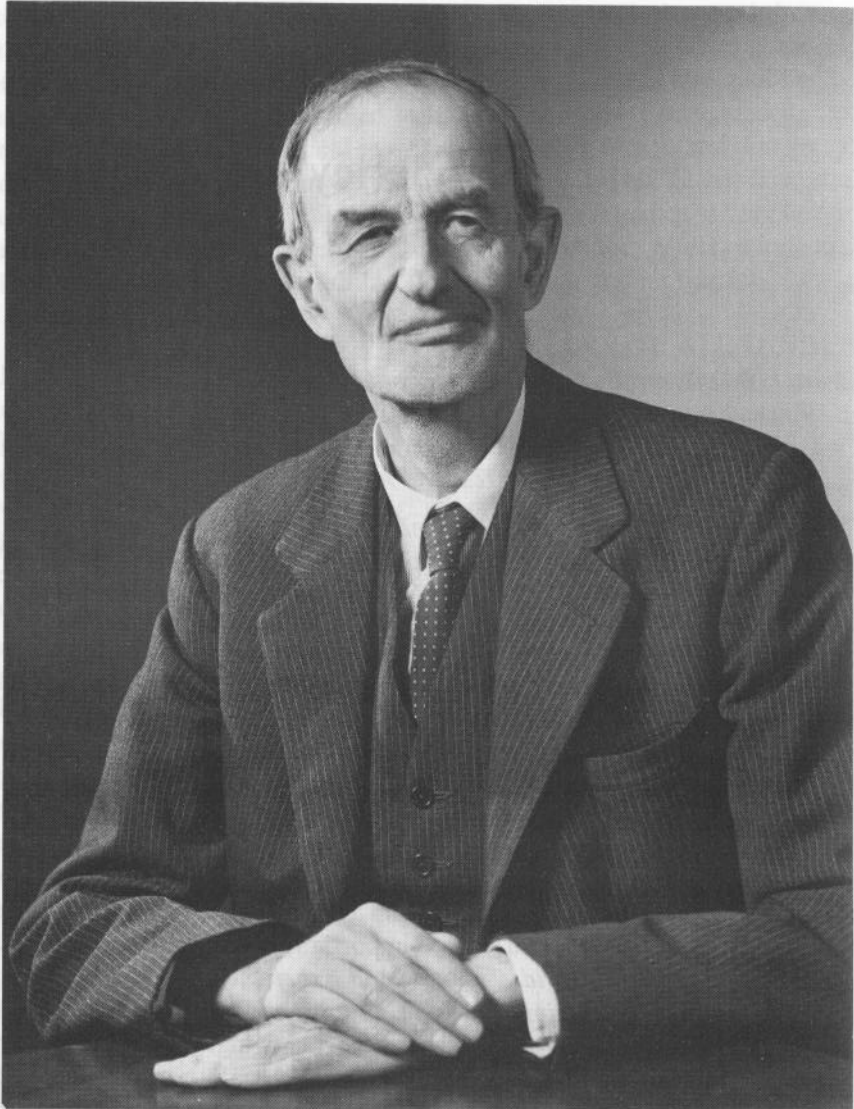


## Henry Habberley Price 1899–1984

HENRY HABBERLEY PRICE was born in August, 1899. He was a pupil at Winchester and a scholar of New College, Oxford. He obtained a First in Lit. Hum, in 1921. He was subsequently to become Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford (1922–4), Assistant Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Liverpool (1922–3), Fellow and Lecturer at Trinity College, Oxford (1924–35), Lecturer in Philosophy in the University of Oxford (1932–5), and then, from 1935, Wykeham Professor of Logic (at New College) in the University of Oxford. (It is said that a group of younger members of the Philosophy Faculty visited Sir David Ross, one of the selectors, to advocate his appointment.) He was elected to a Fellowship of the British Academy in 1943. While he was at Oxford he held visiting Professorships at Princeton and Los Angeles. He gave the Sarum Lectures (Oxford, 1970–1), the Boutwood Lectures (Cambridge, 1965) and the Gifford Lectures (Aberdeen, 1959–60). He was awarded an honorary D.Litt by the Universities of Dublin, St. Andrews and Wales. He was twice President of the Society for Psychological Research (1939–40 and 1960–1). He was the author of numerous and influential articles for learned journals. His books, most of which were and still are important, were *Perception*, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, *Thinking and Experience*, *Belief* and *Essays on the Philosophy of Religion*. He was a pilot in the R.A.F during the first world war (1917–19), and never lost an interest in flying. He was a founder member of the Oxford Flying Club. He was a keen painter, which interest was closely connected with his study of perception. He was an enthusiastic ornithologist, and possessed an enviable collection of replicas (I am glad to say) of owls, a bird which he was supposed to resemble. He was devotedly looked after by his sister for many years.

Henry Price was one of the kindest and most conscientious men I knew.

