

A.N. PRIOR ON AUSTIN'S 'SENSE AND SENSIBILIA'

(A reconstruction from Prior's mss.)

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(abstract)

In the early 1960s A.N. Prior was commissioned to write a review of J.L. Austin's 'Sense and Sensibilia'. The review was never published. The present article presents a transcription of the review from the material available in the Virtual Lab For Prior Studies maintained at Aalborg University, together with an edited version of the transcription of a longer commentary on 'Sense and Sensibilia' from which the review was condensed.

Editors' introduction

What follows is an edited version of A.N. Prior's discussion of J.L. Austin's 'Sense and Sensibilia'. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962.) The basis for this version is the transcriptions of two items in the Virtual Lab for Prior Studies, maintained at the University of Aalborg. The transcriptions were made from the virtual lab's photographed copies of handwritten material which is held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The VL photographs are numbered in the order in which are preserved in the Bodleian Library. They were transcribed by Chrissy van Hulst in the (southern) summer of 2014/2015, with subsequent collating and editing by Max Cresswell. The present article is in three parts. The first (A) is a review commissioned by *Mind* but apparently never published, and occurs as item number VL1249.¹ The second (B) is from a transcription of item number 1250, which is a fuller commentary on 'Sense and Sensibilia' — a commentary on which the review in A appears to have been based. The material presented here includes all the pages of VL1250 which seemed able to be assembled into a continuous whole, in a way which is intended to reveal Prior's views on 'Sense and Sensibilia' as they can be extracted from this ms. There are 68 pages in VL1250. Some of these form groups in which the text runs on in a continuous order, though the groups themselves do not appear in an order which reflects a single text. In addition, there are pages of VL1250 which seem preliminary notes for what we have presented. These have not been included here, but they have been transcribed. these are pages 9-11, 42 and 46-54. A few pages, 45, 56-58 and 60 more or less repeat what is

¹VL1249 indicates that it is item number 1249 in the Virtual Lab for Prior Studies. Where a number follows a '.' after the item number it indicates the relevant page according to the VL ordering, which reflects the order in which the pages occur in the Bodleian Library. Thus VL1250.19 indicates the 19th photograph in item 1250.

said elsewhere. Finally there are four pages of VL1250, which are a discussion of the interaction between Austin and Strawson on Truth. We have appended this latter as the third part (C) of our study. The remaining pages have been assembled to form the text in B in the following order: 28-38, 44, 41, 19-27, 16-18, 59, 1-8, 61-68. All this material would have been written about the same time as what emerged in the posthumously published *Objects of Thought*, i.e. in the early 1960s. The transcriptions of 1249 and 1250 in VL include all Prior's crossed out material and respect his line breaks and abbreviations (like '&' for 'and', 'm.t.' for 'material thing' and so on.) They also indicate Prior's page breaks. None of these practices have been followed in the present version.² The footnotes in what follows are the editors' not Prior's.

Prior was a 'logician' during the period of the 'ordinary language philosophy', associated principally with Oxford, and in particular with people like J.L. Austin. It may therefore be of some interest to see that there is very little of the logician in Prior's treatment of Austin.

A: Prior's review of '*Sense and Sensibilia*'³

Sense and Sensibilia. By J. L. Austin. Reconstructed from the manuscript notes by G.J. Warnock. The Clarendon Press. Oxford. Pp ix + 144.

This is as much as we can now have of Austin's attack on 'sense-data', and Warnock is to be congratulated on the reconstruction — the lectures do have the authentic Austinian flavour.

The view under attack, Austin explains in the first lecture, is the view that "we never see or otherwise perceive ... or anyhow we never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense data" (p. 2). In lecture II he finds this view set out in Ayer's *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, as typical of 'philosophers', and contrasted with the naïve realism of the ordinary man. But Austin thinks Ayer makes the plain man out to be more naïve than he really is; the plain man certainly doesn't believe, e.g., that *everything* he perceives is a 'material thing' (since he believes that he perceives rainbows shadows, etc.), and in Austin's view it is a mistake to "try to represent as some single *kind of things* the things which the ordinary man says that he 'perceives'" (p. 8). On the other hand, the view attributed by Ayer to

²In this reconstruction we have also regularised Prior's use of single and double inverted commas. We have used double inverted commas for quotations of passages of text — mostly from Austin — and single commas where words or expressions are mentioned. (The distinction is often a nice one, where it is a judgement call which way it should go.) Prior mostly uses double commas for quotations, but is not always consistent.

