clear, that you all do see different sizes; the differences between the different distances at which you are from the envelope are not so great, but what the patches of colour you all see might be, at least, of *much the same* size. So I will give a hypothetical instance to make my point clearer. Suppose this room were so large that I could carry the envelope two or three hundred yards away from you. The sense-given size which you would then see, when I was three hundred yards off, would certainly be appreciably smaller than what you see now. And yet you would still be seeing this same envelope. It seems

quite impossible that these two very different sizes should both of them be *the* size of the envelope. So that here the *only* possibility is that the size which you see at some *one* definite distance or set of distances, should be the envelope's real size, *if* you ever see its real size at all. This may be so: it may be that some one of the sense-given sizes which we see is the envelope's real size. But it seems also possible that none of them are; and in any case we all see the envelope, just the same, *whether* we see its real size or not.

And now for the shape. Here again it seems quite impossible that *all* the shapes we see can be the envelope's real shape. This side of the envelope can have but *one* shape: it cannot be both rhomboidal, as is the shape which you on the left see, and also rectangular, as is the shape seen by those in front; the angles at its corners cannot be both right angles and also very far from right angles. Certainly, therefore, the sense-given shape which some of you see is *not* the shape of this side of the envelope. But here it may be said, it is plain enough that one of the sense-given shapes seen *is* its real shape. You may say: The shape seen by those in front *is* its real shape; the envelope *is* rectangular. And I quite admit that this is so: I think we do know, in fact, that the envelope really *is* *roughly* rectangular. But here I want to introduce a distinction. There are two different senses in which we may talk of *the* shape of anything. A rectangle of the size of this envelope, and a rectangle of the size of this blackboard, may both, in a sense, have exactly *the same* shape. They may have the same shape in the sense, that all the angles of both are right angles, and that the proportions between the sides of the one, and those between the sides of the other, are the same. They may, in fact, have the same shape, in the sense in which a big square always has the same shape as a small square, however big the one may be and however small the other. But there is another sense in which *the* shape of a big square is obviously not *the same* as that of a small square. We may mean by *the* shape of a big square the actual lines bounding it; and if we mean this, *the* shape of a big square cannot possibly be the *same* as *the* shape of a smaller one. The lines bounding the two cannot possibly be the *same* lines. And the same thing may be true, even when there is no difference in size between two shapes. Imagine *two* squares, of the same size, side by side. The lines bounding the one are *not* the same lines as those bounding the other: though each is both *of* the same shape and *of* the same size as the other. The difference between these two senses in which we may talk of *the* shape of anything, may be expressed by saying that

the shape of the big square is the same *in quality*—qualitatively identical—with that of the small square, but is not *numerically* the same—not numerically identical: the shape of the big square is *numerically* different from that of the small, in the sense that they are *two* shapes, and not one only, of which we are talking, though both are the same in quality: both are *squares*, but the one is *one* square and the other is *another* square. There is, then, a difference between two different kinds of identity: qualitative identity and numerical identity; and we are all perfectly familiar with the difference between the two, though the names may sound strange. I shall in future use these names: qualitative identity and numerical identity. And now to return to the case of the envelope. Even supposing that the sense-given shape which you in front see is rectangular, and that the real shape of the envelope is also rectangular, and that both are rectangles of exactly the same shape; it still does not follow that the sense-given shape which you see is *the* shape of the envelope. The sense-given shape and the shape of the envelope, even if they are qualitatively the same, *must* still be *two* different shapes, *numerically* different, unless they are *of the same size*; just as *the* shape of a large square must be numerically different from *the* shape of a smaller one. And we saw before how difficult it was to be sure that any of the sizes which you saw were the *real* size of the envelope. And even if the sense-given size which some one of you sees *is* the real size of the envelope, it still does not follow that the sense-given *shape* which you see is numerically the same as the shape of the envelope. The two may be numerically different, just as in the case of two different squares, side by side, of the same shape and size, *the* shape of the one *is not* *the* shape of the other; they are two numerically different shapes. We may say, then, that if those of you who see rectangular shapes, do see rectangular shapes of different sizes, only one of these can possibly be *the* shape of the envelope: all the others may be of the same shape—the same in quality—but they cannot be *the* shape of the envelope. And even if some *one* of you does see a shape, which is of the same size as *the* shape of the envelope, as well as being of the same shape (and it is very doubtful whether any of you does) it would yet be by no means certain that this sense-given shape which you saw was *the* shape of the envelope. It might be a shape *numerically* different from *the* shape of the envelope, although exactly similar both in shape and size. And finally there is some reason to suppose that none of the sense-given shapes which any of you see are *exactly* the same, even in quality, as *the* shape of the envelope.