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H. H. PRICE

*Ramsey & Muspratt*

It used to be said that the nastiest thing he could bring himself to say in criticism of another philosopher was 'There may be something in what you say', though I believe this is to do him an injustice. (I never knew whether he tended to overrate people, or was just too polite not to seem to overrate them. I suspect it was the latter.) It was said that if he received an unsolicited book from a publisher he felt under an obligation to pay for it. Once, realising that he had forgotten that he had undertaken to address a meeting of a student Philosophy society in Liverpool, he chartered a plane as the only way of getting there on time. His conscience, however, was mainly directed at himself, the only other persons he felt disapproval of being, I am told, drivers who slowed him down.

He was an excellent lecturer. During my time in Oxford, when many lecturers lost most or all of their classes before their courses were complete, his lectures were always well attended. I myself have never been to a course of lectures which I have found more interesting, more lucid, more considerately presented, or more enlightening. They were given with that apparent ease which can only be the product (though unfortunately it is not the invariable product) of much thought and the taking of endless pains. There was no nonsense about encouraging discussion, which took place in his informal instruction classes. As a teacher Price had the ability to make one feel that one's clumsiest remarks were novel and interesting. Indeed, I have always harboured the delusion, if it was one, that his enthusiasm for the subject was so great that he really did find one's remarks interesting. He had the gift of being able to devote his whole attention to one when he discussed anything.

Price was an extremely modest man. He possessed that very great and genuine humility, which sprang from a vision of the enormous extent of one's subject in comparison with one's own limited powers, which is lacked by those with little imagination. I suspect this, combined with the arrogance of some others, caused him to be sometimes underrated by those insufficiently discerning not to take at its face value humility in those more able than themselves. He always wrote with the same very great clarity with which he lectured, and, though sometimes I felt that his anxiety to be understood, especially at times when he was misunderstood, made him repeat himself unnecessarily, this was doubtless a fault on the right side. There was nothing superficial, pretentious, or slipshod about his work. If he did not thoroughly understand what he was saying, he did not say it. Philosophy would be a much more rewarding subject if other people did the same.

I would not have supposed that Price so much as understood the motive for spending time on getting oneself on, or of increasing the influence of oneself and the institution to which one belongs, had it not been for the

Machiavellian advice—too dreadful to relate—he gave me a long time ago, when I became head of a small department in a provincial university—an atmosphere which is not noted for producing saints. It could be, however, that he was *too* unworldly. He lacked the common touch. He could not fraternise with young men in pubs, to their benefit as well as his own, but instead went to bed with a cup of cocoa, a drink which he wrongly supposed to be a sedative. Nevertheless he was extremely hospitable, and frequently entertained quite boring students at high table at New College.

In politics he was an extreme individualist, and contrived to be conservative while at the same time disapproving of class-consciousness. He opposed the common market, and regarded religion as a socially binding force—a better reason, as I am sure he would have agreed, for persuading other people to be religious than for being religious oneself. He had a B.Sc. in Psychology, which helped him with his study of perception. He was an authority on the philosophies of Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism.

Price's work was always constructive, and he seldom turned aside to enter into controversy, though the effects could be devastating on the very rare occasions when he did. One of the guiding lines of Price's work was to accept the empirical facts as he found them. This produced his acceptance of the sense-datum theory, of mental images and other introspectable phenomena, including an ostensible sense of the divine. He rejected theories which did not conform to the facts rather than, like most modern materialists, distorting the facts because they did not conform to the theories.

Price was one of the many victims of fashion in Philosophy. The uncertainty of Philosophers concerning the soundness of their methods seems to make them unusually susceptible to the proponents of false dawns. It is easy to forget that if the history of philosophy is the history of error—as to a distressingly large extent it is—one's own pet theories are unlikely to be sufficiently privileged to be immune to the fates which have befallen their predecessors. A flood of publications, and a high rate of obsolescence, which seems to vary inversely with the secure progress of the subject, makes it increasingly difficult to detect what is of permanent value. Price would not, like far too many British philosophers, have been carried away by a certain number of sometimes gimmicky doctrines from across the Atlantic. Nor would he have yielded to the temptation of thinking that technical virtuosity in the use of symbolism gives one the right to have accepted philosophical doctrines that cannot be put simply and lucidly into good plain prose.

Price's work contrived to be large in scale without sacrificing a most meticulous attention to detail. It was both sustained and intricate. Price had the gift of being able to say simply and clearly and briefly things which other

philosophers struggled over many pages to express. Price's contribution to philosophy, especially to epistemology, was great, and deserves more recognition than it has received. I shall attempt in the following pages a brief exposition and defence of some of his views.

## Perception

Price's first book was *Perception*, published in 1932. This was one of the best books, if not the best book devoted exclusively to the Philosophy of Perception, that has ever been written. Whereas philosophers usually maunder on *ad nauseam* about whether there *are* material objects, Price, in *Perception*, explained how he thought not only how we knew that there were such things, but how we knew what were the shape, the size, position, and the colour and the causal properties of such objects. He explains such things as how we know we were seeing something square, and how a simultaneous unitary picture of an object was put together piecemeal by means of looking at it successively from different points of view, a process which he correctly said was one of syngnosis. (He eschewed the pretentious and inaccurate word 'synthesis'.) Quite incidentally and unassumingly (to take just one example) he gives what I suspect is a definitive solution to the question, which Kant makes such a hash of (for it has nothing to do with causality): How do we know the difference between an objective succession (when the change in the appearance of things is due to the fact that the object is moving) and a subjective succession (when it is due to the fact that the observer is moving)?

