

Austin: *Sense & Sensibilia* Revisited

When John Langshaw Austin died in 1960 he had published only seven papers, together with a translation into English of Frege's *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*. But at his death he was pre-eminent among Oxford philosophers. Memoirs of him published at or near that time mention him in the same breath as Wittgenstein, as his equal in influence and philosophical importance. This conjunction is echoed in some popular presentations of the history of mid-century philosophy, which lump Austin and Wittgenstein together as the leaders of the 'linguistic philosophy' or 'ordinary language' philosophy that dominated England at that time.

One might feel now, nearly forty years later, that Austin's impact on philosophical life has diminished sharply. While there continues to be a vibrant research community dedicated to the exposition and criticism of Wittgenstein's work, including the vast *nachlass*, there is no similar project dedicated to Austin. In part, that must be due to the fact recorded by those who praised him in life and death, that his intellectual dominance came from the context of his teaching, and his guidance of his colleagues and pupils rather than through any published work or developed thesis or doctrine which he wished to propound and his students to promulgate. Whatever the exact explanation, an unfortunate consequence of this is that there has been some tendency in recent years to dismiss Austin as having an overblown reputation: Colin McGinn, in his review of Warnock's book on Austin ('Reputations', *London Review of Books*, November 23 1989), surmises improbably that Warnock intended to deflate Austin's reputation through his patient criticism of Austin's views, and himself implies that the deflation is overdue.

It can be of no help here that there is a popular conception of what 'linguistic philosophy' in Austin's hands comprised: a somewhat *ad hoc* and pedantic focus on how words are actually used in ordinary or common language; an obstinate refusal to look at the phenomena which genuinely motivate philosophical concerns, and an insistence that all one must do is use one's words carefully. If that is all that Austin's philosophical method amounts to, it would be difficult to respect it: the fetish of sticking with what we have so far been content to say is stultifying in areas of investigation where there may be innovation and advance. Surely we do not want to

deny the sciences the right to introduce new vocabulary. Why then should philosophers be restrained? One might also harbour suspicions of the method so characterised: with what right can someone assume themselves to be an authority on what can or can't be said, or what does or does not make sense? How could one hope that the investigations into usage could aspire to any generality that would apply to the way people talk beyond Oxford common rooms.

But the characterisation is just a caricature, and *Sense & Sensibility* is a good place to start to reveal quite what a travesty that depiction of Austin's intentions and methods is. Based as it is on a series of lectures that Austin gave annually in Oxford from 1947 to 1958, the book takes us closer to Austin's actual style of instruction which is so often commented on by his defenders, than do the seven papers he published in his lifetime, written as they were for special occasions or symposia. No one who casts a fresh eye over the lectures will miss the keen sense that Austin has of the phenomena with which he is concerned. As Austin himself puts the point in 'Truth', 'It takes two to make a truth':¹ his focus is not solely on language, but, in part through a focus on use of language, the phenomena talked about.

The set of lectures is an apt object of investigation for another reason as well. It is now fifty years since Austin first gave these lectures. When we look back to the mid-century we can see a very different landscape within which philosophical debate took place. The concerns of those writing about knowledge and reality at that time focused on the 'problems of perception' associated with the argument from illusion. Any discussion of the nature of knowledge would likely have to be a discussion also of the nature of reality known, with a focus on what is to be said about the nature of perception and the knowing mind. The blending of these different themes is central to the varieties of phenomenalism, the elaboration or criticism of which was a central concern of many of these discussions.

If one looks to recent discussions of knowledge, of metaphysics, and of mind one will find much more division of labour. For few, if any, writers on knowledge in recent years has the nature of perception been a dominant concern. For many philosophers, it is an important dogma that one needs carefully to separate issues in the theory of knowledge from issues surrounding general metaphysics or ontology. In place of the dominance of phenomenalism, we now find a general assumption of physicalism in some form or other.

1. (Austin 1979b), p.124, f.1.

When we turn to perception in particular, we see this allied with the repudiation of any form of sense-datum theory as traditionally conceived.

Since Austin is often presented in memoirs of him as a great innovator who is concerned to brush away the cobwebs of the assumed terms of debate, it is tempting to see these lectures as a key point in the rejection of the more traditional debate about the nature of perception, turning on the contrast of appearance and reality, together with a dismissal of the alleged consequences of that contrast for our conception of our knowledge of the world or of the world we thereby know. One might then hope to explain the contours of the shift between the concerns dominant in mid-century and those that obsess us now through looking at this work. We may expect to get a better sense of where we have come from, and to where we may be heading.

In fact, as I shall argue, the lessons to be learned here are complex. Austin can be seen as marking a big divide between recent concerns and earlier ones, but the reasons he has for rejecting his predecessors are more local to his time than we might have expected. We can see important themes which link him to some recent debates about knowledge and perception, but when we do so we find that that emphasises more of a continuity with the traditional debate than Austin himself would have been prepared to acknowledge.

1. *Sense & Sensibilia* comprises eleven chapters, all deriving from the lectures that Austin gave. Some of the material, particularly towards the beginning is in a stable form from when the lectures were first given, but the later material is in more sketchy a form drawn from annotations to late revisions of the earlier notes. Some of the material lectured on, that relating to Austin's views of truth, are excised from the published version, since they overlap with the paper 'Unfair to Facts' to be found in the *Philosophical Papers*.

Austin's central concern in the lectures is with:

The general doctrine... [that] we never see otherwise perceive (or "sense"), or anyhow never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, *sensa*, sense-perceptions, percepts etc.)²

And swiftly he lets us know that his

...general opinion about this doctrine is that it is a typically *scholastic* view, attributable, first, to an obsession with a few particular words, the uses of which are over-simplified, not really understood

2. (Austin 1962), p. 2.

or carefully studied or correctly described; and second to an obsession with a few (and nearly always the same) half-studied “facts”.³

In the lectures he wishes to take on a whole tradition of debate about perception and reject not just one party to the debate, but the whole issue itself. In fact, his focus within the course of lectures is principally on AJ Ayer’s *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, and to a much lesser extent HH Price’s *Perception*, the final chapter acting almost as an epilogue, applying similar criticisms to Warnock’s attempt to rehabilitate the doctrine of sense-data as the immediate objects of perception in his book *Berkeley*.⁴ As many commentators have noted, two of these texts had been published some ten to fifteen years before Austin began to lecture on the topic, so he was not directly engaging views presented contemporaneous with his criticisms of them. Nonetheless, Austin assures his readers that the texts he is concerned with are ‘the best available expositions of the approved reasons for holding theories which are at least as old as Heraclitus’ (p.1). The intention then is to offer a critical overview of long standing concerns with appearance and reality through focusing on these particular examples.

In his monograph on Austin, Warnock characterises the lectures as ‘almost throughout undeviatingly negative, critical, even polemically critical’.⁵ It is tempting, then, to evaluate the significance of the work solely in terms of its negative theses and attacks on both Ayer, and the tradition he is taken to represent, and to look to the work’s legacy as the general rejection of the doctrines that Austin attacks. Ayer himself discerned seventeen different arguments propounded by Austin against sense-data in the book.⁶ However, we can distil from this four main lines of critique that Austin puts forward:

1. He is keen to reject the dichotomy between sense-data and material objects as ill-constructed: some entities will fall on neither side;
2. The argument from illusion is variously treated as involving a conflation of illusion with delusion, or as trading on some fallacious or unconvincing assumption;
3. Our ordinary terms for talking about perception, and the look, or the appearance of things, or how things seem are indicated to be in good order and capable of being used to make much finer distinctions than the philosophers’ terms of art ‘sense-data’ and ‘material object’;

3. *Op. cit.* p. 3.