The envelope itself probably has a more or less irregular edge; there are probably ups and downs in the line bounding its side, which you at that distance cannot see.

Of the three kinds of sense-data,<sup>1</sup> then, which you all of you saw, when I held up the envelope, namely, the whitish colour, its size, and its shape, the following things seem to be true. First, as regards the colour, no one of you can be sure that the exact colour which you saw was really a part of the envelope—was really in any part of the space, which the real envelope (if there was a real envelope) occupied. Then as regards the size, no one of you can be sure that the size which you saw was the real size of the envelope. And finally as regards the shape, no one of you can be sure that the shape which you saw was really of exactly the same shape as that of the envelope; still less can you be sure that it *was the* shape of the envelope, that the bounding lines which composed it were numerically the same bounding lines as those which enclosed the envelope. And not only can none of you be sure of these things. As regards the sizes and shapes which you saw, it seems quite certain that some of you saw sizes and shapes which were *not* the real size and shape of the envelope; because it seems quite certain that some of you saw sizes and shapes different from those seen by others, and that these different sizes and shapes cannot possibly *all* be *the* size and shape of the envelope. And as regards the colours it seems fairly certain, that the colours which you saw cannot all have been *in* the envelope; since it seems fairly certain that you all saw slightly different colours, and it is difficult to believe, though not absolutely impossible, that all these different colours were really in the same place at the same time.

This seems to be the state of things with regard to these sense-data—the colour, the size and the shape. They seem, in a sense, to have had very little to do with the real envelope, if there *was* a real envelope. It seems very probable that *none* of the colours seen was really a part of the envelope; and that *none* of the sizes and shapes seen were the size or the shape of the real envelope.

But now I wish to mention one other sense-datum, of a kind that we all saw, which might be thought to have more to do with the real envelope. Besides the patch of colour and its shape and size, we did, in a sense, all see the *space* which this patch of colour occupied. The patch of colour seemed to occupy a certain area; and we can by abstraction distinguish this area from the patch of colour occupying

<sup>1</sup>The *patch* itself, which *has* that colour and shape and size, again forgotten! (1952).

it. This area was also a sense-datum. And in this area we can distinguish parts—this part, and this part, and this. And it might be thought with regard to parts, at least, of this area, that two things are true. Firstly, that part at least of the sense-given area which each of you saw, is really numerically identical with some part of that seen by all the rest. And secondly, that *this* part, which you all saw, is also a part of the area occupied by the real envelope. In other words, you might comfort yourselves by supposing, that even if the colour presented by your senses is *not* a part of the real envelope, and even if the shape and size presented by your senses are not the shape and size of the real envelope, yet at least there is presented by your senses a *part* of the *space occupied* by the real envelope. And against this supposition I confess I cannot find any argument, which seems to me very strong. We are all, I think, very strongly tempted to suppose that this is so. That, for instance, this space which I touch is really seen by all of you—this very same place—and that it also is part of the space which the real envelope occupies. The best argument I can think of against this supposition is the following; and I think it is enough to render the supposition doubtful. If we are to say that part of this sense-given area which I see is really numerically the same with part of those which you see, and that it is also numerically the same as part of the area occupied by the real envelope, then we must either again accept the hypothesis that all the different colours which we see as occupying the area are really in the same place and in the same place as the real envelope, or else we must say that the colours only *seem* to be in this sense-given area and are not really there. But there is the former objection to supposing that several different colours are all really in the same place. And as to the only remaining possibility, namely, that they only *seem* to be in this sense-given area; it may be objected that so far as the sense-given area is concerned, the colours we see *really do* occupy it—that they not only seem to be but *really are* there—that there can be no doubt about this. If we are talking of the area really presented by the senses as occupied by the colours, *this* area, it may be said, undoubtedly *is* occupied by the colours: it *is* nothing but the space over which the colour is spread. So that, if the area, which I see, really is numerically the same as those which you see, then it will follow that all the different colours we see really are in the same place. This argument, I say, does not seem to me to be absolutely conclusive. It does seem to me possible that the colour I see only *seems* to be in the sense-given area, which I see. But it is, I think, sufficient to