It is most important to stress that what Price was doing in *Perception* was epistemology, not phenomenology. (One might call it phenomenological epistemology.) Most of Price's contemporaries, when they talk about perception discussed *words* like 'looks' and 'seems'. Price did not do this to nearly the same extent. He went straight to the phenomena, instead of approaching the phenomena indirectly *via* the words which it was customary to use to describe the phenomena. But he was not interested in the phenomena of perception just for their own sake. His interest was epistemological. He wanted to know what it was about the phenomena that made us say, for example, that we were walking in a straight line, that the object in front of us really was blue, or that it was impenetrable or soluble in water.

*Perception*, though it had a considerable reputation until the end of the second world war, lost its influence later. This was due to a number of factors. First of all, the sense-datum theory, according to which perceiving

material objects was mediated by awareness of something other than a material object, viz. a sense-datum of that object (e.g., the yellow round shape or silver crescent which one sees when one perceives the moon), fell into undeserved disrepute. But all but the first couple of chapters of *Perception*, which defended the sense-datum theory, presupposed it. It was characteristic of the lack of historical perspective of the time that this theory, which in one form or another had been held by Locke and Berkeley (who called sense-data 'ideas') and Hume (who called them impressions), as well as by John Stuart Mill and G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell (to mention only the major British empiricists) was, shortly after the war, supposed to have been conclusively refuted by a number of articles in learned journals.

Rejecting the sense-datum theory was partly motivated by reluctance to admit into one's ontology anything other than physical objects like electrons and combinations thereof (and perhaps also people, if people are more than complicated groups of physical objects.)

But the metaphysics of the aforementioned reluctance can be crude. Lucretius, the father of modern materialism, held that atoms and the void were the only things there were. He did not, however, attempt (as perhaps he ought to have attempted) to *reduce* the void to atoms). Sense-data, obviously, are neither. But the equator, for example, which certainly exists, is not a physical object, but one should not speak ill of it for that reason. Nor should one deny that there is such a thing for reasons such as that we cannot trip over it when we cross it. Dances, impulses, waves, tunes, novels, quadratic equations, plays, tunes, limited liability companies and bank balances, to name but a few, are similar. (Gilbert Ryle held that minds were the same.) It is obvious, too, that the existence of at least some of the large number of such abstract entities is not incompatible with the truth of materialism. Electrons can and do dance, and statements about impulses passing down lines of trucks are logically entailed by statements about the trucks, even though the impulse can move much faster than any of the trucks.

Before rejecting sense-data on the grounds that they were neither electrons nor composed of electrons, its opponents should have considered more carefully whether their existence, like the existence of impulses, was not compatible with materialism. They would be compatible with materialism if they were 'entities' like the equator, whose existence no sensible person supposes to entail the rejection of materialism. Materialism then, must be re-defined as not the view that everything is material, but as the view that every *substance* (in the sense of 'substance' which meant 'that which is capable of existing by itself', as cats can exist by themselves but grins can only exist on the faces of cats) is material. Lucretius could then

have held (i) that atoms are the only substance, (ii) that the void, though it existed, was not a substance, and (iii) (which may be entailed by (i) and (ii)) that statements about the void could be reduced to statements about atoms.

Those who denied the sense-datum theory usually supposed that we were directly aware of the front surfaces of objects, rather than of sense-data. But *surfaces* are among those things that are not substances. Hence those philosophers who rejected the sense-datum theory on the grounds that what we were immediately aware of were not sense-data, but the front surfaces of material things, were inadvertently playing into the hands of the sense-datum theorists. For in that case our perception of material objects *was* mediated by something other than a material object, namely the *surface* of a material object. Hence our perceiving material objects (at least in those cases when the object, unlike the Northern Lights, *has* a surface) is mediated by our perceiving their surfaces, and to complain that we are prevented from perceiving material objects by an iron curtain of sense-data would be as sensible as to complain that we were prevented from perceiving material objects by an iron curtain constituted by their surfaces. If a philosopher were to be so naïve as to suppose that we can quite easily get behind the surface of an object—by cutting it open, let us suppose—he should remember that one then just sees the surfaces of other objects—half a loaf instead of a whole one, perhaps. An object is always hiding behind its surfaces, so to speak, from which it follows that we can never just ‘read off’ its properties. But this is just what the sense-datum philosophers maintained. There is no reason why a sense-datum theorist should maintain that sense-data are substances. Hume explicitly says they are. Berkeley held the monistic view that the only substances were minds.

