

significantly like a name in his utterances. If I used "E.A." like that, and had no first-person inflections of verbs and no such words as "I", I should be in a difficulty to frame the proposition corresponding to my present proposition: "I am E.A." The nearest I could get would be, for example, "E.A. is the object E.A." That is, "E.A. is the object referred to by people who identify something as E.A."

There is a mistake that it is very easy to make here. It is that of supposing that the difference of self-consciousness, the difference I have tried to bring before your minds as that between "I"-users and "A"-users, is a private experience. That there is this asymmetry about "I": for the hearer or reader it is in principle no different from "A"; for the speaker or thinker, the "I"-saying subject, it is different. Now this is not so: the difference between "I"-users and "A"-users would be perceptible to observers. To bring this out, consider the following story from William James. James, who insisted (rightly, if I am right) that consciousness is quite distinct from self-consciousness, reproduces an instructive letter from a friend: "We were driving . . . in a wagonette; the door flew open and X, alias 'Baldy', fell out on the road. We pulled up at once, and then he said 'Did anyone fall out?' or 'Who fell out?' - I don't exactly remember the words. When told that Baldy fell out he said 'Did Baldy fall out? Poor Baldy!'"<sup>8</sup>

If we met people who were A-users and had no other way of speaking of themselves, we would notice it quite quickly, just as his companions noticed what was wrong with Baldy. It was not that he used his own name. That came afterwards. What instigated someone to give information to him in the form "Baldy fell out" was, I suppose, that his behaviour already showed the lapse of self-consciousness, as James called it. He had just fallen out of the carriage, he was conscious, and he had the idea that someone had fallen out of the carriage - or he knew that someone had, but wondered who! That was the indication of how things were with him.

Even if they had spoken a language without the word "I", even if they had had one without any first-person inflexion,<sup>9</sup> but everybody used his own name in his expressions of self-consciousness, even so, Baldy's conduct would have had just the same significance. It wasn't that he used "Baldy" and not "I" in what he said. It was that his thought of the happening, falling out of the carriage, was one for which he looked for a subject, his grasp of it one which required a subject. And that could be explained even if we didn't have "I" or distinct first-person inflexions. He did not have what I call 'unmediated agent-or-patient conceptions of actions, happenings and states'. These conceptions are subjectless. That is, they do not involve the connection of what is understood by a predicate with a distinctly conceived subject. The (deeply rooted) grammatical illusion of a subject is what generates all the errors which we have been considering.

<sup>8</sup> *Principles of Psychology*, II (London 1901), p. 273 n.

<sup>9</sup> In Latin we have "ambulo" = "I walk". There is no subject-term. There is no need of one.

### 3 Substance

The raising of certain difficulties about the notion of substance belongs especially to the British Empiricist - that is to say our - tradition. We can see a starting-point for them in Descartes' considerations about the wax in the Second Meditation. Descartes concluded there that it was by an act of purely intellectual perception that we judge the existence of such a thing as *this* wax - a doctrine the meaning of which is obscure.

Let me sketch at least some of the troubles that have been felt on this subject. First, there is the idea of the individual object. What sort of idea is that, and how got? This individual object is the same - 'persists' as we say - through many changes in its sensible properties, or sensible appearances; what is the individual itself all this time? Second, supposing that question should be answered in the case in hand by 'It is wax', is it not one objection to this answer that it gives a *general* term "wax" as an answer to the question "What is the individual?" Surely we wanted to know: what is the individual thing *qua* individual, in its individuality? And this cannot be answered by giving a predicate which not merely logically can be true of many individuals, but does actually fail to mark out this one from others. Next, even accepting this answer: "It is wax", what can being wax be except: being white and solid at such and such temperatures, melting at such and such temperatures . . . etc., etc.? Are not the ideas of kinds of substances given by more or less arbitrary lists chosen from the properties found by experience to go together? In that case, the general idea 'wax' will be equivalent to the chosen list; and the particular, individual, parcel of wax is at any time the sum of its sensible appearances. Any other notion of substance surely commits us on the one hand to unknowable real essences, and on the other to an unintelligible 'bare particular' which underlies the appearances and is the subject of predication but just for that reason can't *in itself* be characterized by any predicates. This picture of the appearances or the properties as a sort of clothes reminds one of Butler's lines about Prime Matter:

He had first matter seen undrest;  
He took her naked, all alone,  
Before one rag of form was on.