suggest a doubt whether any part of this sense-given area seen by me really is numerically the same as any part of any of those seen by you.

Well now: Chiefly, I think, for reasons of the sort which I have given you, an overwhelming majority of philosophers have adopted the following views. Reasons of the sort which I have given are not the only ones which have been alleged as reasons for holding these views, but they are, I think, the ones which have really had most influence in getting them adopted, and they are, it seems to me, by far the strongest reasons for adopting them. However that may be, whatever the reasons, an overwhelming majority of philosophers have, I think, adopted the following views; and I wish you to realise these views as clearly as possible.

They have held with regard to absolutely *all* the sense-data<sup>1</sup> and every part of any sense-datum, which we ever apprehend by any of our senses, the following things.

They have held (1) that absolutely no part of the sense-data, which I ever apprehend, exists at all except at the moment when I am apprehending it. They have held, that is to say, that except at the moment when I am apprehending it, there simply *is not* in the Universe any particular sense-datum which I ever apprehend. If, for instance, I look at this envelope again and now turn away my eyes for a moment, then while I saw that particular patch of whitish colour, there *was* that particular patch of colour in the Universe: there certainly *was*, for I saw it. But now that I no longer see it, that particular patch of colour has ceased to exist. It no longer *is* in the Universe, any more than my seeing of it is. They are both of them, both the colour and my seeing of it, things which *were*, but which are no longer: both of them equally and in the same sense have completely ceased to be. These philosophers would not deny, indeed, that there *may* still be in the Universe a patch of colour *exactly like* that which I saw. For instance, some one else might at this moment be seeing a patch of colour exactly like it. But this other patch of colour, though exactly like, they would say, is certainly not the same: they may be exactly the same in quality, but they are *not* numerically the same. *The* patch of colour which I saw cannot be now existing even though another exactly like it may be. And they would say this with regard to absolutely all the sense-data, which any of us ever apprehends. Each of them only *is*, so long as the person apprehending

<sup>1</sup>These three propositions about what philosophers have held are only true if the word 'sense-datum' be understood in the sense explained in footnote 2 on p. 30. *i.e.* in such a sense that 'patches' are sense-data, but their colour, size and shape, are not. (1952).

it *is* apprehending it. And they would say this not only with regard to sense-data like colours, sounds, hardness, smoothness, heat, cold, aches, which seem to us to occupy space—to be localised. They would say it also with regard to the sense-given spaces which these things seem to occupy. For instance, the sense-given area, occupied by this patch of colour: I see it now, and while I see it, it *is*: that particular area is one among the contents of the Universe. But now that I turn my head away, *it*, that particular area I saw, has entirely ceased to exist. With my seeing of it, *it* also has ceased to be. I may indeed be still seeing an area exactly like it: this area for instance, which I now see, seems to be exactly like, and only distinguishable by the fact that it is occupied by a different colour. But these two areas, they would say, though perhaps exactly like, are not the *same*. They are no more the *same* than is this part of the total area which I now see the same as *that* part. *The* particular sense-given area which I just now saw has entirely ceased to be.

This, then, is one view, which an overwhelming majority of philosophers have held with regard to sense-data. They have held that every sense-datum, of *every* kind, and every part of every sense-datum, is something which only *is* or *exists*, so long as the person apprehending it is apprehending it.