4. (Ayer 1940), (Price 1932), (Warnock 1953).

5. (Warnock 1989), p.11.

6. (Ayer 1969a), p.284.

4. The root of the whole debate and problem is diagnosed as a concern with incorrigibility, and the need to find propositions which would be incorrigible on all occasions, and which could act as the certain foundations for empirical knowledge; a concern which is itself hopeless and ill-founded.

If we just stick with these four central claims, one might be tempted to think that Austin has at least been highly influential in *Sense & Sensibilia* whatever the merits of his case really are. For, one can find almost no one now who is prepared to talk of sense-data, or posit such things as the immediate objects of perceptual awareness, and fewer still who are prepared to embrace Ayer's phenomenalism. Sense-data are not now taken to be the focus of debate about the nature of perception, a commitment to them is taken rather to indicate that a philosopher must have gone wrong in their reasoning. The argument from illusion is introduced as a piece of clearly fallacious reasoning which will lead one to accept the existence of such ridiculous entities as sense-data. Where a central tenor of the traditional debate is an anxiety about the revision of our common sense beliefs about the world and our relation to it, any such anxiety seems to have been swept away in recent discussion. Although the search for incorrigible truths has not entirely abated, few now are prepared to endorse any form of simple foundationalism in the theory of knowledge, with certain knowledge of one's own experiences as at the base.

In his Dewey Lectures, Hilary Putnam suggests a converse reading of Austin. He does not emphasise the negative elements in Austin's work, but rather the continuity of a certain positive commitment he finds in James, Austin and which he himself wishes to identify with: '*Sense & Sensibilia* represents the most powerful defense of what I am calling "natural realism" in the history of philosophy'.⁷ With respect to the negative claims that Austin makes in defending this alleged 'natural realism', Putnam complains that Austin's lessons have been ignored or responded to 'only minimally'.

Given our earlier observations, Putnam's comments might seem to miss the point. For philosophers now repudiate all talk of sense-data, and ridicule the argument from illusion, just as Austin invites them to do. What more could Putnam demand of them? But I do think that there is something right about Putnam's complaints here. Putnam's main concern is that where philosophers have come to reject a commitment to sense-data, this rejection is the most shallow form of religious conversion, repudiating no more than a form of

7. (Putnam 1994), p.455.

words. In general, those who deny that there are sense-data are still prepared to accept a view of our relation to the world which introduces, 'sensory experiences as *intermediaries* between us and the world...[making] it impossible to see how persons can be in genuine cognitive contact with a world at all'.⁸ In many recent discussions of knowledge and perception, one can find a form of the argument from illusion playing a central role, and it is clear that Putnam wishes to reject that.

At the same time, I think that it is clear that the reasons that philosophers now have for rejecting sense-data, particularly those associated with a commitment to physicalism, are distinct from any Austin put forward. So we cannot think of these recent views as Austin's legacy. However, whether or how Putnam's position—his rejection of currently favoured arguments from illusion—derives from Austin's position is moot. For the assumptions which drive these more recent debates are somewhat beyond the scope of Austin's discussion in *Sense & Sensibilia*. If Putnam is right to identify his views with Austin's, then this must come from the more positive elements in Austin relating to perception and knowledge, and not the kinds of scathing criticism, that commentators have tended to focus on.

I suggest first that if we assess Austin's negative charges then we shall find they are at best successful against a limited range of opponents. The arguments turn on certain assumptions that these people made which are of little interest to us now. Partly as a consequence of this, Austin's assessment of the traditional problems of perception and the debate that surrounds them is not convincing, as Myles Burnyeat has rightly complained.⁹ So not only is it the case that the negative elements of Austin's view have few traces in recent thought, it is not clear that they deserve to. On the other hand, there is much in Austin's positive views that have been unjustly neglected and which do form an interesting connection with more recent concerns in the theory of perception and knowledge.

2. There are two inter-related complaints that Austin makes against the tradition of debate about sense-data: first, that the notions of sense-datum and material thing are not well-defined; and second, that there is no argument from illusion that can show that we directly perceive only sense-data.

At the outset Austin insists:

8. *Op. cit.* p.454.

9. See (Burnyeat 1979).

One of the most important things to grasp is that these two terms, 'sense-data' and 'material things', live by taking in each other's washing—what is spurious is not one term of the pair but the antithesis itself. There is no *one* kind of thing we 'perceive' but many *different* kinds, the number being reducible if at all by scientific investigation and not by philosophy... (p.4.)

Certainly one aspect of this attack is a methodological pessimism about philosophers' abilities to introduce technical terms which pick out genuine kinds of phenomena. If one is more optimistically inclined about philosophical theorising, then one might think that the success of a given vocabulary is to be assessed relative to the fruits of theorising involving it, and so one cannot simply adopt an antecedent scepticism about the possibility of successfully introducing such terms. But in this particular case, there are reasons to side with Austin which do not require such general pessimism. And what is of interest in this, is to note how those reasons limit the scope of Austin's challenge, and the force of his criticisms when ranged against the tradition as a whole of discussing sense-data.

Now, if the introduction of these terms is to work, we should expect that one or other of the two terms should act as the kind term, its dual being used simply to gather up all things which fail to count as being of that kind. Austin's complaint in this passage is really that neither term can occupy that central role: when we focus on material things we are to treat them simply as non-sense-data, but when we turn to sense-data, we can make no more sense of them than as being non-material things.

With respect to the first half of the complaint, there does seem to be much justice to what Austin has to say. We think we can see such things as mirror-images, rainbows, shadows, holes, the Aurora Borealis; we can detect scents; listen to the voices of the choir; the rustling of the leaves. None of these things are we definitely inclined to classify as material entities. So if the notion of material object is to carry the connotations of being made of matter or stuff, then these objects of sense ought to be included among sense-data and not material things. But they then fail to possess one of the key connotations of sense-data that so exercise sense-datum theorists: privacy to one observer, and an exclusion from a shared world independent of any particular observer's investigations. So it would seem that the only obvious mark which will group all of these things together as material objects and not as sense-data is just that we take them to be examples of those things which we can perceive, and which we together can on occasion come to perceive. The owner of the laundry must then be the term 'sense-datum' and not 'material object'.