Those who criticised the sense-datum theory assumed that if we are immediately aware of sense-data, then we are *not* immediately aware of the front surfaces of material objects. But, since sense-data are by definition only the immediate objects of perception, then, if the front surfaces of material objects are the immediate objects of perception, then we *are* aware of sense-data. If the coloured patches and trapezoid shapes beloved of the sense-datum theorists turn out to be the front surfaces of material objects, this does not mean that they do not exist. Rather, it means that they do. And even if sense-data were the front surfaces of material objects, this would not mean that the epistemological problems of the sense-datum theorists do not still arise, transposed into another key. There is still, for example, the Kantian problem of how we build a picture of an object having six (say) *simultaneously* existing and spatially related surfaces from having these surfaces presented to us one

by one. Kant is obviously right in thinking that memory is one thing that is necessary.

There are as a matter of fact *two types* of rival to the sense-datum theory, the view that perception is direct, and views (discussed in Chapter II of *Perception*) according to which the characteristics that the sense-datum philosophers attributed to sense-data are the characteristics which the objects seen by means of their mediation look to have. An example of the latter is Whitehead's theory that objects possess their characteristics from a place. Hence, where the sense-datum theorists often (though not always or necessarily) held that seeing a penny from an angle involves seeing something which is elliptical, Whitehead held that what one saw was not elliptical, but only elliptical-from-a-point-of-view. The important thing is that neither the sense datum theory nor its alternatives held that perception was *direct*. Hence, though the sense-datum theory is certainly true as opposed to the view that perception is direct, it is only very problematically true in relation to certain other theories like Whitehead's. Here I think the truth is fairly evenly divided among them. Briefly, the sense-datum theory is true of some of the characteristics of material objects—their colour, perhaps—and its alternatives true of others—their shape. (Something can look elliptical without anything at all being elliptical.) Here, of course, if sense-data just are the front surfaces of material objects, they will have to have characteristics they do not seem to have, for the front surfaces of material objects can. There is no necessary connection between the view that our perception of objects is mediated, and the view that what are the immediate objects of perception must have the characteristics material objects seem to have. And from the point of view of doing philosophical phenomenology it does not matter a jot which view you accept. Of course, the fact that the sense-datum theory is *compatible* with the view that what we are directly aware of are the front surfaces of material objects does not mean that the sense-data *are* the front surfaces of material objects. Price, in Chapter II of *Perception* gives compelling reasons for thinking that this view is *not* true. For example, sometimes we are aware of two sense-data when there is only one surface, and other sense-data—those associated with mirror images—are not in the place where the surface of the object is.

I believe that another of the main reasons why the sense-datum theory is rejected is the belief that sense-data are private, and the belief that private objects cannot be talked about. If so, if there were any sense-data, it would be impossible to communicate the fact to others. The belief that private objects cannot be talked about is the result of two erroneous beliefs, (i) that a word has meaning only if it is governed by rules, and (ii) that private rules could not be checked. But in any case sense-data, defined as the immediate



objects of perception, do not *have* to be private, though it may turn out that they are so. Part of the confusion on this subject is due to Ayer, who held that it was a matter of definition that sense-data were private. One might as well maintain that it was a matter of definition that swans are white. One can, of course, define the word 'swan' in such a way that what is not white is not a swan, but all that would follow from this is that, if this swan-like bird in Australia was not white, it would not properly be called a swan. It would not follow that it did not exist or that it was not white.

It was also a misunderstanding of Price's view to reject it on the grounds that material objects cannot be inferred entities, as its critics supposed the sense-datum theory implied. Philosophers like the late Professor J. L. Austin argued that though when we see the marks of a pig's feet outside what looks like a sty, we *infer* the existence of the pig, if we see a pig in a good light in an environment in which finding pigs is not surprising, we do not. This may well be so. Such philosophers, however were assuming an exhaustive disjunction between *inferring* and *immediate acquaintance*. And though Price thought—as any sensible philosopher must—that we were not immediately acquainted with material objects, he did *not* think that the ones we saw were inferred entities, as anyone who had read beyond the first couple of chapters of *Perception* before criticising it would have known. Two lengthy chapters are devoted to explaining how we *do* know facts about material objects. The first chapter is about what Price called *perceptual acceptance*, the second about *perceptual assurance*. Price repeatedly says that such processes, so far from being inferential, simulated immediate intuition, though they were not forms of it.

Though Price was accused of excessive conservatism, his approach is in fact less conservative than the arch-conservatism of the linguistic philosophy of his time, which makes it difficult—and, it then tended to be supposed, reprehensible—to improve upon the enshrined wisdom of generations of language users. Fortunately the two ways of doing philosophy are not incompatible, as Price (though not always the linguistic philosophers themselves) realised. But the epistemological phenomenalism is more fundamental than the verbalism, because the interest in the words is only derivative from interest in what the words are used to talk about.

If the sense-datum theory was so true, the question arises: How has philosophy got on for the last fifty years without it? Part of the answer is that it has not got on without it. Philosophers have evasively attempted to say some of the things that the sense-datum theorists said, but do not use the word 'sense-datum', but some equally ugly circumlocution instead. The other part of the answer is that the intellectual loss caused by the rejection of the sense-datum theory has been enormous. If one rejects the sense-datum theory, there will be a large amount of philosophy that

one will be unlikely to appreciate. One example of this is the brilliant Leibnizian theory of perception (which I shall mention again later) put forward by Bertrand Russell in *Mysticism and Logic* and *Our Knowledge of the External World*, according to which material objects consist of vast and complicated systems of unsensed sense-data (which Russell called unsensed *sensibilia*) organised in a six-dimensional space. If one thinks there are no sense-data, one will be unlikely to give this theory the attention it deserves.