(2) And they have held too this second view. Namely, that no two of us ever apprehend exactly the same sense-datum. They would allow that we might, perhaps, apprehend sense-data exactly *alike*; but they would say that even though exactly alike—the same in quality—they cannot ever be *numerically* the same. That this is so with regard to sense-data which exist at different times, would, indeed, follow from the first view. If this particular patch of colour which I see now, has *now*, when I turn away my head, entirely ceased to be, it follows that nobody can be seeing it now. But it is worth while to emphasize that this is the view actually held by most philosophers. It is held, for instance, that if somebody were to come and look at this envelope, immediately after I had looked at it, standing at exactly the same distance from it and in the same direction, having exactly the same power of eye-sight, and the light also not having changed at all, so that he saw a patch of colour exactly similar to that which I had just seen; nevertheless the patch of colour which he saw would not be *the same* as that which I had just seen. It would be numerically different from it, in the same sense, in which, supposing you see two spots of colour, of exactly the same size and shape side by side, the one spot, though exactly like the other, is yet *not* the

same, is numerically different from it. And it is held too, that no two persons can see the same sense-datum, or any part of the same sense-datum, even *at the same time*: a point which does not follow from the last view. For though it might be true that all the sense-data, which any of you now sees in looking at this envelope ceased to exist the moment you ceased to see it; yet it might be true that, *while* you were seeing and while, therefore, it exists, some other of you might be seeing at least a part of one of them too. But this is what is denied by this second view. It is denied that any two of you are at this moment seeing, even in part, the same sense-data. It is asserted that every part of every sense-datum which any one of you sees now, is numerically different from any part of any sense-datum seen by any other of you.

And the third view, which is held by an overwhelming majority of philosophers about sense-data is this.

They hold, namely (3) that none of the sense-data apprehended by any one person can ever be situated either in the same place with, or at any distance in any direction from, those apprehended by any other person. In other words, they hold that any sense-datum apprehended by me cannot possibly be in the *same place* as any sense-datum apprehended by any one of you: and that this is true of any pair of persons you like to take. That is to say, this patch of colour seen by me is neither in the same place with, nor at any distance in any direction from, any that is seen by any of you: the two simply have no spatial relations of any kind to one another. With regard to the different sense-data seen by me at any one moment, they would indeed admit that these have, in a sense, spatial relations *to one another*. This corner of the patch of colour which I see really is at a certain distance, in a certain direction, from this corner; and at another distance in another direction from this other corner. But they would say that all the different sense-data within my field of vision at any one time have distance and direction from one another only within a *private space of my own*. That is to say, no point in this private space of mine is either identical with, nor at any distance from, any point within the field of vision of any other person. The sense-given field of vision of each of us, at any moment, constitutes a private space of that person's own;—no two points in any two of these spaces, can be related to one another in any of the ways in which two points in any *one* of them are related.

These three views have, I think, been held by an overwhelming majority of philosophers. They have held, that is (1) that absolutely

every sense-datum that any person ever directly apprehends exists only so long as he apprehends it, (2) that no sense-datum which any one person directly apprehends ever is directly apprehended by any other person, and (3) that no sense-datum that is directly apprehended by one person can be in *the same space with any sense-datum* apprehended by any other person—that no sense-datum that is seen or heard or felt by me can possibly be either in the same place with or at any distance from any that is seen or heard or felt by any one else. These three things are, I think, the chief things that are meant, when it is said that all sense-data exist only *in the mind* of the person who apprehends them; and it is certainly the common view in philosophy that all sense-data do only exist *in our minds*. I do not think myself that this is a good way of expressing what is meant. Even if all these three things are true of all the sense-data which I ever directly apprehend; it does not seem to me to follow that they exist only in my mind, or indeed are *in my mind* in any sense at all except that they are apprehended by me. They are, so far as I can see, not in my mind in the sense in which my apprehension of them is in my mind: for instance, this whitish colour, even if it does only exist while I see it, and cannot be seen by any one else, does not seem to me to be *in my mind* in the sense in which my seeing of it is *in my mind*. My seeing of it is, it seems to me, related to my mind in a way in which this which I see is not related to it: and I should prefer to confine the phrase '*in the mind*' to those things which are related to my mind, in the way in which my seeing of this colour, and my other acts of consciousness are related to it. But whether they could be properly said to be in my mind or not, certainly all the sense-data, which I ever directly apprehend, are, if these three things are true of them, *dependent* upon my mind in a most intimate sense. If it is really true of all of them that they exist only while I am conscious of them, that nobody else ever is directly conscious of them, and that they are situated only in a private space of my own, which also exists only while I am conscious of it, and of which no one else is ever directly conscious—then certainly nothing could well be more thoroughly dependent on my mind than they are. Most philosophers have, I think, certainly held that all sense-data are dependent on our minds in this sense. This has been held both by philosophers who believe that there are material objects and that we know of their existence, and by those who believe that there are no such things as material objects, or, that, if there are, we do not know it. It has, in fact, an overwhelming weight of authority in its