Yet it is less clear that Austin's second charge is correct. Why can't Austin's opponent seek to introduce the term 'sense-datum' in the following kind of way? First, grant certain assumptions. Suppose one thinks, admittedly improbably, that even in cases of total hallucination where it may seem to one as if one sees a pig when there is no pig there to be seen, there must be something of which one is aware. The term 'sense-datum' will be introduced to pick out such entities. But is there anything that such entities will have in common which could ground the use of the term? Suppose one thinks, in addition, that one can bring about visual hallucinations of pigs just by appropriate stimulation of a subject's visual cortex. Then we might reason that our causal action on the subject's brain was (causally) sufficient to bring about the hallucination. In doing this, surely we acted only on the physical (or rather, neurophysiological) states of the subject and through that their mental state. We have not acted on anything non-physical and non-mental. So if, as we assumed above, there must be something which the subject is aware of in having the hallucination, then that thing must itself be dependent on one's state of hallucinating. For if the object was not so dependent, then merely causing the mental state, the hallucinating, would not by itself have been sufficient to bring about the awareness of the object in question—instead one would have needed to bring about a correlation between that object and the subject's state of mind, just as in cases of veridical perception one needs to bring about a correlation between a pig in the subject's environment and the subject. So, if we make a certain general empirical assumption about what we can or cannot cause, then the sense-datum theorist will have specific reason to suppose that the objects of awareness in cases of hallucination are mind-dependent: they depend for their existence and character on the act of being aware of them, and being presented with them as being thus and so. This then provides a general feature which all sense-data may be thought to possess: they are those items whose existence is dependent on a particular subject's awareness of them. Public objects of perception, even such phenomena as rainbows, will not be dependent for their existence on any one individual's given experience.

One can question the assumptions at play here, and in particular one may well question the first assumption about the need for an object of awareness for all experiences, whether perceptions or hallucinations. There may yet be other problems with the argument, even if one is prepared to grant such assumptions. It would be beside the point somewhat to reflect on the ways in which the view is flawed and how it could be refined, for the issues then raised would

be inconsequential to our main concerns. For such an account of how we could give the sense-datum/material object contrast substance is not the target of any of Austin's criticisms. Price would not have found this way of introducing the term acceptable, and though Ayer used it in a somewhat different way, the account sketched above would not find his favour either.

The first point to make about Price's use of the term, in which he follows Moore, is that he means by 'sense-datum' not something non-physical but merely whatever it is that occupies a certain role: that of being given or present to the mind in states of sensing.¹⁰ He then takes himself to have an argument to show that such things cannot at any rate ever be identified with physical objects. However, given that Price did think that all sense-data were in fact non-physical, the most important point to note is that he denied that it made any sense to affirm of them that they are mind-dependent. Consider:

It has often been thought that sense-data 'exist only *for* a mind'. My sense-data, it is said, exist only for me, and yours only for you. This phrase may be taken in two ways. It may mean that sense-data depend for their existence or for their qualities upon our awareness of them; this proposition is a gross absurdity, incompatible with the very connotations of the terms 'existent', 'awareness', and 'qualities'...¹¹

So Price has no easy way of defining sense-data as just those things which are dependent for their existence on any state of awareness of a subject. Of course, he did not take seriously the thought that non-physical sense-data might have an existence entirely independent of our sensing of them. But his account requires that we accept a complex interplay of causal and other dependencies between physical objects of perception, sense-data and the mind:

It looks as if a sense-datum is only not an event inhering in any one thing, because it is so intimately related to several different things at once: on the one hand, to the thing to which it 'belongs' and which it enables us to be perceptually conscious of; on the other, to the brain and the mind of the sentient. Thus the colour-expanse which

10. Of course, to suppose that there must always be an occupant of this role, whenever one has an experience, is thereby to make the implausible assumption that there is always something which one senses, when one has an experience. Even if one were prepared to grant that assumption, one should also note that Price has no sound justification for the assumption that there is a common role for objects of awareness to play, although his definition of 'sense-datum' requires that assumption.

11. (Price 1932), p.126; cf. here (Moore 1922); and Prichard in 'The Sense-Datum Fallacy', in (Prichard 1950a), where he argues from the non-independence of the objects of sensations, to our lack of knowledge or acquaintance with them.

I am acquainted with when the tree is present to my senses is a member of at least two distinct complexes.¹²

But this makes it look as if the answer to the question, ‘What kind of thing is a sense-datum?’ is to be answered by looking to a general theory of perception which relates the conditions of perception and the structure of the brain to episodes of sensing. It is as if we have here a theory whose terms will come to have content through its empirical application. Unfortunately for Price there seems to be no hope of any such theory gaining empirical footing, so it seems as if there can be no satisfactory answer to the question at hand.¹³

Ayer is not happy with the position that Price lands himself in. On Price’s account it looks as if it should be a substantive issue about what kinds of things they are which fulfil the presentation role of sense-data. Yet, for all of Price’s apparent convictions about the matter, his theory will simply be unable to answer it. Ayer’s attempt in *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* is to remove the appearance of there being any substantive issue here at all. He wants to deny that the issue between a naïve view of perception, and the kinds of phenomenalisms or representative realisms that Price and C.D. Broad carefully distinguish and discuss involve a meaningful debate of substance.¹⁴ As a consequence, in his discussion of the argument from illusion he is keen to emphasise that we should see that it is merely a matter of decision whether we decide to speak in terms of sense-data or not.

Ayer does not have Price’s reasons for denying the mind-dependence of (non-physical) sense-data. Nevertheless he does not avail himself of the means of fixing the term by reference to mind-dependence in the way suggested earlier. For to do so would require taking seriously the picture of bringing about hallucinations sketched above, which mixes elements of common sense and cod-neuroscience. Such a view takes the existence of sense-data to be a substantive matter, and would take seriously the idea of the priority of mind over its objects (sense-data being dependent for their existence on our awareness of them). The particular form of phenomenalism that Ayer favoured at various times, both in *The Foundations*

12. (Price 1932) p.137.

13. Cf. here Paul’s famous discussion of the nature of sense-data and our inability to decide certain key issues about their identity and persistence, (Paul 1966). The force of his questions holds as long as we think of sense-data as objects open to investigation independent of our acts of awareness of them, such that questions about sense-data should be settled by looking to the data themselves, rather than thinking of sense-data as no more than the shadows of the experiences that can be brought about by suitably affecting the mind.

14. See (Broad 1923), (Broad 1925), and (Broad 1956).

of *Empirical Knowledge* and later, would rule out taking this thought seriously. It is no surprise then that both Ayer and Austin should agree that the way for Ayer to mark out what sense-data are is via the criterion of incorrigibility. For it is only if Ayer adopts this criterion that he then has a way of distinguishing sense-data from material objects which could be employed from 'first principles'. Using this means, he doesn't need to appeal either to the general causal conditions of perception or to claims about the relative dependence or independence of the objects of sense.

So Austin's charge that his opponents had no good way of defining 'sense-datum' holds good in respect to the way that Price (and in fact Moore and Broad) conceived of the issue. His diagnosis, that the underlying conception of the distinction relates to an epistemological concern with incorrigibility, is a correct characterisation of Ayer's own position when Ayer seeks to redefine the debate. But while the diagnosis is accurate in respect of Ayer, it is not clear that it holds true of Price. Austin downplays the sense in which both he and Ayer wish to reject the appearance of a problem of some substance that the argument from illusion supposedly poses for us.

Again, I want to stress that these results arise from the particular set of assumptions present in Price's work and again those present in Ayer. Price, like Moore before him, thought that it was absurd to suppose that the objects of awareness might be mind-dependent. Like Broad, who thought this at least an open matter, Price was non-committal about the completeness of physics, and was interested in the possibility of para-psychological phenomena. So the very possibility that there might be interesting relations of dependence between the physical world and certain non-physical entities was not to be ruled out as apparently absurd. Ayer, like Price, wished to find grounds for developing an account of perception and perceptual knowledge that could proceed from first principles, and albeit for different reasons, was not keen to stress either the mind-dependence or mind-independence of any particular entity.