The most popular physicalist alternative to the sense-datum theory is the view that perceiving is believing. Physicalists think they have no difficulty in admitting that there is such a thing as belief, because they think belief is just goal-seeking behaviour. Even an anti-missile missile can and does seek goals. The view that perceiving is believing will not, however, survive a moment's unprejudiced examination. If I believe that I am seeing the moon, it is *because* of what I see (a crescent-shaped patch in the middle of my visual field, which may or may not be identical with the physical surface of the moon) that I believe that I am seeing the moon. *Examining* the moon from different points of view is *obviously* different from forming beliefs about the moon as a *result* of examining it.

## Hume's Theory of the External World

Price's second book, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, published in 1940, was one of the best books on Hume ever written. Part of the reason for this is (oddly) its length. Most people writing about Hume, or any other philosopher, tend to reduce his work to a fraction of the original length, a procedure which one would think could be adopted successfully only when writing about a philosopher who was extremely verbose (which Hume was not). Such writers seem to aim at giving a moderately accurate account of the work of a great philosopher for those who do not have time to read him for themselves. In contrast, Price's book spends 230 pages discussing some 22 pages in the original text. Partly as a result, it provides some extremely lucid and helpful exposition, careful discussion and lucid criticism, combined with attempts to find for Hume a way out of the difficulties which he faces (some, but not all, of which Hume was aware of himself), and alternative solutions to the problems that occupied him. This is the critical and constructive spirit in which a great philosopher ought to be read and written about.

Price's book contains, among other things, a most lucid exposition

of Hume's account of what induces us to believe in the existence of an external world, i.e., the *constancy* and *coherence* of our impressions. We believe in the existence of such a world because we come across sequences of sense-data—the view can be presented without using the word 'sense-data'—such as the following: (Ai) blazing fire, dying embers, ashes; (Bii) blazing fire, dying embers, gap; (Biii) blazing fire, gap, ashes; (Biv) gap, dying embers, ashes; (Cv) blazing fire, gap, gap; (Cvi) gap, dying embers, gap; (Cvi) gap, gap, ashes; (Dvii) gap, gap, gap; which are what Price aptly christened 'gap-indifferent'.

(A *constant* sequence of impressions, e.g.: blazing fire, blazing fire, blazing fire, is, Price pointed out, just a limiting case of *coherence*. There is no need for us ever to have observed a complete sequence; we could get on perfectly well without (i) above.)

When this happens we involuntarily, for nature has not left it to our choice whether we believe in the existence of body or not, fill in the gap in any sequence with impressions like those in the gaps in the relatively gapless series. (I think Price and Hume should have stipulated that this gap filling is involuntary only in relatively simple cases. Detectives experience notorious difficulties in filling in the gaps of certain sequences from a knowledge of what is observed at these sequences' ends.) Knowledge of gap indifference is inductive, but involves a kind of induction that precedes and is presupposed by inductive knowledge of the behaviour of material objects.

Hume's view had the odd consequence (which Hume accepted, though perhaps he was not consistent about it) that, since there could not *be* any unobserved impressions (for their existence was dependent upon the state of sense-organs), and bodies were composed entirely of impressions, there could not *be* any bodies. That there are material objects is a false and unfounded delusion, but nevertheless a delusion that is so useful—one would say 'useful for good biological reasons' were it not that evolutionary biology could not be true if there were no (living) bodies for it to be about—that we cannot live without it.

Hume thought that there could be no unobserved impressions because he thought (probably rightly) that impressions could not exist without the sense-organs of observers. Price, under the influence of logical positivism, takes a more extreme view than this. He holds that it is meaningless even to talk about unobserved impressions, because the existence of unobserved impressions is unverifiable, and, according to logical positivism, sentences which express no verifiable statement must be meaningless.

This argument is an example of the modal shift fallacy. Price thought that the existence of unobserved impressions (or unsensed sensibilia)

was unverifiable, because they were (by definition) unobserved. They are no more incapable of being observed, however, than bachelors are incapable of being married. A bachelor is by definition, just unmarried, not unmarriageable, and it is actually easier to marry men who are bachelors than men who are not. The modal shift fallacy alluded to above is (for example) the mistake of confusing the true statement that it is necessarily the case that if a man is a bachelor he is unmarried, with the false statement that, if a man is a bachelor, then, necessarily, he is unmarried. (It also involves a modal shift to suppose that the existence of desert islands is unverifiable.)