favour. And I am going to call it for the moment *the accepted view*.

And as regards the question whether this accepted view is true or not, I confess I cannot make up my mind. I think it may very likely be true. But I have never seen any arguments in its favour which seem to me to be absolutely conclusive. The strongest arguments in its favour, as I said, seem to me to be arguments of the sort which I have given you. This one, for instance : That if we are to say that any portion of the sense-given spaces apprehended by each of us at the same time, really is numerically the same portion of space, then we must hold *either* that the very same portion of space may be occupied at the same time by several different colours *or* that it only really is occupied by the colour which *one* of us sees and only *seems* to be so by those which the rest of us see *or* that it only *seems* to be and is not really occupied by any of the colours which any of us see. There do seem to me objections to saying any of these three things ; but, on the other hand, the objection to none of them seems to me perfectly conclusive : it seems to me *possible* that any one of them *might* be the truth. One argument which has been urged by some philosophers as being conclusive seems to me to have absolutely no weight at all. It has been urged, namely, that we can see directly, without the need of any argument, if we will but think of it, that all sense-data are a sort of thing which can only exist while the person perceiving them is perceiving them : it is urged that this is a self-evident truth like the truth that  $2+2=4$ . This argument seems to me to have no weight at all. It seems to me that it is simply false that what it says is self-evident. I can perfectly well conceive that the very same sense-data, which I see at one time, should exist even when I am not seeing them : and I cannot, by merely considering the possibility, determine whether it is true or not. And moreover, I think, that the apparent strength of this argument has been largely due to the confusion I spoke of above—the confusion between the sense-data which I see and my seeing of them. Many philosophers have, as I said, not only called both of these two very different things ‘sensations’, but have treated them as if they were the same thing. And, of course, when I cease to see a given sense-datum, I do cease to see it : my seeing of it certainly does cease to exist. They have, then, argued, treating the sense-datum as if it were the same thing as my seeing of it, that the sense-datum ceases to exist too. But this is surely mere confusion. We are, then, I think, if we are to find conclusive arguments in favour of this accepted view, thrown back upon such questions as whether many different colours can all occupy the

same space ; and whether, when the space we are talking of is the sense-given space presented with the colours, it can be true that these colours only *seem* to occupy this sense-given space, and do not *really* occupy it. And no arguments of this kind seem to me to be perfectly conclusive, though they do seem to me to have weight. And on the other side, in favour of the contrary view, there seems to me the fact that we all have a very strong tendency to believe it. I find it very difficult not to believe that when I look at this, and turn away my head, the colour which I just saw is not still existing ; that the space in which I saw it is not still existing too ; and that the colour is not still *in* that space. And so too, I find it very difficult to believe that this space, which I see—this very same portion of space—is not also seen by all of you. I point at it ; and what I point at seems to be a part of the sense-given space which I see ; and I cannot believe that by pointing at it I do not make plain to you also, which portion of space I am pointing at. We all constantly assume that pointing at a thing is of some use ; that if I point at a thing, that serves to show you *which* thing I am talking about ; that you will see the same thing, which I see, and will thus know what it is that I see. And it certainly seems as if *the* thing at which I am pointing now is part of the sense-given space which I see ; and that, therefore, if you see *what* I am pointing at, some portion of the sense-given space which each of us sees *must* be the same. But on the other hand, I can imagine that I am mistaken about this. I can imagine that what I am sure that you see is *not* a part of my *sense-given* space ; and that what you see, when you see the place I am pointing at, is *not* a part of your sense-given space either : and that the supposition that some portion of our sense-given spaces must be identical, arises from our confusion of sense-given space with the real space, which we do really all of us see—but see in another sense. I can, therefore, not find any arguments, either, which seem to me conclusive *against* the accepted view : the view that all the sense-data I see, including every portion of my sense-given space, are private sense-data of my own, which exist only while I directly apprehend them, and no part of which can be directly apprehended by any one of you. And what I wish to do in the rest of this lecture is this. I wish for the moment to *suppose* that this accepted view is true ; to *suppose* that absolutely all the sense-data of each of us are private to that person, in the sense I have explained ; and then to consider what, supposing this view is true, can be the nature of our knowledge of material objects by means of the senses, if we have such knowledge at all.