³VL1249

the ‘philosophers’ is, Austin says, obscure; in particular, what they mean by ‘direct’ perception is not clear, as what it is opposed to doesn’t seem to be the kind of perception that would ordinarily be called indirect, e.g. seeing something in a mirror (p. 18).

Lecture III begins a long consideration of the ‘argument from illusion’, by which people are first persuaded that what they see “on certain *abnormal, exceptional* occasions” cannot be material objects and so must be sense-data, and then they are further persuaded (because of the identity in quality between normal and abnormal experiences) “that they always perceive sense-data” (and not material things). Austin’s answer to the first part of the argument is that it confuses ‘illusions’ properly so-called, in which something perfectly real publicly appears to be other than it is, with ‘delusions’, in which some private defect causes a man to see things that just aren’t there at all. The man who says that in both types of case we are perceiving ‘sense-data’, gets from the case of illusions proper the idea that we are indeed perceiving something, and from the case of delusions the idea that we are not perceiving anything ‘material’, but there is no good reason for trying to cover both types of case with a single theory.

After a discussion (lecture IV) on our ordinary uses of ‘looks’, ‘appears’ and ‘seems, Austin considers (lecture V) the second stage of the ‘argument from illusion’, in which we are led on to believe that not only in special cases but in all cases what we are perceiving are ‘sense-data’. His counter-arguments are that abnormal perceptions are easier to distinguish from normal ones than this part of the argument allows, and that there is no reason why ‘generically different’ objects, like chairs and mirror images, should not have the amount of qualitative similarity that they do have.

Lecture VI is directed against a suggestion of Ayer’s that the issue between those who say and those who deny that we only perceive sense-data is “not factual but linguistic”. As far as the facts go, Ayer seems to be suggesting in the passages which Austin here cites, we are equally free to say that the ‘real shape’ of a perceived rotating coin remains circular while the changing shapes that we perceive are not of the coin but of ‘sense ‘data’, or that there are no sense-data and we are perceiving real changes in the shape of the coin itself. In passages which Austin considers in the next lecture but one (VIII), Ayer gives criteria for deciding which sense-data present the ‘real qualities’ of material things, e.g. for deciding that a penny ‘really’ has the shape of the sense-datum we perceive when we look at the penny along the line at right angles to itself. We call this its real shape for such reasons as that on this assumption correct predictions are more easily made than any others.

With a view to rebutting talk of this sort, Austin has a lecture (VII) in between the two just mentioned in which he develops the ordinary use of ‘real’. This word, he says, doesn’t explain any single concept, but it is (1) a ‘substantive-hungry’ word, i.e. you can’t just call a thing ‘real’ but must call it a real something-or-other (a real duck,

a real decoy, etc.); it is (2) dependent for its sense upon some implied contrast which differs from context to context, e.g. one and the same object may be 'not a real duck' because it is only a decoy, but it is of course a 'real decoy' in the sense that it isn't only a picture of a decoy; 'real' is (3) a 'dimension-word', i.e. it is the word comprehensive of a whole group of terms which can replace it in different contexts, e.g. 'genuine', 'live', 'authentic'; and it is (4) an 'adjuster-word', by means of which 'other words are adjusted to meet the innumerable and unforeseeable demands of the world upon language', e.g. on encountering a new sort of animal for which we have no name we might say "It's *like* a pig, but it isn't a *real* pig".

In Lecture IX he turns to a contention of Ayer's that in ordinary language there are two different uses of 'see' and more generally of 'perceive', in one of which it is implied that what one sees (or perceives) exists, although it may not really be quite as it seems to be, while in the other use of 'see' there is no such implication of the reality of what is seen, and there can be no question of seeing what one sees wrongly. If, Ayer goes on, one decides to use 'see' in a third and special sense, in which both what one sees is bound to exist and one cannot misperceive it, then the object of such seeing, or perception, will be sense-data. Austin's first criticism of this is that there simply are not these two ordinary senses of 'see' and 'perceive' that Ayer alleges there are, but only the one in which seeing implies that what is seen exists but not that it really is as it seems to be. And in Lecture X he attacks the assumption, the philosopher's supposed third sense, that it must be possible to "produce a species of statement that will be *incorrigible*". Austin does not deny that some statements are in fact incorrigible, but there is no one species of statement to which all of these belong. Not only utterances like "it seems to me now as if I were seeing something pink", but equally ones like 'That's a pig', may be made in circumstances in which "nothing could be produced that would show that I had made a mistake". In a final chapter, Austin notes that the error (as he conceives it) of thinking that there is a sort of sentence which is uniquely immune from criticism is present not only in expositions of the sense-datum theory like those of Ayer and Price, but also in Warnock's book on Berkeley, in which statements of the form 'I perceive (in a special sense) a sense-datum' are replaced by ones beginning 'It seems to me as if ... ' and finishing with something quite ordinary.