The picture of substance is too unacceptable, so following Russell we must speak of 'bundles of qualities' or following Ayer of 'totalities of appearances' which are unified not by their relation to some further entity but by their own interrelations. We would rather not admit anything so doubtful as that

'obscure and relative' idea of substance which Locke said the ideas of qualities, actions and powers brought with them: the idea, namely, of the substrate which supports them. (Indeed I believe that the sort of account you get in H. W. B. Joseph of the ultimate characterless subject of predication is a conflation of Locke on substance and (an attempt to understand) Aristotle on the matter of substantial change – the stuff which is not *as such* X, and not not-X either, whatever X may be.)

These were standard arguments and opinions in the times when I was growing up, and they are probably still extremely familiar. One doctrine closely associated with them, which has been criticized before but is in constant need of rebuttal, is the view that the *individual* has no 'nominal essence', that the proper name either lacks all connotation, or has that of a more or less arbitrarily incomplete description giving the history of the individual. This doctrine indeed concerns all proper names, not just those of substances, but it does concern substances too. About this I have written elsewhere, and here will merely repeat that to describe a word as a proper name at all is a great deal of information about its sense, which only needs completion by saying of what kind of thing it is a proper name. The doctrine that individuals have nothing that is essential to them suggests a phantasmic notion of the individual as a 'bare particular' with no properties, because it supposes a continued identity independent of what is true of the object. This was thought to be *the* notion of substance, to which the objections were well known.<sup>1</sup> One of the considerations brought forward in erecting this notion (for it is not a straw man, real humans *have* gone in for it) seems so idiotic as to be almost incredible, namely that the substance is the entity that has the properties, and so it itself has not properties. Philosophers have been divided between those who defend some such notion as necessary and those who reject substance because it involves this notion and is therefore itself absurd.

The lump of wax melts and becomes liquid. The argument – if it can be called that – for the propertyless subject would suggest that the subject of the properties 'melting' and 'liquidity' is the individual which in itself has no properties. This must depend on taking "in itself" to mean "apart from having properties". But another possible meaning of "in itself" does not lead to the characterless substrate which people supposed was meant by "substance". "What a thing has in itself" might mean "What is always and necessarily true of it". Descartes' argument was that the wax must be something grasped by the intelligence because all the sensible properties changed but it was the same wax. Now this argument does not require a propertyless subject, but a subject with some permanent properties – which, however, he says are not 'sensible properties'.

What does Descartes mean by sensible properties? He mentions colour,

<sup>1</sup> Alas, this belief is not so much a thing of the past as I supposed. See for example A. H. Basson's *David Hume* (London, 1958), pp. 136 ff., and J. P. Griffin's *Wittgenstein's Logical Atomism* (Oxford, 1964), p. 71 – the ink of this one is scarcely dry.

shape, size, being liquid, being hot, yielding no sound when rapped. After heating, "Whatever fell under taste, smell, sight, touch, or hearing has now changed".