I return, then, to my original question: What happens, when we all see this envelope?

I began, you may remember, by saying that a *part* of what happened to me was that I *saw* certain sense-data—a particular whitish patch of colour, of a certain size and shape, and also the area which this patch of colour did, or seemed to, occupy. This, the seeing of certain sense-data, was also a part *at least* of what happened to you. But now, having for the moment accepted the philosophical view that all the sense-data seen by any one of us are seen by *that* person alone, we have got this far further: namely, that, *if* we do in fact all see the same envelope, this seeing of the envelope cannot possibly consist *merely* in our seeing of those sense-data; this seeing of sense-data, which I declared at first to be *at least* a part of what happens when we see the envelope, must, we now find, be a *mere part* of what happens; it cannot possibly be the whole, if we all do really see the *same* envelope: for we *do not*, according to the accepted philosophical view, see the same sense-data; the sense-data which we see are not, even as regards the least part, the same. It remains, then, to enquire, what else *beside* the seeing of sense-data, can have happened when we saw the envelope. But before we go on to consider this I want to insist upon one point, with regard to this first part of what happened—namely this, which I have called the seeing of certain sense-data. I said before, that, if I wanted to use a term which would apply not only to the sense of sight but to any other sense, I should use the term 'direct apprehension' of sense-data. And the point I wish now to insist on is *what* exactly this way of perceiving<sup>1</sup> things, which I call *direct apprehension*, is. It is certainly one of the most important ways we have of perceiving things. And I want, in future, to be able to refer to it by the name 'direct apprehension' and therefore I want you to realise as clearly as possible what sort of a thing *this* way of perceiving which I call 'direct apprehension' is. It is, as I said, that which happens when you actually see any colour, when you actually hear any sound, when you actually feel the so-called 'sensation' of heat, as when you put your hand close to a fire; when you actually smell a smell; when you feel the so-called sensation of hardness, in pressing against a table; or when you feel the pain of a toothache, etc., etc. In all these cases you *directly apprehend* the sense-datum in question—the particular colour, or sound, or smell; or those peculiar sense-data, which we

<sup>1</sup>There is another, very different, use of 'perceive', in which we are said to perceive *that* so and so is the case, *i.e.* to perceive, *not* a 'thing', but a fact or truth (see below, p. 77, footnote). I can be said both to see a man, and also to see *that*, *e.g.*, he has a beard.