One cannot put this book down without feeling that many philosophers have expressed themselves extremely carelessly, and that even when they have not done this, they have departed from common usage in more ways than they have noticed. But one also cannot help wondering how much this (especially the second point) really matters.

B: Prior's extended commentary on Austin⁴

⁴From VL1250, with some passages re-arranged. (See the editors' introduction.)

In Lecture I Austin formulates the position he is going to attack as the view that “we never see or otherwise perceive (or ‘sense’) or anyhow we never *directly* perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our ideas, impressions, *sensa*, sense-perceptions, perceptions, etc.)” (p. 2). He warns us, however, that he is “‘*not*’ ... going to maintain that we ought to be ‘realists’, to embrace, i.e., the doctrine that we *do* perceive material things (or objects)” (p. 3), for in his view “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” (p. 4).

In II he quotes the opening paragraphs of Ayer’s *The foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, in which “some sort of contrast is drawn between what we (or the ordinary man) believe (or believes), and what philosophers, at least ‘for the most part’, believe or are ‘prepared to admit’ ” (p. 7). He complains that the ordinary man’s position is misrepresented by Ayer in a variety of ways, and then turns to the view ascribed to philosophers, and objects to a certain obscurity in it. Under the first head, he says that in Ayer’s account “it is clearly implied, first of all, that the ordinary man believes that he perceives material things” (p. 7). He objects to this that Ayer nowhere defines the technical expression ‘material things’, though he gives an illustrative list in which all the items are “moderate-sized specimens of dry goods”. And in this or any similar sense, Austin suggests, the ordinary man certainly doesn’t believe that *everything* he perceives is a material thing, since he believes that he perceives rainbows, shadows and so on. He regards it as a fundamental mistake to “try to represent as some single *kind of things* the things which the ordinary man says that he ‘perceives’”(p. 8). At other points Ayer is said to insinuate too much of the ‘philosopher’s’ point of view into his statement of the ‘plain man’s’. Finally, Austin comments on Ayer’s use of the plain man’s admission that “people are sometimes deceived by their senses”. He insists that this expression, as commonly used, is metaphorical, and is not meant to suggest that our senses are an intermediary between ourselves and the world (p. 11); that “talk of deception only *makes sense* against a background of general non-deceptions” (p. 11 — this is directed against the suggestion that this admission of the plain man is a step towards the ‘philosopher’s’ view that we are *always* deceived by our senses); that cases of actual deception are “not at all common”. In fact, when the plain man “dreams, looks down the long straight road, or at his face in the mirror, he is not, or at least is hardly ever, *deceived* at all” (p. 12); that even the cases where he does allow such deception, he does not regard as being all of one kind (p. 12), and in particular does not regard them as all being cases in which “he is not ‘perceiving material things’, or *is* perceiving something not real or not material” (“looking at the Müller-Lyer diagram ... is a very different kettle of fish from’ having D.T.’s and seeing pink rats”) (p. 14).

Turning to the ‘philosophers’, who “are not, for the most part, prepared to admit that such objects as pens or cigarettes are ever directly perceived” (Ayer), Austin says

that in ordinary language the word ‘directly’ takes its meaning from its opposite, ‘indirectly’, which “has *different* uses in different cases” (p. 15) but is “most at home where” (as with seeing in a mirror) “it retains its link with the notion of a kink in *direction*” and “is not naturally at home with senses other than sight”(p. 16). It is ‘extremely doubtful’ how far this notion “could or should be extended”, and “certain” that “we should not be prepared to speak of indirect perception in *every* case in which we see something from which the existence (or occurrence) of something else can be inferred” (p. 17), especially if the inferred object is something not perceptible at all, e.g. an electron (p. 18). “The philosophers’ use of ‘directly perceive’ whatever it may be, is not the ordinary, or our familiar, use; for in *that* use it is not only false but simply absurd to say that such objects as pens or cigarettes are never perceived directly” (p. 19).