There are relevant differences between the properties mentioned. Visible colour, shape and size are not substance-involving. 'The sound it gives out if you rap it' seems to be substance-involving in this sense: the question arises "If you rap what?" and the answer is "the wax". But sound itself of course is not substance-involving. What I mean by "not substance-involving" is this: you can suppose a man to see a coloured expanse without there having to be any substance (or, of course, collection of substances) *whose* expanse, or part of whose expanse, it is. One of the problems of epistemology that first strikes one – did first strike me – is: how do I know the things I look at have behinds? Why shouldn't they have the sort of merely phenomenal existence a rainbow has? This question arises because colour, together with its determinations of shape and size, is not substance-involving. Just this is what I take a philosopher to be driving at if he says things like "All I have got when I look, and, as I say, see a red curtain, is a visual content specifiable as light and dark and colour patches thus and so arranged." I do not think he is effectually answered by deriding him for saying by implication that he does not, strictly speaking, see a red curtain hanging in folds.

The properties known as secondary qualities in modern philosophy have a claim to be called "sensible" in a much more restricted sense than that in which we could say malleability was sensible. To receive impressions of secondary qualities, you merely have to let the appropriate sense-organ be affected; that is why one can always imagine that the quality is a *mere* sense content. This is indeed a lot easier to imagine for 'white' than for 'soft' but it can be imagined for all those qualities.

But no list only of *those* sensible properties would be adequate to comprise the idea – the 'nominal definition' – of a particular substantial kind. There are always further properties, such as malleability and melting at 44 °C, which, though eminently ascertainable by the senses, are substance-involving properties. The red patch you see might have – could be imagined to have – only the sort of existence that a rainbow does. If I asked someone to see if the rainbow was malleable or melted at 44 °C, this would imply a conception of a rainbow as made of a kind of stuff.

Let us now consider the reasonableness of defining a substance as the totality of its appearances. "The appearances" of a substance suggests its sensible properties in the restricted sense, i.e. the secondary qualities, together with their qualifications of size, shape and mutual arrangement.

The reason is this: usually our judgements of what is there are right, and then we don't have to bother about appearances; but when they are wrong we can retreat to appearances. This retreat may consist merely in saying "It *looked* as if there were a fly on the painting, but actually there was no fly" (where the appearance is one of a fly), or, extending the notion of 'appearance' to the sense of touch, "It *felt* as if there were fur there in the hole

where I put my hand – but there was not”. Here the appearance is one of fur: an appearance to the sense of touch, as that of the fly was to the sense of sight.

Now when there are such appearances, the secondary qualities involved are usually not mere *appearances* of secondary qualities. In a *trompe l'oeil* painting the colours aren't a mere appearance; rather they, in their disposition and relation to the surroundings, are what yields, or at least are a necessary element in, the appearance of there being a fly on the painting of a lily, or an archway in a wall leading into another room. And the felt softness bears the same sort of relation to the incorrect judgement “There's fur there” as the colour patches do to the incorrect judgement “There is a doorway there”. If one did not know what was there, but knew only – no matter how – that the judgement one was inclined to make, “That's a fly” (or, “It's fur”) was wrong, one could retreat to the description of the colour patches (the texture) as what one saw (felt) *in that* one was inclined to think one saw a fly (felt fur). And there does not in fact have to be illusion or incorrect judgement to *entitle* one to make this sort of retreat; that type of case merely *forces* one to retreat and that is the use of considering it.

For these reasons, quite generally there is I think no objection to calling the ‘secondary qualities’ (with their immediate qualifications) “appearances” of the things we incline to think are there when perceiving the qualities. But malleability, though a sensible property, is not like this: it is not in any case an *appearance* of the malleable thing. There can of course be an appearance of malleability in the sense that someone could make it look as if something were malleable when it was not; but that does not mean that “malleability” is itself a word for an appearance – for a way things strike the senses.

We can see three ranks of predicate that apply to substances; the substantial ones themselves, like “alive”, “horse”, “gold”; the predicates that are not substantial but are substance-involving like “malleable”, “in powder form”, “awake”; and predicates that are neither substantial nor substance-involving. These are the secondary-quality words, together with such qualifications as go with them.