We might then wonder whether in choosing these two authors to comment on, Austin really has found the best expositions of a traditional doctrine about the objects of sense. For it really is not clear that the particular concerns which drive Price and Ayer are echoed even in the debate among early modern philosophers, let alone in the discussion of these issues which traces back to Heraclitus. Now the worry here extends to the second line of criticism mentioned above, Austin's dismissal of the argument from illusion.

In the third chapter Austin sets about the 'so-called "argument from illusion"', spending some time pointing out how rare genuine

illusions are, and how we often can detect when we are suffering an illusion or hallucination. He also suggests that one root of the use of the argument involves a confusion of illusion with delusion. This suggestion is highly unlikely to convince anyone who has felt the pull of the argument. In particular, if we think back to the suggestion earlier about how one might attempt to define a general notion of sense-datum, then one might think that the relative frequency of perfect hallucinations is not really to the point. Rather, the basic thought is just that for any given perception, or course of perceptions that one has, one could have a sequence of hallucinations which one could not tell from the inside were not those perceptions. Regardless of the frequency of such states of mind, the pressing question is what the consequences of this possibility might amount to.

Austin's discussion develops further in later chapters and his response to the above complaint comes late in the fifth chapter when he insists:

But if we are prepared to admit that there may be, even that there are, *some* cases in which 'delusive and veridical perceptions' really are indistinguishable, does this admission require us to drag in, or even let in sense-data? No. For even if we were to make the prior admission (which we have so far found no reason to make) that in the 'abnormal' cases we perceive sense-data, we should not be obliged to extend this admission to the 'normal' cases too. For why on earth should it *not* be the case that, in some few instances, perceiving one sort of thing is exactly like perceiving another?¹⁵

Now what Austin has to say here has much force against Price's picture of sense-data. If we are not prepared to introduce (non-physical) sense-data as essentially mind-dependent rather than merely non-physical, and must instead introduce the notion of a sense-datum in a way which leaves open the status of the objects of perception, then how can one rule out the possibility of the observable properties of a physical object and of a sense-datum coinciding?

After all, it is not inconceivable that someone should so construct a decoy duck that by sight alone one could not tell it from the real duck that lives in the village pond. The mere fact that these two items could not be told apart would not in itself show that one could only ever see the decoy duck, or that neither the decoy nor the real duck could ever be seen. Rather, what it shows is that, if one relies solely on one's powers of sight, one is not in a position to tell apart the two entities. Likewise, the metaphysical status of an entity—wheth-

15. *Op. cit.* p.52.

er it is physical or not, or whether it is mind-dependent or not—may not be something which is directly observable about it. Instead, what one has to go on is its observed shape or colour, and in this a decoy duck and a mere sense-datum as of a duck might coincide. This fact alone would not show that on the one occasion one was presented with a decoy duck, while on another one had to hand merely the simulacrum of such a material thing, the mere sense-datum.

Austin's point here has force because it focuses on the objects of awareness and asks the perfectly reasonable question why two distinct objects of awareness should not be indistinguishable. But this is not the only way to understand the problem. If one adopts the alternative conception of sense-data as mind-dependent in the way sketched earlier, then one will conceive of the kind of experience which one has when hallucinating as thereby having an object of awareness independent of how things are in the subject's environment. Bringing about such a state of mind will be sufficient for it to have an object, its sense-datum. With this conception of experience, a different argument from subjective indistinguishability can be mounted. For, one might claim, if two conscious states of mind could not be distinguished by their subject 'from the inside', then that gives us conclusive grounds for supposing that the two states of mind are of the same kind. Note that someone committed to this claim need not suppose that there could not be radically distinct but indistinguishable objects of perception—in such cases there is no reason to deny that one is in the same type of state of mind, namely a relation to some object or other with certain perceptible properties. The point here is not whether distinct particulars may share the same properties, but rather whether distinct types of state of mind could be indistinguishable by the subject whose states they are. One reason for endorsing the indistinguishability condition in the restricted domain of conscious states of mind would be the thought that there is a tight connection here with the kind of authoritative self-conscious knowledge that we have of our own conscious states of mind.

Now, if the hallucinatory experience is of the same kind as the experience had when seeing the decoy duck, then truths about the intrinsic nature of that kind of experience will hold of perceptions equally as they hold of hallucinations. If in the case of the hallucination it is true that the experience is of a kind sufficient to bring about its object independent of how the subject's physical environment is, then the same will be true of the experience in the case of perception. So, we have reason in this case too, to suppose that

there is a non-physical object of awareness, a sense-datum distinct from the decoy duck, before the subject. *Pace* Austin, then, one may well have reason to suppose that, if one accepts that there are sense-data as the objects of awareness in cases of hallucination, one has reason to believe that there is an inner object of awareness even in cases of veridical perception.

Again, I don't want to suggest that this argument is conclusive. Indeed, I think that we have good reason to reject the reasoning.¹⁶ The point is rather that Austin does not even articulate this argument, let alone frame any response to it. In his study of Austin, Warnock comments on his lack of interest in arguments which trade on the fact that there is a causal transaction between object of perception and perceiver. Warnock suggests that there is no ground for criticism here, since the mere fact that Austin didn't discuss all possible grounds for the views he opposes, does not show that the attack which he does launch is not effective. While this is correct as far as it goes, it underplays one of the pretensions stated at the outset of *Sense & Sensibilia*, that Austin is picking on Ayer and Price because they offer the best exposition of an ancient and persistent line of argument. The ways in which he diagnoses both the argument from illusion and the dichotomy of sense-datum/material thing turn on particular aspects of the two philosophers he discusses most fully. It is not at all clear that the predilections that they possess echo down the centuries to earlier debates about appearance and reality, or to the debate that now occurs about the nature of perception.

Austin offers us a particular portrait of the shape of a problem that he wishes now to consign to history. As with so many philosophical portraits of the past, when later we come to assess the interpretation we find ourselves as much like the position of a viewer of one of Van Meegeren's Vermeers. In the 1930s, such pictures may well have seemed clearly to be authentic depictions of life in the sixteenth century, while today it is clear to us that the women depicted belong in our own century. So while to Austin and his contemporaries his portrait of past concerns about the problems of perception might have seemed an acute expression of the underlying motivations, for us looking back now it is easier to see the shapes of their own concerns, in the mid-twentieth century, than the deeper undercurrents which moved much earlier thinkers.

In questioning the critical elements of Austin's discussion, I mean only to clear out of the way the most common aspects of in-

16. See (Martin 1997) for a more detailed discussion of the argument, and responses to it.

terpretation of these lectures in order better to focus on the more positive elements within Austin's outlook which still has a bearing on some current concerns. The underlying problem of illusion which we have just outlined will turn out after all to have a further role to play.