are more apt to call 'sensations', such as that peculiar something we call 'heat', and which we directly apprehend when we put our hands close to a fire, and those peculiar somethings which we call hardness or smoothness, or the pain of a toothache. And in all these cases, so far as I can see, what I mean by 'direct apprehension', namely, the act of consciousness, is exactly the same in quality: that is to say, the actual seeing of a colour, considered as an act of consciousness, differs in no respect at all from the actual hearing of a sound, or the actual smelling of a smell. They differ only in respect of the fact, that whereas the one is the direct apprehension of *one* kind of sense-datum, the other is the direct apprehension of *another* kind: the one, for instance, of a colour, the other of a sound. And *what* they are is perhaps best realised by considering the difference between what is happening when you *are* directly apprehending a given sense-datum and what happens when you cease to apprehend it. For instance, you look at this envelope, and you actually see a particular colour: you directly apprehend that particular colour. But, then, if you turn away your eyes, you no longer directly apprehend it: you no longer actually see the colour which you saw. But you *may* still be thinking of it—thinking of just that colour which you saw a moment ago: you may, therefore, in a sense still be conscious of it, though you are no longer directly apprehending it. Here, therefore, is one way of having before the mind, which is *not* direct apprehension: the way which we call 'thinking of' or remembering. That is to say, you may still be thinking of *the* colour which you saw, and therefore having it before your mind in a sense, although you are no longer directly apprehending it. No doubt, when you think of it, you are still directly apprehending *something*: you may, for instance, be directly apprehending an image of it—one of those faint copies of sense-data, which are called images. But you are no longer directly apprehending *the* coloured patch which you saw; the image which you are directly apprehending, though it may be like, is not *the same*; and the relation which you now have to the image is obviously different from that which you have *now* to the sense-datum, which you *saw* but do *not* now see; while this relation which you *now* have to the image, is *the same* as that which you *had* to the sense-datum, just now when you actually saw it. You directly apprehend the image *now* in exactly the same sense as you just now directly apprehended the sense-datum, *of* which it is an image: but you are no longer now directly apprehending *the* sense-datum which you were directly apprehending a moment ago.

I hope, then, you understand what I mean by 'direct apprehension.' And one reason I have insisted on the point is this. I think many philosophers have assumed more or less unconsciously that *this* way of having things before the mind, which I call 'direct apprehension' is the *only* way in which we ever have anything before our minds. They have assumed, that is to say, that the only thing which ever happens, in our minds, whenever we have anything before our minds, merely consists in the fact that we directly apprehend certain sense-data or certain images, or both at the same time. And there is, I think, obviously a certain excuse for this assumption. For this kind of having before the mind—the direct apprehension of sense-data and images—is certainly far easier to observe and to understand the exact nature of than any other. If you try to observe what is going on in your mind at any moment, it is easy to see that you are directly apprehending certain sense-data, or certain images, or both; but it is not by any means easy to see that anything else is happening in your mind at all. At least that is what I find. And even if you are convinced, as you may I think be convinced, that something else is *in fact* happening, it is very difficult to see exactly what the nature of this something else is: far more difficult than to see what the direct apprehension of sense-data or of images is.

It is, therefore, I think, very natural to suppose that all knowledge consists *merely* in the direct apprehension of sense-data and images; and many philosophers have, I think, constantly assumed this. But now observe what results if we combine this view with that view with regard to sense-data which I have called the accepted view—a view which is, of course extended to all images, and which does, in fact, much more obviously apply to images than to sense-data. It then follows that no one does in fact ever have before his mind anything at all except certain sense-data and images, which are quite private to himself, and which can never be before anyone else's mind. And the question then arises how any one of us can possibly know that there *is* anything else at all in the Universe except his own private sense-data and images; how he can possibly know, for instance, that there are in the Universe, either the minds of other people, or material objects, or the sense-data and images of other people. And obviously, on these hypotheses, these are questions which must be answered in the negative. On these hypotheses, nobody can possibly know of the existence of anything at all except his own sense-data and images. But, then, on the same hypotheses, nobody can even think that there *might* be anything else: for to think

that there might possibly be something other than your own sense-data and images, certainly does not merely consist in directly apprehending a certain number of sense-data or images or both.

There must, therefore, be some other ways of knowing of the existence of things besides the mere direct apprehension of sense-data and images. And, in fact, it seems to me quite certain that sense-data and images are not the only kinds of things which we directly apprehend. For instance, suppose I look at this envelope again, and directly apprehend the whitish colour; it seems to me that if I try to observe what is happening in my mind, I can *also* directly apprehend not only the whitish colour but *also* my own direct apprehension of it: that is to say, that just as my seeing of the colour consists in my direct apprehension of *it*, the colour, so, if I happen to observe *my seeing* of it, this observation consists in the direct apprehension of my seeing of it—of something, that is to say, which is neither a sense-datum, nor an image, but the direct apprehension of a sense-datum. I think, therefore, we certainly sometimes directly apprehend not only sense-data and images, but also our own acts of consciousness: and we may, I think, directly apprehend other things also.

