

Letter from Mary to Arthur Prior, undated¹

Dearest,

Your same blue and same father is intriguing. How does one recognize the same blue in disparate things anyhow. This seems the basic problem. The father travelling thru time² w. his tail light is after all destroyed by one blink. We have to be assured from moment to moment that it is the same father-with-tail-light procreating that we saw before, etc. etc. So the problem is the same as with blue. Only w. the father there is at least a hypothetical way of lessening uncertainty, while w. blue the uncertainty is greater. And in fact we do make mistakes about shades and even colours notoriously often. I am not sure the Q. is not psychological to some extent, though the chore seems irreducible. Am inclined to go very Scottish Common Sense³ and regard memory as irreducible and a necessary thing in recognition. Am not sure that I want to say that we go carrying {2} blue samples in our mind by the sackful, tho' perhaps that's O.K.

(Doctor's on his round and the nearer he gets the less I can think. It's John MacL⁴. today.)

The fact is tho' that the seeing of 1 blue thing does tend to evoke comparison w. other blue things. No doubt there's some quite behaviorist way of putting that but do we want it? Isn't it short circuiting – skimping the carving on the underside of the seat because only God and the carving will ever know what it's like?

I'm afraid I'm no real help. Just trying to dredge up a few things – esp. those we tend to have phobias about, and perhaps Platonists shouldn't. I mean think of the awful Qs. One wd. have to answer if one were to plunk for anything as crude as this ragbag of samples in the mind. Yet don't we say when in a shop choosing materials e.g. paint or paper or cloth – “that's just the color I was thinking of”. Well I dunno. Anyway this is no help to you as you'll get it in Chch when you return. Perhaps as well.

Lovely to think I'll be seeing you again on Sunday.

XXX

m.⁵

¹ Editors' note: This letter has been edited by Martin Prior, Peter Øhrstrøm and David Jakobsen. It is part of the Martin Prior Collection, presently kept at Aalborg University folder C, item 10. The letter is written on standard unheaded writing paper. It was kept in an envelope stamped 13. August 1954.

² Editors' note: The text is not clear.

³ Editors' note: The reference to Scottish Common Sense is interesting. The Priors were inspired by the tradition, especially the philosophical realism of Thomas Reid who is mentioned in *Logic and the basis of ethics* (1949).

⁴ Editor's note: John MacLeod was a doctor at the Sanatorium, recollection of Martin Prior.

⁵ Editor's note: Apparently written in lipstick.