3. One of the themes of *Sense & Sensibilia* is what we might call a commitment to a common sense realism, and this lurks behind many of the criticisms of Ayer. To give it a label such as 'common sense realism' may suggest that some particular doctrine, or thesis about the nature of the world, or our relation to it is being attributed to Austin, but there is something unhappy in this context of characterising it in quite that way. One might rather speak of it as a certain attitude or commitment on Austin's part, but then that too may just obfuscate matters. At one level, the thought is just that Austin's view is that we should just accept as facts those things which ordinarily we do see for what they are, facts. We shouldn't question such things as that Balliol is West of New College; or that cups don't normally fall through tables; or that I can normally tell whether there is a pig in the room just by looking. One should look askance at any philosophical doctrine which questions these evident truths, or any approach which attempts to reconstrue them in unfamiliar ways or make the obvious *unheimlich*.

Perhaps another way of getting at this theme is by linking it with figures from Austin's past. One link here is with Moore, whom Austin is reported to have admired.¹⁷ Moore's paper, 'Certainty' begins:

I am at present, as you can all see, in a room and not in the open air; I am standing up, and not either sitting or lying down; I have clothes on, and am not absolutely naked; I am speaking in a fairly loud voice, and am not either singing or whispering or keeping quite silent; I have in my hand some sheets of paper with writing on them; there are a good many other people in the same room in which I am; and there are windows in that wall and a door in this one.¹⁸

Moore uses such examples of particular pieces of knowledge of the world to question sceptical arguments, that he is not certain of these things, or that he does not know he is not dreaming. I do not wish to suggest that Austin follows Moore in appealing to such obvious facts as the basis for an *argument* against scepticism. It is not clear that Austin is concerned to argue against sceptics, rather than show the incoherence of certain assumptions held in common by sceptics

17. (Grice 1989), p.381; Grice is somewhat baffled by Austin's admiration here.

18. (Moore 1959), p.227.

and their opponents. Nevertheless, in Austin as in Moore there is close attention to what clearly are fairly day to day facts of life.

One can also trace a connection with certain of Austin's predecessors in Oxford. Somewhat frivolously I am inclined to reproduce an anecdote of Farquharson's about Cook Wilson:

About ten men were present at the first informal class of that year. He was treating by request the Kantian paradox: 'the mind makes nature, the material it does not make'. He paused in his familiar manner and bending forward looked fixedly in the face of a Balliol man in a ragged scholar's gown. He, supposing himself to be interrogated or in a spirit of mischief, blurted out: 'But why shouldn't the table be there, just where we see it?' Silence attended the result. The professor sprang once in the air; said very fiercely indeed: 'Why shouldn't it?' and then relapsed into reverie. The scholar never returned, but I have sometimes wondered whether the shock set Wilson determinedly to work clearing the path which after many days led him far from the idealist solution he then accepted or appeared to accept.¹⁹

Introducing the scholar's reaction and Cook Wilson's accession to it are not entirely without serious point. For together with his new found commitment to a form of realism, Cook Wilson insisted on the contrast between knowledge and belief as distinct kinds of mental act, a view also taken up by his student Prichard. Prichard insists:

Knowing is absolutely different from what is called indifferently believing or being convinced or being persuaded or having an opinion or thinking, in the sense in which we oppose thinking to knowing, as when we say 'I think so but am not sure'. Knowing is not something which differs from being convinced by a difference of degree of something such as a feeling of confidence... Knowing and believing differ in kind as do desiring and feeling, or as do a red colour and a blue colour.²⁰

And one can find in 'Other Minds', echoes of these sentiments when Austin claims:

There is a singular difference between the two forms of challenge: 'How do you know?' and 'Why do you believe?' We seem never to ask 'Why do you know?' or 'How do you believe?' And in this, as well as in other respects to be noticed later, not merely such words as 'suppose' 'assume', etc.. but also the expressions 'be sure' and 'be certain', follow the example of 'believe', not that of 'know'.²¹

19. Farquharson's 'Memoir', in (Wilson 1926), p.xix.

20. (Prichard 1950b), p.87.

This precedes Austin's notorious suggestion that 'I know' does not describe one's situation, but is rather a performative to be compared to 'I promise'. While Austin seems to have taken up certain ideas from his predecessors, there is also a distinctively different spin on the way the doctrine is to be interpreted. The contrast is not repeated in *Sense & Sensibilia*, and there is no hint of the controversial claim about avowals of knowledge, but there is a related point of some significance in Austin's discussion of incorrigibility, for there he insists in certain favourable circumstances, I can know something without the possibility of mistake, and in such cases I do *not* have evidence for what I know, rather I can just see that it is so (pp.114-7).

The emphasis on resting on what are obvious matters of fact is evident throughout *Sense & Sensibilia*. We find Austin paying attention to what is simply a matter of fact, something that we all know, and which should lead us to question closely any philosophical thesis which entices us away from this. At the beginning of Chapter III, Austin adds a footnote to Ayer's discussion of the argument from illusion:

It is not only strange, but also important, that Ayer calls these 'assumptions'. Later on he is going to take seriously the notion of denying at least one of them, which he could hardly do if he had recognized them here as the plain and incontestable facts that they are.²²

Further, when Austin diagnoses Ayer's evaluation of the argument from illusion in Chapter VI, the complaint is really that Ayer's suggestions about how we could talk about illusion either rely on a degree of '*insouciant* latitude' that one can just say what one likes, or really presuppose the truth of his position, that the facts that there are to talk about, are facts about sense-data. Given that these are not the facts, that the facts are such as that there are straight sticks and that such sticks remain straight when placed in water however they may then come to look, then we are not only in the position to reject Ayer's account, but also to complain that really we don't know what is being said. Ayer's terms, and his instructions would make sense if we could use the terms appropriately in response to how things are. And, of course, things are just not the way that Ayer claims them to be.

But the commitment to a common sense realism, and a concern with what knowledge must be, come to a head in Chapter X. This

21. (Austin 1979a), p.78.

22. (Austin 1962), p.21 ft.1.

contains the heart of the dispute between Austin and Ayer, where Austin fixes his eye on various doctrines concerning incorrigibility and knowledge. At the end of Chapter IX, Austin claims about sense-datum theorists that:

Their real motive—and this lies right at the heart of the whole matter—is that they wish to produce a species of statement that will be *incorrigible*; and the real virtue of the invented sense of ‘perceive’ is that, since what is perceived in this sense *has* to exist and *has* to be as it appears, in saying what I perceive in this sense I *can’t be wrong*.²³

Now, as we have seen, this claim fits Ayer’s position well, and Ayer is happy to endorse this description of the debate. In moving the debate about perception away from the kind of substantive and quasi-empirical issues raised by Price and others, Ayer is keen to locate the matter in a debate about the foundations of empirical knowledge. For that very reason, Austin’s diagnosis as applied either to Price or to the earlier tradition may look more suspect. For all that, Austin’s discussion of incorrigibility and Ayer’s exasperation with it bring out most clearly the stand-off between what I’m calling Austin’s common sense realism and Ayer’s own approach. It is here that we can get the keenest sense of the positive themes in Austin’s work.