In order to understand Price's two shots at replacing Hume's view of material objects (which would, if they could exist, be composed of unobserved impressions) with a theory that did square with the verification principle, it is best to start with Russell. According to Russell, material objects were vast systems of unsensed sensibilia, which existed in 'perspectives'. There were six dimensions in space, because three independent co-ordinates were needed to determine the position of a sensible in its perspective (a visual field would be an example of a perspective) and three more to fix the position of this perspective in perspective space. The position of a perspective was the position of its point of view; it was rather as if one were given the task of ordering photographs of, say, a Normandy landing beach, and ordered them three dimensionally by the laws of perspective and (when necessary) the laws of governing the reflection and refraction of light.

If, however, you think that it is meaningless to talk about unsensed sensibilia, it seems to follow that it is also meaningless to talk about material objects. The first of the two ways out of this difficulty suggested by Price is to say that the world is *as if* I was sitting in my study, even though there are no unobserved impressions of my study. The second (the one suggested to Price by the work of F.P. Ramsey) is to say that material object sentences are in fact not statements but recipes. That this is a dagger that I see before me is not a statement, but a recipe saying 'Use the (concept of) dagger as a means of ordering your experiences, and of predicting what other experiences you will have'.

Neither of these theories are satisfactory (and I do not suppose that Price thought they were; he was just playing with them for the light they threw on Hume's difficulties.) The first looks circular. If it is meaningless to say that there are unobserved daggers, then it ought to be equally meaningless to say that one's experience goes on as if there were unobserved daggers. (If the expression 'slithy tove' is meaningless, one's experience cannot go on as if there were such things.) The second is unsatisfactory because the word 'dagger' occurs in the recipe for ordering

one's experience. But, if the word 'dagger' is meaningless, then the principle 'Order your experiences on the principle that what you see is a constituent of a dagger' ought to be meaningless to.

## Thinking and Experience

Price's third book, *Thinking and Experience* (1953), is a sequel to *Perception* in that it deals with thinking *about* an object, which usually takes place when the object is not present to be perceived. Since the object is itself then absent, we have to make do with a substitute for it. Such substitutes, at least in humans, are usually words.

Many modern philosophers hold that thinking is symbol using, and that we understand a word (say the word 'cat'), if we can (i) combine it correctly with other words, and (ii) say some such thing as 'Pleased to meet you, O cat' when introduced to one. Price has a much more sophisticated and complex theory. Though he agrees that understanding a word does not involve the mind's passing from it to something (the universal: cathood, say) he does not agree that the only thing necessary to understanding a word is to be able to combine it correctly with other words, and to apply it correctly to objects – to call a spade a 'spade', for example.

Price's account of thinking is nominalistic in that though he thinks that thinking involves awareness of substitutes for the object, it does not involve a passage of the mind from the substitute to anything other than the substitute. It is *not* nominalistic in that Price does not think that thinking involves the use of *words*. One can think with images, in actions, in gestures, in producing replicas (my having a concept of a boat can be manifested by my drawing one or making one or making a model of one), in non-verbal symbols, and in interpreting things that are a sign of them. (Taking smoke as a sign of fire is a rudimentary form of thinking, and animals are capable of it.)

And though Price's theory is dispositional – one understands a word if a certain set of hypothetical propositions are true of one – it is not wholly dispositional. Seeing or hearing a word 'sub-activates' the disposition; for example, one sees the word 'cat', which sub-activates one's disposition to recognise cats. It thus *may* avoid a difficulty for most dispositional theories – that I seem to know what I mean by a word without having to wait to see what I apply it to. The sub-activation of a concept is an introspectable phenomenon that can be detected immediately.

Words would be no use if they were not linked to reality. Words are linked to reality, according to Price, by the fact that some of them can be ostensively defined, and others defined in terms of these. Though many

modern philosophers seem to think that one ostensibly defines a word by showing someone an example of what it applies to, Price correctly points out that one needs numerous examples. (Ideally, in order to explain to someone who did not know what is meant by 'scryge', one would have to show them a collection of objects to which the characteristic of being scryge was the only one which was both *common* and *peculiar*.) The linkage of the word to the thing it symbolises, however, is not the application of a *rule*. There have to be rules about linkage, but linkage is not itself *defined* in terms of rules, but is a matter of association. Pavlov's rather revolting dogs were not obeying rules when they salivated at the sound of a bell, but the bell meant food to them all the same.

Price thought (correctly) that *one* of the ways in which understanding words, and therefore thinking, manifested itself was in producing appropriate imagery. E.g., mental images of cats were produced by the word 'cats', and an image of a map of London could be produced by the word 'London'—and would, indeed, help one find one's way about that overpopulated entity. (The fact that the image structurally resembles a map, that itself structurally resembles what is mapped, seems to show that it is an entity of some sort.) Unfortunately Price does not adequately distinguish between using an image *as* a symbol, and using images to *cash* symbols; the symbols cashed by images may or may not themselves be images.

Gilbert Ryle, however, had in *The Concept of Mind* argued that it is a myth that there was a kind of cinema screen of images in one's head. (Fellows of the Royal Society, Galton discovered, were very deficient in mental imagery, and the same may be true of Fellows of the British Academy). Mental images may well not be in the category of substance (see above), but there certainly are such things. I have enjoyed having them all my life and only a prejudice in favour of the material can have made philosophers so reluctant to admit their existence.

