

## AN IDEALISTIC REPLY TO THE LATER MOORE

G. E. Moore's 'Refutation of Idealism' is well known. It would be of interest to examine the position of the later Moore in order to see how, if at all, it differs from the position taken by the early Moore.<sup>1</sup> As best as I can understand Moore's later position, it is this. Moore no longer subscribes to the position that there can be unsensed sensibilia, i. e., that blue exists independently of our sensing it. He does, however, insist that there are a class of objects of which it would be true to say that they exist independently of our sensing them, e. g., something which possesses the property of blue. This is, at least, what I understand Moore to be saying in these comments :

"In that early paper I really was asserting that the *sensible* quality "blue" (and, of course, also should have asserted the same of the *sensible* quality "bitter") *could* exist without being perceived: that there was no contradiction in supposing it to do so. Mr. Ducasse's view is that it *cannot*: that there is a contradiction in supposing it to do so. And on this issue I am now very much inclined to think that Mr. Ducasse is right and that I in that paper was wrong."<sup>2</sup>

.. "I now agree with Mr. Ducasse and Berkeley, and hold that early paper of mine was wrong. As an argument for my present view I should give the assertions that a toothache certainly cannot exist without being felt, but that, on the other hand, the moon certainly can exist without being perceived."<sup>3</sup>

.. "when we say that a tie is blue or quinine is bitter .. here each word stands for a *property* in Mr. Ducasse's sense of that term, and a property which may belong to physical objects, and hence certainly may exist when it is not being perceived."<sup>4</sup>

It would appear, then, that Professor Moore would not suppose that the sensible quality "blue" could exist without being perceived, but a blue thing could exist without being

perceived, e. g., a blue wall. But it is not at all clear how a *blue wall* can exist *without blue* existing. Professor Moore seems to hold that blue would exist as a property of the wall. But how can this be if the blue of the blue property cannot exist, outside of perception according to Moore ?

What then can it mean to say that the blue property of the wall exists outside of perception ? It can only mean, I suppose, that the wall possesses the property, not strictly speaking of blue but of being capable of exciting that blue upon being perceived. This seems to be the only way of saving Moore from a contradiction. Blueness can only exist in sensation according to Moore. But the wall can exist outside of sensation. If the wall can exist outside of sensation but blue cannot and blue is nonetheless a property of wall it seems that the only manner in which we can give meaning to the expression 'blue property' is to say that should the wall be observed by someone, that it is blue will be experienced. Yet, if this is what possessing a blue property means, (and it is difficult to see what else it can mean), then the wall must in some way be responsible for causing the sensation of blue to arise in us. Moore, in a word, is back to a causal theory of perception.

If, as we say, Moore is committed to a causal theory of perception, he cannot maintain a causal theory of perception while maintaining that blue is a property of wall. For, if blue arises in us upon our perception of wall, and this is our only contact with blue, then by what right can we say that same blue exists in the wall when it is not perceived ? We surely cannot say that we *know* that blue exists in the wall when it is not perceived.

Now, it might seem unfair to attribute causal and representative theories of perception to Moore, but we did so initially to save him from a contradiction. If we do not ascribe a causal and representative theory of perception to Moore, there is another consequence which will follow. There are two classes of entities for Moore, those which can exist unperceived ( as the moon ) and those which cannot ( as blue ). The class of entities which cannot exist except as perceived; are, for Moore, directly apprehended.

... 'I am inclined to think that it is as impossible that any-thing which has the sensible quality "blue" and, more generally, *anything whatever which is directly apprehended*

any sense-datum, that is, should exist unperceived, as it is that a headache should exist unfelt."<sup>5</sup>

It would seem from this analysis that Moore holds that whatever is directly apprehended cannot exist apart from perception. If this is true then whatever exists apart from perception cannot be directly apprehended. It follows then either that the moon, for example, is not directly apprehended (in which case, I take it, we are involved with some form of a causal theory of perception), or, that the moon does not exist apart from being perceived. Now, of these two alternatives, I think that Moore would prefer the first.

Moore is himself troubled by the problem. He wants both to be able to say that we can directly apprehend objects and still maintain realism. He states his puzzlement with regard to the question of whether physical surfaces are directly or indirectly apprehended.

"Now at the end of the last section I said that I was strongly inclined to agree with Mr. Murphy and Mr. Marhenke that physical surfaces are directly apprehended. I am, therefore, now saying that I am strongly inclined to take a view incompatible with that which I then said I was strongly inclined to take. And this is the truth. I am strongly inclined to take both of these incompatible views. I am completely puzzled about the matter, and only wish I could see any way of settling it."<sup>6</sup>

Moore wants to be able to say that we can directly see objects which possess qualities and yet he realizes that he cannot say this or else he must give up his realism, for whatever is directly apprehended cannot exist apart from being perceived according to his own notions. How can we resolve this problem?

It seems that the resolution to this problem is the realization that we do not directly perceive objects but that what we call an object is a creation of the mind. We *hear* a sound; we infer that it is a train. We *see* a color, a line, a shape; we *judge* that it is a chair.<sup>7</sup> If we understand that our peculiar mode of grouping qualities together so as to make of them objects is a function of

the human intellect and does not reflect what exists in independence from the human intellect, we should be able to resolve Moore's dilemma. It is Moore's conception that *we directly see objects* that is a cause of his difficulties. A fuller conception of the contribution of the human mind to perception would, I think, obviate many of his difficulties. Let us examine a particular case in point. We may take a very late description of sensation given by Moore :

"It seems to me evident that I cannot see the *sensible* quality blue, without *directly seeing* something which *has* that quality - a blue patch, or a blue speck, or a blue line, or a blue spot, etc., in the sense in which an after-image, seen with closed eyes, may be any of these things."<sup>8</sup>

Now, that blue is seen no one would deny. What we might alter in Moore's description is the status of the object. We could just as easily say that it is blue which has the quality shape, could we not? Or, we could say that it is the patch which is blueing. Another possible description of the blue pattern is that it is the patch which is in the blue. In all of these cases the same qualities are seen; it is only the arrangement of them that differs.

The point of these varying possible descriptions is that our arrangement of colors and lines into what we call objects is a matter of epistemological convenience. The fact that varying and differing descriptions are possible indicates that no one description can claim to be the description of the way things are. It indicates, I think, that what we call a "blue patch" is not something that we directly see, but is a composition which we have made up because it best fits our epistemological natures. "Blue patch" is something done, rather than something directly seen. The resolution to G. E. Moore's dilemma is that we never perceive objects; what we call an object is a creation of the mind.

## NOTES

1. For an examination of Moore's classic position, cf., R. E. Allinson, 'A Non-Dualistic Reply to Moore's Refutation of Idealism', *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. V, No. 4, pp. 661-668.
2. G. E. Moore, 'A Reply to my Critics' *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, p. 658.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 653 (emphasis his).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 658 (emphasis his).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 658 (emphasis his).
6. *Ibid.*, p. 658-9 (emphasis his).
7. It is a more complicated affair than simply this, to be sure. There is combination in conformance to certain rules. But the example makes the point clear. For the rest, one may be referred to Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *Transcendental Analytic*.
8. *Op. cit.*, p. 659 (emphasis his).

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