To repeat, if I asked you to see if the rainbow would melt at 44 °C, this would imply a conception of a rainbow as composed of stuff, so that a sample of it could be brought away and subjected to tests. “Malleability” means that the stuff can be beaten into a shape which it will then retain if not further interfered with. Thus you could not consider whether something was malleable unless you had the conception of a lump of stuff whose properties could be further investigated – but that is already to have a partial conception of substance. Thus, though malleability is obviously a sensible property, nevertheless a thoroughgoing phenomenalist would want to analyse it out, just as he would want to analyse the substantial predicates out.

Substantial predicates are more than substance-involving. They tell you what kind or kinds of substance *that lump of stuff* is. Something must be *that lump of stuff* in order to be so much as a candidate for having malleability.

This makes it sound as if it were normal to pass from the bare characterization “lump of stuff” straight to the enquiry into substance-involving predicates. While this may happen, it is not normal; the lump is generally already known to be a lump of stuff of a certain kind – a bit of copper, say – and the kind is told you more or less specifically by the substantial predicates. Very many substantial predicates enter naturally into the characterization of appearances – it felt like fur, it looked like metal. It is notorious that these characterizations are often irreducible. If it felt like fur, it felt soft; but with the quite peculiar softness characteristic of this or that kind of fur.

But the fact that something looks, smells, tastes, feels and sounds like *X* – or as many of these as is possible – does not prove that it is *X*: for all this is appearance, capable of conflicting with reality. For example it may not have the right origin or chemical structure or reactive properties to be *X*. Predicates expressing a substance's origin are likely to be and predicates expressing its chemical structure are certainly themselves substantial predicates.

Some people will want to know why the secondary qualities are not substance-involving. I said that the red that you see might have an existence like that of the rainbow; it might be a colour to be seen from this position, but not the colour of any substance. It may be said to me: “Suppose you *know quite well* that it is the colour of the red plate you are looking at. You see what evidently is a plain red plate of uniform colour. The supposition that this is simply a red patch, to be seen when you look in that direction, with no more substantial existence than a rainbow has, is plain ridiculous: you know there is no question of it. The red is the red of the *plate*, just as that other bit of red is the red of the *curtain*. The plate and the curtain are of course not hidden, not occult substrates which you cannot know; but they imply a substantial existence, and reference to them enters into your account of the expanses of red that you see. So aren't colours also substance-involving, when they are the colours of objects? Admittedly this is not the same manner of substance-involvement as malleability has; but, from the fact that not all the red that you may see has to be the red *of* anything, you have inferred that no red that you see can be immediately perceived to be the red of something; and that is wildly unjustified.”

I fear that this involves us in a fresh start. Descartes defined substance as what needs nothing else (apart from divine co-operation) in order to exist; but if he were faced with the objection that many substances need oxygen, or a certain temperature, to exist, he would no doubt say he had not meant that; so presumably he meant something like Aristotle, who defined individual substance as what exists without either being predicated of or existing in anything else.

Now let us consider the red patches of Cambridge twentieth-century philosophy (“I see a red patch” seemed to be very clear, very certain, very safe), and ask: Are these substances by the Aristotelico-Cartesian account?

They were certainly supposed to be individuals, particulars – should we then say: they ought to have been conceived as substances, if a substance has independent existence, i.e. exists not in another thing?

The answer to this will depend on (1) whether these red patches, assumed to be real entities, are supposed to be pure objects of sense and (2) whether they are thought not merely to have an *esse* which is *percipi* but also to exist essentially in dependence on an act of *percipere* by a mental substance. I am only concerned with the former question, which I think will be explained, if not resolved, by the following:

If what I am looking at is a plain red plate, then there is before me and in plain view an expanse of a standing red colour. But I see a certain variation produced by the shadowing of some part of the plate, which is not flat but has a slope up to its edge. If I look carefully I will see a lot of variation in the appearance of the surface, very light spots and tiny short streaks, some a matter of particles of dust settled there, some a matter of minute variations of light and shadow. Also I see high-lights. Yet I say with confidence that this is a uniformly red plate. I learn to say “red plate” “white door” without regard to shines and streaks and variations of light and dark. Now if I speak of the red patch that I see, is *the part where the high-light is* part of the red patch? That part of the expanse is of a standing red colour, and I say I see something of a uniform red colour. But if where I see not red but a high-light is part of the red patch that I see, then that red patch is not something whose *esse* is *percipi*. Its red colour is a standing red colour, not seen by me in all parts, although I see the whole expanse in question. Then it is not a substance by the Aristotelico-Cartesian definition: its identity is that of the standing colour of that part of the surface of a plate, and its existence is in something else.

Now for a phenomenalist *this* red patch, which = the expanse of plate visible to me, is just as much a construct, an inference, as the plate itself. The fact that the high-light moves about on the plate when one moves one's head or moves the plate proves that it is just a *shine*; but that it *will* so move can't be *seen* in seeing it, but only judged or guessed on some grounds – and the grounds must be the way it now looks together with my past experience.

Is there not a description which gives simply what is *seen* – and does not depend on whether one or another thing which can't possibly be being seen is the case? Certainly one sees a plate; yet it isn't a plate if it has no behind, and one doesn't see in one viewing that it has a behind. So surely “a plate” is simply a true description of what what one sees in fact *is*, and also perhaps one's straight-off description of what it strikes one as; but yet in a sense of “sees” there is more than can be *seen* to calling it a plate – as in the case of John Austin's “To-day I saw a man born in Jerusalem” (said in Oxford). Of course there isn't a born-in-Jerusalem look about a man, so that case is particularly clear – but aren't the two cases essentially similar? We are merely distracted by the fact that there is no born-in-Jerusalem look about a man – whereas there is a plate-look about. . . .

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About *what?* – Here one wants to say something like: the *red patch as seen* – the one that isn't red where the high-lights are and that is variegated by shadows and all sorts of spots and streaks.

But even this red patch is not one whose *esse* is *percipi*, unless one can be supposed not to notice the true character of that whose *esse* is *percipi*, to observe it more closely, to realize one had mistaken it. For the realization of the spots and streaks and shadows and high-lights is a gradual process of discovery.

Locke:

When we set before our eyes a round globe of any uniform colour, e.g. gold, alabaster or jet, it is certain that the idea thereby imprinted in our mind is of a flat circle variously shadowed, with several degrees of light and brightness coming to our eyes. But we having by use been accustomed to perceive what kind of appearance convex bodies are wont to make in us, what alterations are made in the reflections of light by the difference of the sensible figures of bodies, the judgment presently, by an habitual custom, alters the appearances into their causes: so that, from that which truly is variety of shadow or colour collecting the figure, it makes it pass for a mark of figure, and frames to itself the perception of a convex figure and an uniform colour; when the idea we receive from thence is only a plane variously coloured, as is evident in painting.

The notion of the ‘idea’ as Locke calls it (or visual sensation, impression, experience or datum, as later writers have called the same thing) is in this context, I suggest, a conflation of disparate notions: *What I have the impression of seeing* – which may be quite properly said to be “a globe” or “a red plate” – and something quite different and very difficult to get at, which we want to call the “*purely visual*” about what is seen. It is what you'd get if, adopting the suggestion of Leonardo, you held up a glass pane vertically before you when you were looking straight ahead and supposed to be painted on it with utter accuracy *exactly* the colour behind it, as seen, in every part of it. The result represents what is thought of as the minimal, uninterpreted visual impression, which is the basis of all else. And it seems as though in this conception the difference between the objective and the subjective appearance – between the highlight, or colour changed by the light it is seen in, on the one hand, and the drug-induced or astigmatic colours and perspectives, on the other – is quite unimportant. But this pane would in turn be only an ordinary object of perception: it does duty for something else; it merely carries what *has to be understood as a picture of a purely visual object*.