In lecture III Austin begins a long consideration of the ‘argument from illusion’, which is immediately designed to “induce people to accept ‘sense-data’ as the proper and correct answer to the question what they perceive on certain *abnormal, exceptional* occasions”, but is “usually followed up with another bit of argument intended to establish that they *always* perceive sense-data” (p. 21). The argument is that when we see a stick apparently bent in water, or a mirage, or a mirror-image we are not seeing a real bent stick, oasis or person behind the mirror, but are certainly seeing something, so let’s call it a ‘sense-datum’. Austin objects that ‘illusions’, which are essentially public affairs, in which something perfectly real takes on the appearance of something else, are here indiscriminately jumbled together with ‘delusions’, which are due to some serious disorder in the person that has them, and in which we have to do with “something totally unreal, not really there at all” (pp. 22-24). By running these two quite different cases together, we can be tricked into thinking that in both “There really is something there that we are perceiving, but ... this is an immaterial something” (p. 26). But apart from special tricks, mirror-images aren’t even the milder thing, illusions, except in special cases, since normal civilized adults know perfectly well what they are. “It is important to realize here how familiarity, so to speak, takes the edge off illusion” (p. 26). There are also mistakes which are neither illusions nor delusions, e.g. the misreading of a proof (p. 27). Price’s definition of an ‘illusory sense-datum of sight or touch’ as ‘a sense-datum which is such that we tend to take it to be part of the surface of a material object, but if we so take it we are wrong’, is criticised as having already incorporated in it “the idea that in such cases there is something to be seen *in addition to* the ordinary things”. To argue from the fact that a hillside which is not flat and vertical may appear so, to the existence of a ‘sense-datum’ which “*actually is* flat and vertical’, is a simple *non-sequitur*. (p. 28). Why should we assume that things must always look as they are (p. 29).

In lecture IV Austin has a digression on the verbs ‘look’, ‘seem’ and ‘appear’,

which Ayer and other philosophers treat too easily as interchangeable. He remarks that “there is no *general* answer to the question how ‘looks’ or ‘looks like’ is related to ‘is’; it depends on the full circumstances of particular cases”. If I say that ‘petrol looks like water’ there is not the slightest implication that petrol *is* water, but “ ‘This looks like water’ may be a different matter; if I don’t already know what ‘this’ is, then I *may* be taking the fact that it looks like water as a ground for thinking it *is* water.” (pp. 39-40). He mentions earlier cases “when the way something looks is wholly conclusive (what more must she do to *be chic* than to *look chic*?)” (p. 38). And he insists that “the way things look is, in general, just as much a fact about the world, just as open to public confirmation or challenge, as the way things are. I am not disclosing a fact about *myself*, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water”. (p. 43).

In lecture V he takes up the argument which in Ayer and Price follows the ‘argument from illusion’, to the effect that not only in special cases but in all cases “what we (directly) perceive” is a sense-datum. The argument is that “there is no intrinsic difference in kind” between the special cases (illusions and delusions) and the ordinary cases, and that “veridical and delusive perceptions shade into one another”, as when a man who looks small at a distance gradually comes to appear as large as he really is.

Lecture VI is directed against a suggestion of Ayer’s that the issue between those who say and those who deny that we only perceive sense-data is “not factual but linguistic”, and Ayer’s use of words like “real” and “really” at this point leads Austin in the next lecture (VII) to give an independent discussion of the common meaning of these words. “Real”, he says, is not a technical but a common word, and in its common use it is (1) “substantive-hungry”, i.e. you can’t just call a thing “real” but must call it a real something-or-other (a real duck, a real decoy, a real picture etc.); it is (2) dependent for its sense, in any given use, upon some implied contrast (“a dummy, a toy, a picture, a decoy, etc.”); it is (3) “the most general & comprehensive term in a whole group of terms of the same kind”, such as “proper”, “genuine”, “live”, “true”, etc.; and it is (4) an ‘adjuster-word’, by means of which ‘other words are adjusted to meet the innumerable and unforeseeable demands of the world upon language’, e.g. on encountering a new sort of animal for which we have no name we might say ‘It’s *like* a pig, but it isn’t a *real* pig’. Further, while Austin is certainly right about ‘real’ being ‘substantive- hungry’, there is no reason why the substantive supplied should not in some cases be a very general one such as ‘object’ or thing.⁵

Austin’s list of peculiarities of the word ‘real’ oddly omits the most important

⁵This paragraph occurs as VL1250.44, except that the first sentence up to the word ‘data’, and the penultimate sentence from the phrase ‘the world upon language’, have been taken from VL1249.4-8, in order to provide the grammatical sentences which Prior clearly intended. The final sentence of the paragraph is VL1250.41.

