

Philosophy 136  
The Philosophy of Perception  
Handout 15  
Thursday 20 October 2005

1. *Objections to Sense-Data*

Critics of sense-data have generally objected to them on three kinds of grounds:

- a.) Ontological;
- b.) Epistemological;
- c.) Phenomenological;

2. *The Problem of the Speckled Hen*

B. Are sense-data just too *weird* for us to accept that they exist?

Suppose your eye sight is not that good: you may see a hen to be speckled, and yet there be no determinate number of speckles which you then see the hen to have. (Compare: you look at a crowd in Haas Pavilion – you can see that there is a huge crowd of people, but do you see the exact number?)

How many speckles are there in the sense-datum of which you are aware, according to the sense-datum theorist?



The argument assumes:

- i.) it looks to you as if the hen has a large number of speckles;
- ii.) there is no number  $n$  such that it looks to you as if the hen has  $n$  speckles
- iii.) if something has a large number of speckles then there is some  $n$  such that it has  $n$  speckles

Which assumption of the sense-datum theory does this posit a problem for?

3. *Adverbialism about Sense Experience & the Need for Objects*

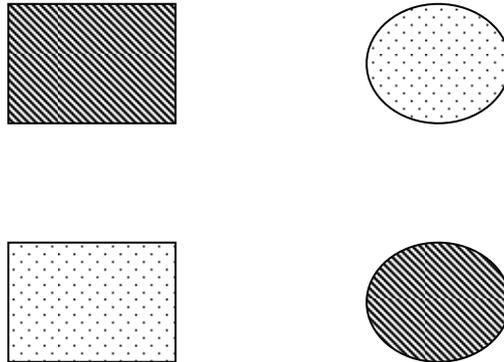
If the sense-datum theorist agrees that a sense-datum exists just in case we are aware of it, what is the need to posit a sense-datum as a separate object? Why not say that the red that one senses is a mode of one's sensing?

...in saying "He appeared to white," or "He senses whitely," we are not committed to saying that there is a thing—an appearance—of which the word "white," in its sensible use, designates a property. We are saying, rather, that there is a certain state or process—that of being appeared to, or sensing, or experiencing—and we are using the adjective "white," or the adverb "whitely," to describe more specifically the way in which the process occurs. (Roderick Chisholm, *A Theory of Knowledge*, sec edition, 1966, Ch.6.)

According to an adverbialist to have a visual hallucination of an expanse of red is to sense in a red manner, or redly.

Can an adverbialist give an adequate account of the variety of our sensations?

In the case of vision (G.E. Moore and Frank Jackson):



How does 'sensing rectangularly, ovally, slantily and spottily' distinguish between these two situations?

This suggests a role for objects: gathering up properties together.

But are objects the only things that can play this role? Cf. Michael Tye.

#### 4. *Epistemological Objections*

Do sense-data act as intermediaries or barriers between us and objects in the world?

What does it mean to claim this?

But why don't we say that sense-data afford or facilitate perceptual awareness of objects instead?

Perhaps the complaint is that according to the sense-datum theory, sense-data play the role that we thought ordinary objects played. But why should we suppose that ordinary objects play any such role?

#### 5. *The Phenomenological Objection to Sense-Data*

The situation is rather... that the employment of our ordinary, full-blooded concepts of physical objects is indispensable to a strict, and strictly veridical, account of our sensible experience. (Strawson, 'Perception and its Objects, p.96 in *Vision & Mind*.)

[mgfmartin@berkeley.edu](mailto:mgfmartin@berkeley.edu)