
It seems to me quite plain that one of the commonest senses in which the word 'see' can be correctly used in English, perhaps the commonest of all, is that in which a particular person can be said, at a particular time, to be 'seeing' such objects as, e.g. a particular penny, a particular chair, a particular tree, a particular flower, or a particular horse, his own right hand, the moon, the planet Venus, etc. etc.—objects which I will call 'physical objects'. I have, indeed, once met a philosopher who told me I was making a great mistake in thinking that such objects are ever seen. But I think this philosopher was certainly wrong, and was thinking that the various correct uses of 'see' are limited in a way in which they are not in fact limited. I think there is no doubt whatever that the word 'see' can be correctly used in such a sense that, e.g. the words 'I have often seen pennies' or 'I have often seen the moon' when used by me and by many other people, are correct ways of expressing propositions which are true. I, personally, have in fact often seen pennies and often seen the moon, and so have many other people. But, nevertheless, I think there is a puzzle as to how the word 'see' is being used in this common usage.

There are two kinds of physical objects which we may at a particular moment be said to be 'seeing' in this common sense, viz. (1) objects which are transparent, like a drop of clear water or any ordinary glass tumbler or wineglass, and (2) objects which are opaque, like a penny or the moon. In the former case it seems possible that you may, in certain cases, see the whole object at once, both every part of its surface and its inside: it is, at all events, not clear that, in certain cases, you don't do this. But, in the case of opaque objects, it seems perfectly clear that you can be correctly said to be 'seeing' the object, in cases where (in another sense of 'see') you are only seeing one or several 'sides' of the opaque object, i.e. some part of its surface, but emphatically not all parts of its surface nor its inside. It seems, indeed, doubtful whether you can be correctly said to be seeing it unless you are seeing a sufficiently large part of its surface; and I am inclined to think that how large a part of its surface is 'sufficient' to entitle you to say you are seeing it is different in the case of different objects: e.g. it is quite plain that you can be correctly said to be seeing the moon when you only see the very thinnest crescent, whereas if you only saw such a small part of the surface of a penny, it would be doubtful if it could be correctly said that you were seeing that penny: you would be inclined to say that you did not see it, but only a small part of its rim. But where, for instance, you see the whole of the 'tail' side of a penny, but don't see the 'head' side, there is no doubt whatever that you can be correctly said to be seeing the penny. What is meant by 'seeing' the penny in such a case? There seems to me no doubt that, if you said to yourself, as you might, That is a penny', the demonstrative 'that' would be short for a phrase of the kind which Russell has called a 'definite description'; and, if you only said this to yourself, there would, of course, be no need for you to point at or touch anything, in order to show which object you were referring to, since you would be able to identify the object without any such gesture. The 'definite description' for which your 'that' would be short would be the object of which this is part of the surface'; and if 'know by description' were used in the way in which Russell uses it in *The Problems of Philosophy* (ch. v) you could be said to 'know' the penny 'only by description', although you can also correctly be said to be seeing the penny. I think, however, that this is an incorrect use of the word 'know'. We do not use the words 'See' or
'Perceive' in such a way that what you see or perceive is necessarily 'known' to you at all. Perhaps we might say that the penny in such a case is only 'seen by description'. But the important point is that, if in your 'That is a penny', the demonstrative that' is short for a definite description, then your proposition that is a penny' is a proposition which is 'about' or 'refers to' two objects at once, not only to one. This can be easily seen by looking at an example similar to what Russell gives as an example of a sentence which contains a definite description. Consider the sentence, The author of Waverley was a Scot.' It is undeniable that the proposition expressed by these English words says something about two objects, and not only about one. It says something both about the novel Waverley and about its author. About the novel Waverley it says that it had one and only one author, and does not say that this novel was a Scot. But it does also say something not about the novel, but about its author; for it is of its author that it says he was a Scot.