But there are, I think, certainly other ways of knowing, which do not merely consist in the direct apprehension of anything. And if we do ever know of the existence of material objects by means of our senses, our knowledge of their existence, on the accepted view with regard to sense-data, must, I think, partly consist in one of these other ways of knowing. But it is very difficult to analyse exactly what these other ways of knowing are; and that, I think, is one chief reason why many philosophers have supposed that we do not know of their existence at all.

In order to shew quite clearly that there are ways of knowledge other than direct apprehension, and also, in at least one instance, as clearly as I can what sort of a thing such knowledge is, I will return to an instance which I mentioned just above, the instance of memory.

I look at the envelope again and I see the whitish colour. I turn my head away, and I no longer see it. But I remember that *I did see it a moment ago*. I *know* that I did see it. There is nothing that I know more certainly than this. Moreover I know that that whitish colour *was*: that there was such a thing in the Universe. I know, therefore, *now* of the past existence of that whitish colour; and yet I am certainly not directly apprehending it *now*. I may, indeed, possibly be apprehending now an image more or less like it. And,

according to the view that all knowledge consists merely in the direct apprehension of sense-data and images, it is very natural to suppose that my memory of what I just now saw consists merely in my direct apprehension of an image of it now. But if you consider a moment, I think you can easily see that this cannot possibly be the case. If it were the case, I could not possibly know that the image which I now see was at all different from the colour which I saw a moment ago. And yet this is just what we all constantly do know whenever we remember anything. We know that there *was* something in the past different, in some respects, from anything which we are directly apprehending now. Memory, in fact, always carries with it the possibility of our knowing this: that there *was* something which we are not now directly apprehending and different in some respects from anything which we are now directly apprehending.

And it seems to me that, on the view we have accepted with regard to sense-data, our knowledge of the existence of material objects by means of the senses must be analogous to memory at least in this: it must consist in our knowing that there *exists something* different from any sense-datum or image which we are directly apprehending at the moment. This would seem to be the minimum which we must know, if we are to know of the existence of any material object by means of the senses. We must know, when we directly apprehend certain sense-data, that there exists *also* something *other* than these sense-data—something which we do not directly apprehend. And there seems no sort of reason why we should not know at least this, once we have dismissed the prejudice that we cannot know of the existence of anything *except* what we directly apprehend. Of course, *merely* to know this, would be to know very little. If the *something*, whose existence we know of really is, *in fact*, a material object, we might be said to know of the existence of a material object, even if we did not know *that it was* a material object. But, we must know much more than this, if we are to know *also* that this something *is* a material object. And moreover, if we are to know that we all saw *the same* envelope, we must know that the something, of whose existence we each of us know, is *the same something*. But there seems no reason again why we *should not know* many things of this kind. In the case of memory, we certainly do know, with the utmost certainty, a very great many things, about the *something* which we remember, beyond the mere fact that it *was* and was different from anything which we are now directly apprehending.

The *seeing* of a material object—or the perceiving one by any other sense—would therefore, on this view, be something quite different from the *seeing* of sense-data. The seeing of sense-data consists in directly apprehending them. But the seeing of a material object does *not* consist in directly apprehending *it*. It consists, *partly* in directly apprehending certain sense-data, but partly also in *knowing*, *besides and at the same time*, that there exists *something* other than these sense-data. And so, too, if we ever *see* that a material object is round or square, or in a particular position in space; this also would consist, *not* in directly apprehending these things, but in *knowing*, when we do directly apprehend certain sense-data, certain things about something quite other than these sense-data.

I will now try, first of all, to describe more clearly exactly what sort of a thing I take this perception of material objects to be. And will then go on to consider what sort of reasons we may have for supposing that this sort of perception really is *knowledge*; for supposing, that is, that there really does exist something *other* than the sense-data, which we directly apprehend, and that this something has certain properties and is a material object.