It may appear odd to claim that there is a positive thesis or commitment in the discussion of incorrigibility, since most discussions of it have tended to emphasise its negative aspects, the claim that:

There isn’t, there couldn’t be, any kind of sentence which as such is incapable, once uttered, of being subsequently amended or retracted.²⁴

The focus of discussion since has been on whether Austin has demonstrated that statements about our own sensations are not incorrigible in this sense, and in part then whether one can delimit suitably the range or ‘merely verbal’ slips which can enter into the making of such a judgement. And if we focus solely on this question, few, I think, would take what Austin says to have been decisive, although it is equally the case that few people now would place much weight on the incorrigibility of first person reports of sensation.²⁵

But what is of equal importance is what Austin goes on to say following his critique of incorrigible sensation reports, namely what he does want to take to stand as unquestionable knowledge:

23. (Austin 1962), p.103.

24. p. 113.

25. For discussions of Austin *v.* Ayer on this, cf. (Ferguson 1969), (Ayer 1969b), (Pears 1979); for more recent discussions of incorrigibility and sensation cf. (Churchland 1984), Ch.3 and especially, (Williamson 1996).

...it may be said, even if such cautious formulae are not *intrinsically* incorrigible, surely there will be plenty of cases in which what we say by their utterance will *in fact* be incorrigible... Well, yes, no doubt this is true. But then exactly the same thing is true of utterances in which quite different forms of word are employed... if I watch for some time an animal a few feet in front of me, in a good light, if I prod it perhaps, and sniff, and take note of the noises it makes, I may say, 'That's a pig'; and this too will be 'incorrigible', nothing could be produced that would show that I had made a mistake.²⁶

According to Austin, in as much as it is right for us to speak of the certainty of any claims we make, then we should just accept the plain truth that we are certain of many judgements made about things such as pigs, given certain propitious circumstances of making the judgement.

Ayer, of course, will have nothing of this. He complains:

The fact on which Austin is relying is that one would not ordinarily say that the existence of the chair was uncertain unless one had some *special* reason for supposing it to be so...

This is true, so far as it goes. But if we consider the reasons which have led sense-datum theorists to speak of uncertainty in this connexion, we shall find that they remain untouched. The most that is proved against them is that they have chosen a misleading way of expressing the point that they were trying to make. As I see it, this point is a purely logical one. It is that in any such situation as described by Austin the occurrence of the experience which gives rise to the perceptual judgement is logically consistent with the judgement's being false... So, when the sense-datum theorist says, no doubt misleadingly, that even in the most favourable conditions of perception it remains uncertain whether the chair exists, what he must be understood to mean is that the statement that the chair exists does not follow logically from any statement, or indeed from any finite number of statements, which are limited to describing the content of the observer's experience.²⁷

This gets right to the heart of the dispute between them, but even here Ayer manages to misstate Austin's actual position. Austin is not merely claiming that we do not *say* that we are uncertain in propitious situations, he is claiming that, as a matter of fact, we are certain and not open to revision. Ayer, of course, thinks such a position absurd, and he does so for the reasons he cites towards the end of this passage. These concerns link directly to the conception

26. Pp. 114-5.

27. (Ayer 1969a), pp.285-6.

of sense-data and the argument from illusion discussed earlier, and which we noted Austin did not take proper heed of.

For any case in which one sees a pig head-on, it is possible that one should rather be suffering a matching hallucination brought about, perhaps, by skilled manipulation of areas of one's visual cortex. There are two different things that Ayer would seek to extract from such a case. First, the statement that one makes in the case of veridical perception is true, but the very same statement as made when one has the matching hallucination is false. If the two situations are relevantly the same (i.e. from the point of view of assessing whether the subject is justified or knows), then the possibility of a mistake in the second situation shows that one cannot be certain in the first. Secondly, if one reflects on what other judgements one might be able to make, one could see that in entertaining the doubt that one was perceiving and not hallucinating, one would still be in a position to make a judgement about one's experience. Of course, for Ayer, such judgements are to be classified as sense-datum judgements, but the key claim here is independent of any commitment to sense-data and sense-datum language—almost all philosophers now who repudiate the idea of sense-datum judgements are still happy to admit that there is a relevant judgement here to be made about one's experience; one might simply report that it is with one as if a pig is there. This statement would be true not only in the first situation, but also in the second, so there would be no grounds to deny that one is certain of it, that one knows it. Furthermore, Ayer suggests, we can see the contrast between the certainty of these judgements as implying a kind of inference or transition from the more certain facts to be judged about to the less certain.

Austin would certainly think that this kind of reasoning is just confused. He asserts:

It seems to be generally realized nowadays that, if you take a bunch of sentences (or propositions, to use the term Ayer prefers) impeccably formulated in some language or other, there can be no question of sorting them out into those that are true and those that are false; for (leaving out of account the so-called 'analytic' sentences) the question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence *is*, nor yet on what it *means*, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered. Sentences are not *as such* either true or false. But it is really equally clear, when one comes to think of it, that for much the same reasons there could be no question of picking out from one's bunch of sentences those that are evidence for others, those that are 'testable', or those that are 'incorrigible'. What kind of sentence is uttered as providing evidence for what depends,

again, on the circumstance of the particular cases; there is no kind of sentence which *as such* is evidence-providing, just as there is no kind of sentence which *as such* is surprising, or doubtful, or certain, or incorrigible, or true.²⁸

On the occasion on which one does just see the pig one can know that the pig is there, and express knowledge with one's use of the sentence, 'That's a pig'. This fact about one is not undermined, according to Austin, by the thought that there are other circumstances, and other occasions, on which one could use the very same sentence to say something which was not true, or which did not express knowledge. The mere fact that there are possible situations in which one would go wrong does not show that in the actual situation, where one has not gone wrong, and that is not a matter of some mere fluke, one does know that the pig is there.

Equally important for the critique is a resistance to the idea that one's perceptual judgement is the result of some actual or potential inference, that one's judgement, whether certain or uncertain, results from some sensitivity to evidence available to one. Austin is insistent:

The situation in which I would properly be said to have *evidence* for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more *evidence* that it's a pig, I can now just *see* that it is, the question is settled.²⁹

Now Ayer's reaction to this is again just to treat it as a matter of pointing out a commonly agreed truth: that we don't normally make a conscious inference in perceptual judgement. This, he holds, is irrelevant, since the key point is the 'logical' one that we have introduced above, and that is enough to show that the perceptual judgement has, as its grounds, evidence which makes it less than certain.³⁰ But, again, this doesn't directly engage with Austin. First, the issue is not one of logic at all. Grant that 'It appears to S as if there is a table before S' does not entail 'There is a table before S' but does entail 'It appears to S as if there is a table before her', this

28. p.111.

29. p.115.

30. (Ayer 1969a), pp.289-90.

still tells us nothing as it stands about grounds, reason or justification. The issue here is one about the relations among a subject's states of mind, her perceivings and knowings or comings to know, not simply about the logical relations among propositions.³¹

Secondly, Ayer just doesn't take seriously the conception that Austin has of the matter. As noted earlier, we have here an echo of the claims in 'Other Minds' that there is a contrast between believing and knowing. In the case of belief one may have reasons for one's belief, one can ask 'Why?' In the case of knowledge one can merely indicate the means or methods by which one comes to know, one can ask 'How?'

