

What are the attractions of the idea of a 'sense datum'? Can the theory of sense data be defended against criticisms based on the reality principle?

If I look at a stick, a straight stick, it is not the real stick or indeed any other object that I immediately experience, but mental intermediaries called sense data a collection of shades of colours, shapes that make up the *appearance* of my stick. What I directly and immediately experience is available only to me and therefore is dependent on my mind, my subjective given that is hidden within my breast (Locke, Essay concerning Human Understanding) unavailable to others, hence sense data are strictly private items. It is with sense data we are directly acquainted with; this self-evident acquaintance provides me with knowledge, the basic non-inferential foundations to build other empirical knowledge from; 'I know the colour perfectly and completely when I see it and no further knowledge of itself is even theoretically possible' (Russell, Problems of Philosophy). For Descartes likewise only I have direct knowledge of my sensations, that knowledge is infallible and to know something means it is impossible to doubt or be mistaken about it.

The argument from illusion is a strong one for the proponents of sense data; for example, when I place the aforementioned stick in a glass of water it appears as a 'bent stick' even though I know it is a straight stick. What I am therefore seeing is not the real stick, but an intermediary, a mental object that is bent, my experience would be *exactly* the same if there actually was a real bent stick, then what the veridical and non-veridical cases have in common is what we see are *sense data*. So it is the image or appearance that is solely present to mind and along with the arguments from hallucination and secondary properties that presents the case for the sense datum theorists. From this point of view it doesn't take long to conclude that there are only minds that exist or indeed as I have only direct experience of my own mind there is only my mind that exists in the world. An anti-realist stance like this would be that the ultimate constituents of reality are sense data, we can't get at material objects all we can access is the possible continued experience of our own sense data.

The reality principle, fundamentally is the necessary human awareness or rational capacity of judging what is real and what is not real, seeing the distinction between an external (the outside world) and internal (subjective and inner world) reality and ultimately coming (via experience) to the realisation that false beliefs are possible that the ways things are, are, irrespective of how I want or sometimes judge them to be. So immediately we have a contradiction between the position of knowledge underpinned by sense data as stated by Locke, Russell and Descartes and the common sense or rational point of view of the world via the reality principle.

So, how is it possible that I have incorrect beliefs about *my* sense data? If I look out into the world, not at anything in particular but the complex ineffable scene as I see it is as it is given to me, this, here and now and try to suspend all judgment except to what is, to appreciate this experience that totally exists in and for me. What I see are undoubtedly colours and shapes, but immediately these colours and shapes I allude to are fully integrated *public* concepts that I have learned the rules of application for, are described by a common language and the red and oblong thing I see and know to be a bus cannot exist for me uncaused or as a *mere* appearance. But if we are to take it that sense data represent the world non conceptually and if all I have to go on as reference are *my* sense data alone, then yes, what I think *seems* right is going to be right as I have nothing else to go on. But if I alone have to keep track on features of my experience and ensure my private labelling of concepts is consistent without any independent verdict on the success of my application then the only reality is going to be my world. But the bare presence of the 'given' is not sufficient to ground knowledge in this way, there need to be reasons why we take things to be so. That is what the reality principle demonstrates.

If I say I know something, I know something because there is a reason for it other than evidence from *just* my sense data. I know there is a cat on the mat, because my belief at a certain time is caused by a real spatio-temporally existing cat on a real spatio-temporal existing mat in front of me that can be validated by a fellow

language speaking person. I as a self-conscious person know I saw the red number 377 bus yesterday in Streetly at 1.30pm because, my seeing that publically available object of reference, caused the aforementioned memory which can be communicated and validated (if necessary) in a public language by another person if only via a publically available bus timetable. The validator is unlikely to say, yes I saw the appearance of the 377 bus, but I didn't see the actual bus! Well unless she is theorist of a particular ilk that is.

McDowell's view (avoiding the myth of the given) is, having something in view (a Kantian intuition) provides the potential for discursive activity. My experience, that is the possession of certain concepts allows me to take things to be so non inferentially through my recognitional capacities. Now although on first blush this sounds like Russell's acquaintance, it is not, Russell talks about 'certain properties' as sense data, but 'that is a cardinal' is not inferred by the way *it* looks, I can just immediately recognise it. Also so for Hegel, the active role consciousness plays in judgement in distinguishing between features, thus there can be no immediate knowledge by acquaintance of bare indistinguishable private sense data (Russell's later alleged abandonment of sense data meant he was no longer, 'clinging to a mere echo, the faint rumour left behind by the disappearing soul', *The Analysis of mind*). Finally back to the arguments for sense data, illusions and hallucinations, quite simply they can be explained by certain conditions that *can* occur, so when I see the aforementioned stick, I see a material object existing independently to me that under certain conditions looks bent.

So we are left with Kant's transcendental argument to put the final nail in the coffin of sense data, that my conscious and temporal experiences occur in a specific order and the references for these ordered temporal experiences are the existence of persisting objects outside of me in space. But, as the reality principle states, I can be wrong in my judgments I am fallible and can be mistaken and communicating in a public language about publically accessible objects allows others to interject and correct me, I do not have the final word.