A more modern view is that when I say I have a mental image, I am saying that something is going on in my head that resembles what is going on in my head when I see the object imaged. Where Hume held that images were faint copies of impressions, modern materialists hold that, when I *have* the image, what is going on in my head is a faint copy (or something like it) of the neural activity which goes on there when I actually perceive the object imaged. (One wonders how they know this.) But this makes the existence of images a matter for speculation, whereas there they are, visibly gyrating in front of one's nose. In any case, it is the images, not our *having* them, that is suitable for cashing symbols. It is the image of a pillar box, for example, not our having it, that has some claim to be red. Proponents of the theory make a category mistake in applying epithets such as red to our *having* them. Many modern philosophers seem to suppose that dreams,

and so on, are simply a matter of our having false beliefs. But though, when I dream, I do have false beliefs, or at least suspend true ones, the imagery that accompanies this is not a matter of having a belief, and the beliefs I have *about* my imagery – that it is or is not in colour, for example – may be true ones.

My impression is that mental images are becoming respectable again. Indeed, anything can be made compatible with materialism, provided one goes through the now unhelpful verbal ritual of saying that it is identical with happenings to neurons, (however unlikely this may seem to be the case). I shall say more about this in the next section. But the world is what it is, and contains what it contains, a fact which philosophers too frequently seem to forget.

I suspect that one thing that is wrong with present (or perhaps with all) philosophy is the failure of philosophers to use mental images to cash their thoughts in the absence of the things talked about. It is this that Berkeley recommended, and what is essential if contemporary philosophers are not to use their very high degree of logical subtlety and technical efficiency in symbol manipulation to talk nonsense without knowing it. It is perhaps to take philosophy too seriously to suppose that it is the philosophical view that there are no images that prevent people from doing this, but, to the extent that it does, it does a great deal of harm. I believe that Price would have agreed with what I have just been saying.

## Belief

Once upon a time the two main theories of belief in Anglo-Saxon philosophy were that belief was a species of feeling and that it was a disposition to act. According to the first, one believes a proposition (say the proposition that one can control the tides) if one experiences a feeling of confidence in its truth when one has this proposition before one's mind. According to the second, one believes a proposition if one would (*if* one had the opportunity) act in a way that would be successful in obtaining what one happened to want *if* this proposition were true. One believes that one can control the tides, for example if, *if* one *wanted* to impress one's courtiers, one would in their presence tell the tides to turn with a view to impressing them. On the other hand, one believes that one can *not* control the tides if one would tell the tides to turn if one wanted to embarrass one's courtiers. The popularity of the latter theory has doubtless been partly due to the fact that a behaviourist has little difficulty (superficially, at any rate) in accommodating overt action into his world view.

The latter theory has, I think, won hands down. Those who accept

it, however, have tended to suppose that belief is manifested only in public actions, like addressing the tides. Price, though he agreed that belief was a disposition, thought that action was only *one* of the ways in which this disposition manifested itself. Price held what might be described as a multi-dimensional theory of belief (*Belief, 1969*). He argued, I think correctly, that, besides action, belief manifested itself in feelings of confidence, in such things as a feeling of surprise if what one believed turned out to be false, a disposition to give mental assent to the proposition one believed, and a disposition to rely on what one believed in one's internal thoughts. One could use a proposition one believed as a premise in one's private reasoning, for example, and believe other things in consequence. Hence Price's theory of belief was dispositional without being materialist.

One way in which modern materialists could try to accommodate what, according to Price, are the internal manifestations of belief, is by saying that such things were just happenings to neurons. What one wants is some reason for thinking that feelings are identical with material things, and this usually turns out to be that there is some empirically discoverable concomitance between feelings and brain activity, or causal dependence of the former upon the latter.

Concomitance or causal connection, of course, is one thing, identity quite another. One common objection to their being identical is that mental things have properties that the physical things do not. A thought (i.e. an act of thinking) for example, can be painful, but a brain event grey – or, if not this, a happening to something that is grey. And it is obvious that if two things are identical, it cannot be the case that one has a property that the other lacks.

One reply to this objection is to say that the things alleged to be identical have their properties not just simpliciter, but *qua* certain descriptions. Hence one and the same thing can possess an attribute under the description 'brain process', and some characteristic apparently incompatible with this under the description 'mental event'. Hence identical things do share all their properties. (i) The mental event has both the property of being, *qua* mental event, *not* coloured, but *qua* brain process coloured, and (ii) the brain event has the property of being *qua* brain process coloured and *qua* mental event colourless. (Strictly speaking, of course, it does not make sense to say that brain *processes* are grey, though they could be processes undergone by grey things.)

This line of defence works much better for some properties than it does for others. Marguerite Blakeney both worshipped the Scarlet Pimpernel and despised her husband, though her husband, unknown to her, *was* the Scarlet Pimpernel. Any apparent contradiction may easily be resolved by



saying that one and the same person was both worshipped by Marguerite *qua* 'Scarlet Pimpernel' and despised by her *qua* 'Marguerite's spouse'.