But now, it is quite clear that, in the sentence, The author of Waverley was a Scot', the word Waverley* is also short for a description. It may be short, on different occasions, for a number of different descriptions. What do I mean by saying, as is true, that I possess a copy of Waverley? I might mean, and this is one of the simplest possible descriptions, 'I possess a copy of the book which was called Waverley by its author.' But, quite certainly, the novel Waverley is not being directly perceived by me now, though I am making a proposition about it. May it not be the case that, in our sentence 'the object of which this is part of the surface', the word 'this' is also short for a description? This seems to me to bring out the really puzzling question about the meaning of 'see' where the physical object which is seen is opaque; and there is a similar question where the physical object is perfectly transparent. I will only try to explain what the question seems to me to be in what is the simplest, but, also, I think, far the commonest case. The case in question is the case in which both (1) We are not seeing the physical object 'double', i.e. are not having what is often called a 'double image' of it, and (2) are not seeing two or more parts of the object's surface which are separated from one another by parts of its surface which we are not seeing, because they are hidden by intervening opaque objects. It is, I think, quite clear that you can correctly be said to 'see' a particular physical object in the common sense, even in cases where one or both of these conditions is (or are) not fulfilled; but I think far the commonest case is that in which both are fulfilled, and I propose to confine myself to that case.

What is the puzzle in the case of opaque objects seen under these conditions? It arises from the fact, which everybody knows, that, even where there is only one single part of an opaque object's surface which a man is seeing, and that part is large enough to entitle him to say correctly that he is seeing the object, yet the part of its surface in question may 'look' different to two different people who are both seeing that surface at the same time. For it seems to me quite plain that what is meant by saying that the same surface 'looks' different to two different people is that each is 'seeing', in a sense which I have called 'directly see', an entity which really is different from what the other is seeing. I have tried to explain what I mean by 'directly see' by saying that I use that expression to mean that sense of 'see' in which, if you look at, e.g. an electric light, then close your eyes and 'get', while your eyes are still closed, what is often called an 'after-image' of the light, you can be said to 'see' this after-image. It seems to me quite plain that 'see' can be correctly used in such a way that, in such a case, you do see the so-called 'afterimage', although, in that case, you are certainly not seeing in the common sense any physical object whatever. And it also seems to me plain that, to say that, e.g. if I am wearing blue spectacles, a wall which is white but not bluish-white 'looks' bluish-white to me, is merely another way of saying that I am directly seeing an expanse which really is of a bluish-white colour, and which at the same time has to the surface which is not bluish-white a specific re-
lation which, for the moment, I will call 'R'—a relation which entitles me to assert that, in directly seeing that bluish-white expanse, I am seeing the surface of the wall which is not bluish-white.

If I am not directly seeing a bluish-white expanse which has some such relation to a wall which is not bluish-white, how can I possibly know that that wall is looking bluish-white to me? It seems to me quite plain that I cannot 'see' in the common sense any physical object whatever without its 'looking' somehow to me, and, therefore, without my directly seeing some entity which has R to the object I am said to see, if the object is transparent and I am seeing the whole of it; and, if the object is opaque, under the conditions we are assuming, has R to the part of its surface which is the only part of its surface which I am seeing. And I think it is true that I so use the phrase Visual sense-datum that, from the fact that any entity is 'directly seen', in the sense explained, that entity is a visual sense-datum.

It is, I think, important to notice that it is only if 'looks' is used in one particular sense, that to say that a wall which is not bluish-white looks bluish-white to me involves the proposition that I am directly seeing a bluish-white expanse which has R to a surface that is not bluish-white. For there is another sense in which the word looks' is, I think, often used such that this consequence is not involved. What the two senses of 'looks' are can, I think, be very easily seen by considering the fact that if you see (in the common sense) two boats on the sea, one of which is quite near and the other at a considerable distance, you may be able to say with truth both (1) that the distant boat looks much smaller than the near one and (2) that the distant boat 'looks as if it were' much larger than the near one. Now, if 'looks' is used, as I think it sometimes is, to mean the same as what I have just expressed by 'looks as if it were', then proposition (2) could be expressed by 'The distant boat looks much larger than the near one', which would be inconsistent with proposition (1), unless 'looks' were being used in a different sense in expressing (2) from that in which it is used in expressing (1). But the two propositions are obviously not inconsistent with one another, hence 'looks', if it is used to express 'looks as if it were', must be used in a different sense from that in which it is used in (1). It is only if it is used as in (1) that it seems to me quite plain that the proposition that a physical surface looks bluish-white to me, entails that I am directly seeing an entity that is bluish-white.