One can ask in the case of a mistaken judgement, where the subject falsely believes that there is a pig in front of her, 'Why does she believe that?' An adequate answer may well mention the fact that it looked to her as if there was a pig there. But if the subject simply knows that a pig is there in the propitious circumstances of pig-presence being manifest to her, then, Austin implies, one cannot ask with respect to her knowing that the pig is there why she knows it, and hence cannot answer such a question by citing as a ground the fact that it looks to her as if a pig is there—the kind of fact that Ayer takes to be the kind of grounds for any perceptual judgement as a matter of logic. So we are to hold on to the idea, present in Cook Wilson and Prichard, that in the right circumstances one just knows right off how things are.

Yet while Ayer's criticisms don't directly engage with Austin's position here, one might still think that there is a challenge here for Austin to answer. For, even if one does not think that the issues here are just ones of logic, one might still want to know whether the various possibilities of illusion and hallucination bear on the ways in which simply perceiving something can underpin knowledge of the world or claims to such knowledge. And as Ayer notes, Austin does not give any general account of verification, or any direct argument for why the views he opposes must be wrong. And that is because Austin doubts that any general theory of these issues can be given at all:

...it would be a mistake in principle to suppose that the same thing could be done for knowledge in general. And this is because there could be no general answer to the questions what is evidence for what, what is certain, what is doubtful, what needs or does not need evidence,

31. This, at least, is one of the morals to be drawn from Austin's discussion, that the theory of knowledge or justification is not simply a theory about evidential relations among propositions or sentences. It is a moral which has not been properly appreciated in some recent discussions of epistemology.

can or can't be verified. If the Theory of Knowledge consists in finding grounds for such an answer, there is no such thing.³²

For him it simply doesn't follow that because on some occasions one would go wrong in judging that there is a pig there, that even in the most propitious circumstances the same must be true too. This is all that there is to say. He defends our certain knowledge of various banal and simple facts by denying that we can even frame a general theory of knowledge which might set out to question and then possibly vindicate our common claims to knowledge.

One might feel rather disappointed at this stand-off. It seems to suggest that the only way in which one could do justice to the kind of common sense realism expressed in *Sense & Sensibilia* is just by rejecting wholesale the philosophical project of giving a theory of knowledge or justification.³³ If that were so, then it would leave the kind of realism in question looking like a very fragile philosophical hope.

It is at just this point that we can look for connections with Putnam's 'natural realism' and the 'disjunctive' theories of perception and knowledge that Putnam draws upon. For we can ask both the extent to which these theories are nascent in Austin himself, and the extent to which he may be able to call upon them as an alternative to just turning his back on the questions that Ayer would like to press.

4. The lessons that Putnam thinks philosophers have failed to learn concern the status of perceptual experiences as 'intermediaries' between us and the world:

...I agree with James, as well as with McDowell, that the false belief that perception *must* be so analyzed is the root of all the problems with the view of perception that, in one form or another, has dominated Western philosophy since the seventeenth century. James's idea is that the traditional claim that we must conceive of our sensory experiences as *intermediaries* between us and the world has no sound arguments to support it, and, worse, makes it impossible to see how persons can be in genuine contact with a world at all.³⁴

McDowell's earliest statement of this sort of view can be found in 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge' when he claims:

...an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be either a mere appearance or the fact made manifest to someone... the object of ex-

32. p.124.

33. For a development of Austin's criticisms of epistemology here, see (Williams 1996).

34. (Putnam 1994), p.454.

perience in the deceptive cases is a mere appearance. But we are not to accept that in the non-deceptive cases too the object of experience is a mere appearance, and hence something that falls short of the fact itself... appearances are no longer conceived as intervening between the experiencing subject and the world.³⁵

McDowell's form of disjunctivism is not the only, nor the first, such form of view associated with perception. Michael Hinton presented such a view first in some papers in the late 60s, followed by his monograph *Experiences*.³⁶ His intention there was to contrast as disjuncts the perceivings of objects and hallucinations, where it is for one as if some object looks a certain way to one; in developing this line, Hinton sought to plug a gap in the rejection of the argument from illusion that he found in Austin's comments. McDowell's form of the view does not contrast veridical perception of objects with hallucinations of objects, but the perception of facts, that things are thus and so, with mere appearances. In this way, McDowell's form of disjunctivism seems closer to Cook Wilson's and Prichard's views of knowledge and belief. This is one reason for finding a connection with Austin. So it seems appropriate to ask to what extent is McDowell's disjunctivism a development of the position in Austin, i.e. to what extent is common sense realism, as I labelled it, simply 'natural realism'?

There are a couple of reasons already to make us doubt that there can be any straightforward identification here. Although, as we've seen, there are some echoes of Cook Wilson and Prichard in Austin, the way in which they are developed is very different from those authors and also from McDowell. For McDowell it is important to say that the state I am in when I see the pig in front of me is a case of the fact of the pig's presence being manifest to me and this is not to be identified with any case of mere appearance which would be present were I merely hallucinating or suffering some illusion. Austin's way, when explicitly developing the contrast, is to indicate the different uses of the term 'know' and 'believe'. Moreover, and perhaps more substantially, Austin's criticisms of talk of evidence for what one believes or knows seems to require a much greater pessimism about what we can usefully say about knowledge and justification in general than anything in McDowell's picture.

We might then, instead, think of such disjunctivism as an attempt to develop Austinian insights into our situation without hav-

35. (McDowell 1982) p.211 (in Dancy reprint, 1988).

36. (Hinton 1973); Hinton's disjunctivism is discussed and refined further in (Snowdon 1980-81).

ing to embrace quite the destructive attitude towards theory of knowledge in general that he seems to have. One could then explain why Austin would be right to assert that in the case of being presented with the pig one just knows straight off that the pig is there, regardless of the remote possibility of hallucination, by pointing out that in this situation one is in the position of pig-presence being manifest, and that is a salient difference from the case of mere hallucination.

But is this kind of disjunctivism about perception the only way that Austin's position could be further developed against the challenge from Ayer? What is central to Austin's concerns are that one should be able to insist that one does just know that there is a pig there in propitious circumstances, regardless of what is to be said about cases of hallucination. What this requires, in particular, is that one should resist any attempt to generalise back claims made about the unfortunate cases of illusion or hallucination where one's judgement is mistaken to the propitious cases where one perceives things as they are. But disjunctivism about perception and knowledge is only one way of blocking this kind of move.

Many philosophers now would be prepared to accept that there is no kind of inference involved in moving from experience to perceptual judgement, that there is no inference from a proposition about the appearances of pigs to a judgement about the presence of a pig.³⁷ Nevertheless, they would be prepared to admit that the same state of mind, the same experience, is present in the case of veridical perception and in the case of hallucination.³⁸ Turning to knowledge rather than perception, it is even more common to find philosophers who claim that the fact that a given method of fixing belief, such as use of the senses, may give rise to false belief in some possible circumstances, is not enough to show that the processes cannot give rise to knowledge in more propitious circumstances. For, in the case of normal perception, it will be no accident that the subject manages to grasp the truth about the presence of pigs by use of her senses.³⁹

Now Putnam suggests that the mere fact that one allows that the same mental states may be present in both circumstances will show that the states in question act as 'intermediaries' and deny us 'genu-

37. Cf. (Harman 1990), (Burge 1993a), p.478 ft. 18.

38. (Burge 1993b) develops Burge's view here in comparison with John Searle's account in, (Searle 1983), who would also be a candidate for the kind of view discussed here in the text.