But this only works well where 'intentional' characteristics are concerned, for it is these that are affected by the knowledge and the beliefs of the person having the intentions. Had it been held that Sir Percy Blakeney was six feet tall under the description 'Scarlet Pimpernel', but, under the description 'Marguerite's husband', only five foot nine, this defence would have been much less plausible. Yet this is what we are expected to believe of brain processes when we say that, *qua* description 'material' they are grey (or more accurately, happenings to grey things), but *qua* description 'mental' they are not.

I recently listened to an American philosopher of some eminence who claimed to have believed for most of his philosophical life that there were no such thing as beliefs, but now to believe that there are such things. When views such as these become current, one wonders if philosophy has advanced at all since Price wrote, or whether it is just that so much is written that it is impossible to keep up with it without losing the insights of the past (or, indeed, at all). In these circumstances it seems folly to put pressure on academics to produce even more.

## Psychical Research

Professor D. H. Armstrong once described Psychical Research as a black cloud hanging over physicalism. Price would have agreed, though he did not think of psychical research as a *black* cloud. Price's sympathetic attitude to psychical research, though much denigrated, was shared with philosophers as eminent as Henry Sidgwick and C. D. Broad.

Price's attitude, I think, stems partly from his study of Hume. Hume argued that there was no necessary connection between events, and that it was just a matter of empirical fact what events were connected with one another. Antecedently to observation, anything might be connected with anything else. Hence it was just a question of empirical fact whether or not there were such things as telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, and veridical communications from people claiming to be trance mediums. (*Hume's* problem with spirits of the departed would have been not to show that there *could* be disembodied spirits, so much as to show that we were not all disembodied, or at any rate *non-embodied* spirits.)

However Price, unlike Hume, did not attach enough weight to the *antecedent* improbability of such events. My own view is that it is not known that paranormal phenomena do not occur. Given that this is not known, it is a good thing, I think, that some philosophers take psychical

research seriously. There is no need for philosophers to indulge in field work themselves. But some modifications to the world view of modern physics is necessary if the alleged facts of psychical research are to be accepted. It is perhaps over-optimistic to suggest that some philosophers might try their hands at thinking out what kind of modification would be necessary, if the alleged facts of psychical research were to be accepted. This would at least be a training in what is not certainly misplaced ingenuity. If no such modifications are possible, this would be some reason for rejecting the facts that *some* psychical researchers think psychical research has uncovered. If predictions could be deduced from these theories, then so much the better.

Price's interest in psychical research went with an interest in abnormal psychology. One of the things that Price thought that abnormal psychology showed was that there was not necessarily a one to one correspondence between mind and body. Sally Beauchamp's body, it is said, had no less than four minds connected with it or inhabiting it. Materialistic philosophers do not pay enough attention to such facts, which I (but not always they) think would present as much difficulty for them if they were merely possible as they would if they were actual. A lover of the bizarre like Price would doubtless have been distressed, as I am myself, to read that some psychiatrists think that the phenomena sometimes explained by multiple personality is in fact the result of female patients having been so anxious to please male doctors interested in finding cases of it that they faked the symptoms. They must have been very good actresses (or acting for the benefit of very gullible doctors).

## Religion

Price's attitude to psychical research was partly due to his religion. For example, there is a close resemblance (though by no means an identity) between the Christian belief in the efficacy of petitionary prayer and the alleged phenomenon of telekinesis, and a close connection between trance mediumship and resurrection. Nevertheless, Broad supposed that the World Beyond was not so much like heaven as like a Welsh university, but the advent of academic assessment might have made him revise this opinion.

Two Eddington Memorial Lectures were delivered at about the same time, one by Price, the other by Richard Braithwaite. One might say that what the latter claims is that one has faith if one acts in such a way as to bring about good, and encourages oneself by telling oneself (but not believing) stories about the Father, Son and Holy Ghost (whose likeness

to the English aristocracy Braithwaite was acute enough to discern). Since the Father, Son and Holy Ghost become on this view fictional entities, propositions about them would have to be false or neither true nor false. I sometimes suspect that, in trying to sell this theory to devout Christians, Braithwaite was indulging in an impish joke.

Price threw the weight of justifying God's existence on our having a sense of the divine. He valued psychical research partly because, if it could show that modern science (or at least modern physics) was false, it removed an obstacle in the way of supposing that there was a sense of the divine; our sense of it could hardly be the result of impulses from a timeless spaceless entity falling upon receptor organs connected with our brains. Whether or not Price thought there could still be a sense of the divine, even if psychical research was *not* true, I do not know.

To a large extent Price's attitude to religion was empirical. There were in the Old and New Testaments certain recipes, and one found out whether they were successful by acting upon them, and seeing whether they worked. Hence one would have oneself to cultivate a sense of the divine, as I am sure Price did, before one could assess claims made on behalf of it. Christ, it is reported in the New Testament, said 'Knock, and it shall be opened unto to you'. Price, like a true empiricist, knocked, and found that, for him, it was.

JONATHAN HARRISON

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