of them all, namely that it is in most contexts a *dispensable* word, i.e. it can be omitted without altering the sense of what is said (though the omission may remove a suggested antithesis; as also happens, e.g., when we replace ‘but’ by ‘and’); and the same applies to the special words (e.g. “genuine”) which it generalises. To say of a decoy duck, or a picture of a duck, or a bird that has many duck-like characteristics but not quite enough to qualify, that it is ‘not a real duck’, is just to say that it is *not a duck* (but a decoy, or a picture, etc. — of course a ‘real’ decoy, a ‘real’ picture etc.). There is, indeed, an ambiguity about the phrase ‘picture of a duck’ which could give a little trouble here; a picture of a duck is in any case a real picture, i.e. a picture, but it may or may not be a picture of a real duck, so that the word ‘real’ seems not to be dispensable here. The phrase ‘picture of a real duck’, however, has an expansion from which the word ‘real’ can be dropped. without any weakening of the sense, and the plain ‘picture of a duck’ has an expansion into which ‘real’ can be inserted without any strengthening. For a picture is a ‘picture of a real duck’ if and only if there is some real duck, i.e. some duck, of which it is a photograph or portrait (accurate or inaccurate); and it is a ‘picture of a duck’ so long as it is drawn as if there were some duck, i.e. some real duck, of which it is a photograph or portrait.

The contrast which the introduction of the word ‘real’ introduces is never with some other kind or species of the thing in question, e.g. duck — there are not real ducks and other sorts (if there were, the word wouldn’t be ‘dispensable’). A decoy duck, or a picture of a duck, isn’t a different sort of duck from a real one; it just isn’t a duck at all. Nor is a ‘duck in a picture’ a different kind of duck from a real duck; if there is a duck of which it is a photograph or a portrait, then ‘the duck in the picture’ is a real duck; otherwise there just isn’t any ‘duck in the picture’ in the sense of a duck *of* which it is a picture, though certain kinds of talk about ‘the duck in the picture’ may be given a sense derivable from the earlier expansion of the weak sense of ‘picture-of-a -duck’. For example, if a child looking at the picture is asked whether the duck in the picture is walking or flying, this is a question as to whether the picture is drawn as if there were a (real) flying duck or as if there were a (real) walking duck of which it is the portrait.

To see, positively, what kinds of contrast the word ‘real’ suggests, we need to advert to another feature of it which Austin oddly omits to mention, namely what may be called its *adverbial* character. That is, statements like ‘That is a real duck’ amount to ‘That is really a duck’, or ‘It is (really) the case that that is a duck’, and the contrast is with other adverbial insertions or prefixes, like ‘It looks as if it were, though it is not, the case that that is a duck’. There are innumerable alternative adverbs and prefixes of this sort, and the point of ‘really’ or ‘it is the case that’ is to assert that the thing is true *without* any of these prefixes, and indeed without any prefixes or adverbs at all.

Most of what Austin has to say about ‘real’ follows from these considerations (which are basically, of course, a re-hash and expansion of Ramsey on “True”). What

does not follow from them, however, and does not seem to me to be true, is Austin's view "there are no criteria to be laid down *in general* for distinguishing the real from the not real". "How this is to be done", he says, "must depend on *what* it is with respect to which the problem arises in particular cases". And "even for particular kinds of things, there may be many different ways in which the distinction may be made (there is not just one way of being 'not a real pig')". (p. 76). Certainly there are innumerable ways of being not a real pig; but there is only one way of being a *real* pig, namely being a pig, *simpliciter*. Nor, on this view of the matter, can there be any substance in Austin's conjecture that 'the words "real after-image" have no application'. A real after-image is simply an after-image; if there are no merely apparent after-images, or pictures of after-images, etc. a real after-image would still be simply an after-image, though the suggestion that there *are* no merely apparent after-images, i.e. nothing that we might take for an after-image that wasn't one, is an intriguing departure from Austin's general opposition to infallible 'perceptions', and in any case is clearly false.