Professor Ayer seems to have entirely misunderstood my view as to the relation of what I call a Visual sense-datum to such a proposition as is expressed by This is a penny; for he asserts, twice over, that I take a visual sense-datum to be the only object about which we are making an assertion when we say This is a penny.\footnote{Philosophical Essays, p. 78, note 3.} I never, of course, held any view so silly. If I had, I should have been asserting that a visual sense-datum is what is being asserted to be a penny! He seems to have failed to understand that my view was that the demonstrative this', in such an expression, is short for a definite description, and that, therefore, in saying This is a penny we are making a proposition about two objects, and not about one only, just as, when we say The author of Waverley was a Scot, we are making an assertion (but a different one) both about the novel Waverley and about its author. I do hold that, in making the assertion This is a penny, I am asserting something about the novel Waverley. But in both cases I am 'referring to' and 'denoting' (but in different senses) two different objects and not one only. It does not seem to have occurred to him that 'this', even when it 'refers to' an object which we are, in the common sense, 'seeing', may be short for a definite description; and that I was holding that in, This is a penny, it is short for a definite description, and, therefore, 'refers to' at least two objects, though in different senses. It is true I have said that, in such a case, a visual sense-datum is 'the real or ultimate subject' of our judgment,\footnote{Philosophical Studies, p. 236 [p. 14, this volume. Ed.].}
which, of course, implies that it is not the only subject: but this expression is perhaps, nevertheless, misleading, and ought not to have been used. I used it because I was so impressed, as I still am, by the extreme difference between a 'this' which is short for a definite description and a 'this' which 'refers to' a visual sense-datum which is being directly perceived at the moment.

But I have to own that I now think I was mistaken in supposing that, in the case of 'seeing' an opaque-object, where in seeing it you are seeing only one visual sense-datum, the sense-datum can possibly be identical with that part of the opaque object's surface which you are seeing. I now think that it cannot possibly be identical with that part of the object's surface, i.e. that the relation which I have called 'R' above cannot possibly be the relation of identity. Until very recently I had thought that, though some of the arguments that purported to show that it cannot were strong, yet they were not conclusive, because I thought that, e.g. in the case where you directly see an 'after-image' with closed eyes, it was just possible that the after-image only looked to have certain colours and shape and size, and did not really have them. I made this suggestion in Some Judgments of Perception, but said there, several times, that it was perhaps nonsensical.\(^1\) I well remember that, at the Aristotelian meeting at which I read that paper, Russell said that the suggestion certainly was nonsensical. I now feel sure that he was right; but, if so, then, when the same surface looks different at the same time to different people, the sense-datum which the one directly sees is certainly not identical with that which the other directly sees, and, therefore, they cannot both be identical with the surface which both are seeing. I was, therefore, certainly mistaken in supposing that, where an opaque object is seen, in the common sense, and only one sense-datum is directly seen in seeing it, the sense-datum in question is always identical with the part of the object's surface which is being seen. I was misled by the fact that it seems to me that you can always rightly say, in such a case, of a sense-datum which you are directly seeing, 'This sense-datum is a part of the surface of a physical object.' I took it that the is always expresses identity, but it now seems to me that it certainly does not. But I still think that no philosopher, so far as I know, has explained clearly what the relation R is, where it is not identity.

\(^1\) Ibid., pp. 245, 247, 252 [pp. 22, 24, 28, this volume. Ed.].