39. This is, of course, a theme of much of the 'externalist' literature on knowledge and justification. Representative discussions are, (Dretske 1971), (Goldman 1976), (Nozick 1981), Ch.3; see also (Foster 1986), Ch.2 and (Peacocke 1986), Ch.9.

ine cognitive contact' with the world. This would seem to be at one with some of McDowell's complaints against views which do not build truth into the very state of mind central to knowledge, 'hybrid conceptions' of knowledge as he has come to christen them:

In the hybrid conception, a satisfactory standing in the space of reasons is only part of what knowledge is; truth is an extra requirement. So two subjects can be alike in respect of the satisfactoriness of their standing in the space of reasons, although only one of them is a knower, because only in her case is what she takes to be so actually so...how can the unconnected obtaining of the fact have any intelligible bearing on an epistemic position that the person's standing in the space of reasons is supposed to help constitute?⁴⁰

But the opposition may not be convinced. Of course, McDowell and Putnam wish to describe the subject as conceived by the 'hybrid' conception as cut-off from the facts even in the most propitious circumstances. But what is to stop the opponent from just insisting that just what it is to have cognitive contact with the world is to be in this state of mind in such circumstances? Nothing more could be required. It would simply be illegitimate to generalise back from the case of mistaken judgement or lack of knowledge to the central cases where circumstances go our way. So the mere fact that one would be cut-off in unfortunate circumstances would not show that one must be cut-off in propitious circumstances, even if there is a relevant state of mind present in both situations. Or so they would claim.

The stand-off here between McDowell and these alternative conceptions of knowledge indicates another difference of approach between this form of disjunctivism and Austin's attitudes to perception and knowledge. Although it is no part of McDowell's project to present a direct argument against scepticism with respect to the external world, a concern with such scepticism does form part of the armoury he employs against his opponents. On occasion, to highlight what he takes to be the inadequacies of such views, he argues that such scepticism is a consequence of accepting the opponent's position. This suggests a difference of tone from Austin. For Austin really does not take seriously sceptical reasoning, which he treats with suspicion as rather ramshackle. So it is not clear that he would accept that scepticism followed inexorably from any one particular conception of perception or knowledge.

So, it is doubtful, I suggest, whether Putnam is right to see Austin as a straightforward precursor of either McDowell's or his own

40. (McDowell 1995), p.884.

views of perception and cognition. It is just not obvious that the best development of Austin's views of the commonplace should be given in terms of McDowell's and Putnam's disjunctivism.

But perhaps we can tease out slightly more from the notion of common sense realism, to find a closer echo of concern and content between Austin and Putnam. And that leaves me with one last connection to draw between the common sense realism that Austin espouses and recent forms of disjunctivism. One has a reason to endorse some form of disjunctivism where one supposes that there is some positive connection or contact with the world in the propitious cases of perceiving that things are so, or correctly recognising them to be that way, and one supposes that such a property could not be present were the relevant state of mind common between cases of perception and hallucination. So one might think that a common sense realism would lead to McDowell's disjunctivism to the extent that its proper articulation here requires us to embrace a conception of cognitive contact with the world which would rule out any such common element to perception and hallucination, or knowledge and false opinion.

The most suggestive way of doing so in relation to perception, would seem to take us far from Austin's official stance, though. For developing this line of thought requires us to take far more seriously the argument from illusion than Austin does. On Austin's account of the problems of perception, a philosopher like Price no less than Ayer is driven by epistemological concerns, and he cites the notorious passage concerning doubt and tomatoes in support of this. But that really is to misread Price's view. That is perhaps best brought out by considering more carefully the passage itself:

When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is a material thing there at all... One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is presented to my consciousness...that something is red and round then and there I cannot doubt...that it now *exists*, and that *I* am conscious of it—by me at least who am conscious of it this cannot possibly be doubted... This peculiar and ultimate manner of being present to consciousness is called *being given*, and that which is thus present is called a *datum*.⁴¹

One could just about read this passage as a search for certainty, end-

41. (Price 1932), p.3.

ing in the positing of some item a sense-datum which meets that pathological demand. But there is a much more appropriate reading of it than that, which takes us away from any simple epistemological concern. Later in the book, Price confesses:

When I say ‘This table appears brown to me’ it is quite plain that I am acquainted with an actual instance of brownness (or equally plainly with a pair of instances when I see double). This cannot indeed be proved, but it is absolutely evident and indubitable.⁴²

For whatever reason, Price seems to suppose that it is just evident to him, perhaps given reflection on what his experience is like, that there must be *something* there before him. Hence by reflecting on what things are beyond serious doubt, he hopes to draw his audience’s attention to that supposed fact. The grounds of Price’s convictions here are not so much epistemological, but phenomenological. According to him, the kind of situation one is in when one senses is one which just must involve the presence of what one is aware of.

If we apply this to Austin’s example of happening upon the pig, then one might suggest that the kind of contact one has with the facts here, when pig-presence is just manifest to one, involves just the kind of contact with the world which couldn’t be present in a case of hallucination. That is, being apprised of pig-presence will not be a state of affairs decomposable down into facts in the world on the one hand, and some mental state independent of them on the other. This is obviously in tension with the view that experience is a common kind between perception and hallucination. For, if that were so, then one would have to conclude with Price that the state of affairs manifest to one would be non-physical. To resist that consequence, one may then feel impelled to embrace some form of disjunctivism: the state of mind one is in when perceiving includes what one perceives, and hence is not of a kind which could have occurred were one merely hallucinating.

This certainly gives us a more substantive content to common sense realism in a way that indicates why a kind of disjunctivism about perception would seem natural. But one couldn’t easily attribute these concerns as an underlying motivation for Austin himself. For, once one has moved as far as this, then one can no longer be satisfied with Austin’s analysis of the traditional problem of perception as being one that derives from a concern with incorrigibility. The problem on this interpretation has a phenomenological basis not principally an epistemological one. Nor would the fact that our

42. *Op. cit.*, p.63.

common ways of talking about perception and illusion confirm one in the faith that there is nothing to the traditional anxiety. For the worry may arise that the commitments we would end up with as a result of reflecting on experience cannot be made mutually consistent. One charitable interpretation of the traditional problems of perception is as no more than a concern with this. If this is so, then in articulating the commitments of common sense realism, Austin might find himself having to take somewhat more seriously the traditional challenge of the argument from illusion than he is want to do.

The negative aspects of Austin's project in *Sense & Sensibilia* have the appearance of success—few now uphold the doctrines that Austin ridiculed. On closer inspection it is difficult to see how Austin's own position could have more than local significance, undermining aspects of Ayer's and Price's somewhat idiosyncratic views. I've argued that there is also a positive theme in Austin's thought, one that has origins in Austin's predecessors, and elements of which can be found in some contemporary views of knowledge and perception. But there is no simple matching between Austin's account and any of these contemporary views. For to flesh out the common sense realism that links these various philosophers together one has to go beyond the concerns that Austin himself thought appropriate, and also find deeper concerns within the tradition of debate about perception than Austin himself was prepared to do.⁴³

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