What also follows from the considerations I have sketched is the very important thing that Austin says about 'looks' and 'looks like' on p. 43. namely that "the way things look is, in general, just as much a fact about the world, just as open to public confirmation or challenge, as the way things are." The reference to 'public confirmation or challenge' is superfluous here, and the contrast between 'the way things are' could be so real as to cancel out his main point, since the 'facts about the world' in a sense *constitute* 'the way things are' — part of the way things are is that they are the sort of things that look thus and thus. But the way things look is the way they 'really' look; if they look thus and thus, it is the case (is a fact) that they look thus and thus; 'really', in short, can be dispensed with, *and can be inserted*, before as well as after other prefixes.⁶

Austin's next sentence, however, on its negative side, is more contentious, and more doubtful. "I am not" he says, "disclosing a fact about *myself*, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water". This is not a genuine commentary on what precedes it, for facts about oneself are as much about 'the world' as facts about petrol. That petrol looks like water of course *is* a fact about petrol; what is less clear is that it is not *also* about himself and of course other normal human beings, and photographic plates sensitive to the same range of light-rays. There may be — I have no idea what the facts are about this — others which go through petrol and water differently, so that petrol *wouldn't* look like water to organisms or plates sensitive to these. This is one of the many points at which one wishes that Austin had not "omitted from consideration"

⁶Up to the word 'superfluous' the material in this paragraph occurs immediately after the previous paragraph in our text. It is taken from VL1250.27, but has been crossed out there. The crossed out material is clearly intended to lead in to VL1250.16, which begins with the word 'superfluous' and is not crossed out.

an “argument cited by both Price and Ayer, which makes play with the ‘causal dependence’ of our ‘perceptions’ upon the conditions of observation and our own ‘physiological and psychological states’.” (p. 46, note 2).

It is part of Ayer’s thesis that there are two ‘correct & familiar’ uses of the word ‘perceive’, and also, correspondingly, of particular perception-words such as ‘see’. In one sense, ‘it is necessary that what is seen should really exist, but not necessary that it should have the qualities that it appears to have’, but in the other sense ‘it is not possible that anything should seem to have qualities that it does not really have, but also not necessary that what is seen should really exist’. Austin emphatically denies that there is any ‘correct or familiar’ sense of ‘see’ or ‘perceive’ but the first one. In lecture IX, in discussing the examples adduced by Ayer to the contrary, Austin takes rather different lines in different cases, none of them entirely satisfactory.

Ayer and Price distinguish a sense of “see”, and of “perceive” generally, in which “I see (perceive) an X” entails that there really is an X which I am seeing (perceiving) and another sense in which “I see (perceive) an X” has no such consequence. Austin says that, on the contrary, there is only one sense of “see” (and similarly of “perceive”), namely the first one, in which “it is necessary that what is seen should really exist”. Ayer’s particular examples of the alleged other use, he deals with — characteristically — in a variety of ways, but only in one case, so far as I can see, quite successfully. This is where Ayer says, “If I say that I am seeing a stick which looks crooked, I do not imply that anything really is crooked”. But what fails here, as Austin rightly points out, is not the step from “I am seeing an X” to “There is an X” but that from “X looks crooked” to “X is crooked”. (1) “I am seeing a crooked stick” would normally be understood as implying that (2) a crooked stick is really there, and (3) “I am seeing a stick that looks crooked” as implying that (4) a stick that looks crooked is really there, but (4) doesn’t imply (2). Nor does (3) imply (1); nor on Austin’s view of “seeing”, ought they to.

Austin applies the same recipe — “look for the trouble, not with the perception-word, but elsewhere in the sentence” — to the case of the phantom limb.

Ayer: If I say that someone is feeling pressure on his leg, I do not necessarily exclude the possibility that his leg has been amputated.

Austin: But why explain this by invoking a sense of ‘feel’? Why not say instead ... that the expression “pressure on his leg” can sometimes be used to specify what someone feels, even if his leg has actually been amputated?

“Feeling pressure”, in other words, always implies that the pressure exists, but there

being pressure on one's leg does not imply that one has a leg. It is hard to see this as anything but an exchange of one paradox for a worse one. Austin's talk, however, of "using" the phrase "pressure on one's leg" to "specify what is felt, half suggests a rather different solution, namely the exploitation of an ambiguity in 'feel' which he himself would surely have admitted, and to which there is no parallel in the case of "see" or "perceive". For in one sense "feel" has no object, strictly speaking, at all, but only an adjectival complement "feeling lonely", "feeling tired", etc. — and one might in this sense feel "pressured-on-the-leg" even when one didn't actually have a leg. However this isn't Austin's explicit solution; and in any case I'm not sure that it will really do.

Ayer's third example, double vision, Austin himself admits is "less easily dealt with". "We may agree that in saying "I am perceiving two pieces of paper", I may not *mean* — since I may know it to be untrue — that there really are two pieces of paper before me". And so, he candidly asks, "since it is undeniable that these words may *also* be so used as to imply that there really *are* two pieces of paper, do we not have to agree that there are two different senses of 'perceive'?" But to this he answers, astonishingly, "Well, no, we don't". And by way of an excuse he adverts to begin with, to a consideration which, if taken seriously, would overturn his whole position.

Ayer, in presenting this example, had slipped into replacing "If I am perceiving two pieces of paper" by "if two pieces of paper really are perceived...", and saying that even in this case "it need not be true that there are two pieces of paper". "This", Austin cannot resist observing, "is surely just wrong". That "two pieces of paper really are perceived" is just what we should *not* say in a case of double vision — just for the reason that there must *be* two, if two 'really are perceived'. And he makes use of this when resisting in the next paragraph, the suggestion that he is himself admitting two senses of "perceive". "Even if 'I perceive two pieces' needn't mean that there *are* two pieces, it seems that 'two pieces really are perceived' is *not* compatible with their being really only one", hence it looks as though "the implications of 'perceive' may differ in different *constructions*", without there being any need to suppose "two *senses* of 'perceive'".

In the whole argument sketched in the last paragraph, Austin seems to me absolutely right, and Ayer to have made a bad slip. But this one sense of "perceive" that is all that need be involved in this part of the discussion, is not the sense that Austin says is the only one it ever bears, i.e. not the one in which "I perceive two pieces" does, but the one in which it does not, imply that there really are two pieces. This latter consequence, on Austin's own account of the matter, follows not from this but from the other construction, "Two pieces are being perceived". In fact the two senses that Ayer distinguishes might be characterised precisely as (a) one in which "I perceive two papers" does, and (b) one in which it does not, imply "Two papers are perceived", i.e. as one in which Ayer's second "construction" does, and one in which it does not, add

something to his first.

The strange turn that this part of the argument takes illustrates at once Austin's candour (he will tell you anything he sees, without regard to what its place in the general argument may turn out to be), his ferocity (he won't miss a single chance of making Ayer look foolish), his penetration in matters of detail, and his singular blindness as to the actual bearing on the argument of the details he unearths. However, while he doesn't see this bit about different "constructions" as positively unhelpful from his own point of view, he does seem in effect to admit that there is after all Ayer's second sense, only it isn't a 'correct and familiar' one, and he refuses to call it a distinct 'sense', it being rather a 'stretching' of the one normal sense. The important thing here is that "double vision is a quite *exceptional* case, so that we may have to stretch our ordinary usage to accommodate it."

Returning to this case further on, he says that double vision "does suggest that in exceptional situations ordinary words may not be *meant* in quite the ordinary way." (p. 97). It is the same with the D.T. sufferer who 'sees pink rats' — "we don't mean here (as would be meant in a normal situation) that there are real, live pink rats which he sees", but he insists again that "such stretchings of ordinary words in exceptional situations — do not constitute special *senses* — of the words in question. It is hard to see wherein the 'stretching' of a sense of use so far that what is 'meant' is different from what is meant in the ordinary sense, differs from giving the word a different (though of course connected) sense — how Austin *counts* 'senses', in other words, is obscure. But even if one agrees to count them in this way (whatever it is), why should not Ayer simply rephrase his point and say that the words 'perceive', 'see', etc. may be 'meant' in different ways? Part of Austin's point is of course that we only 'mean' these special things by these words in special circumstances, or at any rate the words only *have application* in these special circumstances — as some recent writers (Ebersole, Siegler)⁷ have said explicitly, when there really are pink rats that we are seeing we are not (either *in* seeing the pink rats or *as well as* this) doing *anything* of the same sort as seeing-pink-rats in the D.T. patient's way. But this is something which, whether true or not (and I do not think it is), *can be said*, and in saying it we actually juxtapose the two 'meanings' of 'see', the relation between which is in any case worth investigating, especially if it is (as Austin contends) so very close that it is misleading to talk here of different 'senses' at all. This is not, in a word, a real contradiction of Ayer's main position, but at most a removal of some blemishes in his presentation of it.

With another example, namely the alleged 'perception' in the first sense of a

⁷The authors referred to here are probably Frank B. Ebersole and Frederick Adrian Siegler. Our guess is that the Ebersole work Prior is referring to is: De Somniis, *Mind*, NS, Vol. 68, 1959, pp. 336-349. Ebersole does not explicitly mention D.T.s, but what he says about dreaming seems to illustrate what Prior attributes to Austin. Siegler's Stanford PhD dissertation of 1960 was called, *An examination of attempts to find incorrigible knowledge*.

large and distant star and in the second sense of a ‘silvery speck’, Austin takes a different line. When we speak of perceiving or seeing the silvery speck, he says, the sense of ‘perceive’ or ‘see’ isn’t even a ‘stretched’ one, and the speck’s existence is as much entailed as the star’s (p. 94); in fact the speck *is* the star. He even insists upon this when the speck is seen by reflection: “The image in the fourteenth mirror of the telescope *is* a bright speck, this bright speck *is* a star, and the star *is* Sirius; I can say, quite correctly, that I see any of these” (p. 99). And there is no question here of the perception-word being used in different senses; “it is simply that what we “perceive” can be described identified, classified, characterized, named in many different ways.’ I can say correctly both that I kicked a piece of painted wood and that I kicked Jones’s front door, not because there is any subtle ambiguity in ‘kick’, but because “the piece of wood in question *was* Jones’s front door” (p. 98).

There are no doubt cases in which ‘This X is a Y’ doesn’t entail ‘This Y is an X’. Suppose, for example, that somebody asks me to show him something pink, and I point to what is in fact a carnation and say ‘This rose is pink’. Or suppose *he* points to the carnation and asks what colour it is, and I again say ‘This rose is pink’. There the fact that I have misidentified the carnation as a rose is so completely irrelevant to the actual point of the sentence that one could say that what I had said was true, or anyhow not false, and a correct answer to the man’s question. But I cannot think of any circumstances under which I would point to the same object and correctly or truly say ‘This pink thing is a rose’. In this case the inference from ‘This X is a Y’ to ‘This Y is an X’ fails because, though the thing is a Y, it isn’t an X, and this doesn’t matter in the premiss but does in the conclusion. But the cases which Austin lists as parallel to the speck-star and dot-house cases are not like this at all. It is equally true to say ‘I kicked a piece of painted wood’ and ‘I kicked Jones’s door’ because what I kicked is in fact both of these things, and for this reason ‘That piece of painted wood is Jones’s door’ and ‘Jones’s door is a piece of painted wood’ are both true. But is the very large star (really) a silvery speck, and is my house (really) a white dot? Austin doesn’t say, but the failure of the inference-pattern, to which he adverts in his footnote, rather suggests that the answer must be ‘No’; but if it *is* ‘No’, then (by his rule that whatever I see must be there) I cannot after all be really seeing a silvery speck or a white dot when I am looking at the star or the house. Either that, or since he insists that in these cases we are ‘seeing a silvery speck’ or ‘seeing a white dot’ — there is after all a sense of ‘see’ for which this rule doesn’t hold.⁸

⁸B lacks a conclusion, but the last paragraph of A would seem to sum up what Prior has been telling us.

C: The Strawson-Austin controversy⁹

The Strawson-Austin controversy was partly expressed as one about whether or not a ‘fact’ is ‘something in the world’. By insisting that it is not, Strawson seems to have meant primarily that a fact is not a ‘thing’, except in the rather stretched sense of ‘thing’ in which a ‘proposition’ (‘what is believed’, ‘what is said’) is equally one. Austin’s insistence that a fact *is*, almost *par excellence*, a ‘thing in the world’, can be given a good sense if we recall that ‘the world’ is one of a group of philosophical ‘box’ explanations — one says that something is or happens ‘in the world’ very much as one says that something is or happens ‘in the mind’ or ‘in Greek mythology’.

All of these philosophers’ ‘boxes’ are to be taken seriously, but none of them quite literally. To say that something is so ‘in the mind’ is just to say that *someone thinks that* it is so; to say that something is so ‘in Joyce’s *Ulysses*’ is just to say that *it is said in Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ that* it is so. ‘The world’ differs from all these other ‘boxes’ in that to say that something is so ‘in the world’ is just to say that it is so, without any qualifying prefix. (It is to say *in direct speech* that it is so, while the others put the statement that it is so into *oratio obliqua*). And a ‘fact’ is *par excellence* ‘something in the world’ in the sense that what *is a fact* is what simply *is so* as opposed to what is merely thought to be so (‘is so merely in the mind’), or said to be so in a book. With the phrase thus understood, the ‘correspondence’ between what is stated and what is ‘in the world’, which Austin defended against Strawson’s variant of the ‘No-Truth’ theory, is the simple being so (being so ‘in the world’ = simply being so) of what is stated to be so.

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⁹VL1250.12-15. These pages are stapled together, and seem intended to be apart from the remaining material.