

## THE NOTION OF 'INNER SENSE'

**I**N INVESTIGATING some other psychological concepts, I shall approach them from the side of psychological judgments in which they are exercised. Psychological judgments have very often been held to be based primarily on the deliverances of an 'inner sense' whereby we are cognizant every one of his own psychical states; just as judgments about physical realities are based on the evidence of our senses. The supposed 'inner sense' is compared sometimes to looking ('introspection'), sometimes to feeling.

With the ordinary senses there is associated the power of forming mental images; I see in my mind's eye past scenes that are no longer before me, or things that I might see now in another position, or even quite imaginary scenes. No mental images, however, are commonly assigned to 'inner sense' in the same way. People have ridiculed the idea of McTaggart that I may have mental images of my own past mental states which I have introspectively perceived, of other people's mental states which I happen to be unable to inspect (a removable limitation, McTaggart believed), and of purely imaginary mental states that nobody has actually been in. (McTAGGART, pp. 106-8.) Of course McTaggart's idea is quite wrong, but why is it absurd? If "looking into the mind" has a genuine logical similarity to "looking into the box", then it ought to make sense to talk about introspective mental images as we do about visual images; lack of introspective imagery would be an idiosyncrasy like being unable

to visualize, and might be expected to disable a man for some tasks. If McTaggart's idea is absurd, then it ought to make us suspect the comparison of introspection to real looking.

Hume seems to have supposed that there were mental images of past mental states—less vivid copies of them, related to them as a perfume I 'smell' in memory is to something I really smell. But what Hume says is shot all through with his confusion between two senses of "idea"—the mental image of something, and the exercise of a concept of it in judgment. This exercise is in no way dependent on the presence of a pale replica of the thing judged about; if it were, then, as St Augustine remarked, we should habitually feel a certain reluctance to use the words "grief", "fear", "pain", lest they should arouse in our minds faint reproductions of the unwelcome experiences so called (*Confessions*, book X, chap. xiv).<sup>1</sup>

People suppose that I can give meaning to such words as "seeing", "hearing", "thinking", "hoping", etc., only by observing in my own case sample occurrences of what these words refer to; failing the relevant experiences, or failing attention to them when I have had them, I must either lack a concept altogether or possess it in a very imperfect form, comparable to a colour-blind man's concept of colours. Let us fasten upon this comparison. The defect colour-blindness can be tested for, not only by looking for oddities in a man's colour-concepts, which come in his use of colour-words, but also by a non-linguistic investigation of what colours he is practically able to discriminate,

<sup>1</sup> Augustine here uses the term "*notiones*" for the mental acts involved in an understanding of such words as "fear", and denies that *notiones* are *imagines*. I wonder if this is the origin of Berkeley's puzzling talk about 'notions' as opposed to 'ideas'.

without using words. We can even investigate what colour-discriminations brutes are capable of, although of course they cannot tell us and have no colour-concepts at all. Now could there be, let us say, anger-fear emotion-blindness, as there can be red-green colour-blindness? Could a man's introspective 'sense' be unable to discriminate between his being angry and his being afraid, so that his use of the words "anger" and "fear" depended precariously on other people's use of them, in the way that a colour-blind man's use of colour-words does? In regard to colours, we can distinguish between a colour-blind man with a sensory defect and a mentally defective man who is unable to form colour-concepts and learn the use of colour-words; could we make a similar distinction about emotions? Could we say of somebody: "He's very intelligent, but he keeps on using words for emotions wrongly; the psychiatrist says he has a congenital defect of the 'inner sense' that discriminates emotions from each other"?

I chose to set emotion-words and colour-words side by side, because there really is a considerable logical similarity. Both colours and emotions can occur in different intensities, and can wax and wane in intensity; there can be an emotion that is a blend of anger and fear, as there is a colour that is a blend of red and blue; you can ask of a feeling of fear, as you can of a coloured light, whether it came on suddenly or gradually, and how long it lasted, etc. If in spite of this we find a radical dissimilarity between colour-language and emotion-language, in that we could not apply a term "emotion-blindness" comparably to "colour-blindness", then the conclusion we ought to draw is surely that the idea of an introspective 'sense' is an illusion.

Somebody might try saying that the reason why we have no use for the term "emotion-blindness" is that our 'inner sense' is not liable to such defects as our eyesight is; our inner sense represents our emotions just as they occur, even if we are unable to describe them correctly. Now a sense that was *in fact* not affected by any illusions, any failure to discriminate, etc., is indeed conceivable; but plainly what our present objection is really after is a sense that not merely does not but *cannot* mislead us. But this "cannot" would be a logical "cannot"; and the inclination to use "cannot" here points to a logical difference between our knowledge of the outer world by our senses and our knowledge of the mind by 'inner sense'. Of *bona fide* sense-faculties, it is impossible to say that they *cannot* be defective or inaccurate.

If anyone should think that in criticizing the idea of 'inner sense' I am flogging a dead horse, or knocking down a stuffed dummy of my own creation, I may reply by instancing Freud's use of the idea. "What role is there now left, in our representation of things, to the phenomena of consciousness, once so all-powerful and overshadowing all else? None other than *that of a sense-organ for the perception of psychic qualities.*" (FREUD, p. 544; his italics.) "The unconscious is the true psychic reality; *in its inner nature it is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly communicated to us by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the reports of our sense-organs.*" (FREUD, p. 542; his italics.) Freud, as may be seen, transfers a naive 'representative' theory of perception from its usual application (to the bodily senses, that is), and holds it to be no less valid of 'inner sense'. Presumably on his view 'inner sense' would *not* be in-

errant; but I find in him no clear account of what an error of 'inner sense' would be like.

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COULD SENSUOUS EXPERIENCES  
OCCUR APART FROM AN  
ORGANISM ?

'INNER SENSE' is supposed to show us, and to be the only thing that shows us, what it is like to see, hear, be afraid, etc. With this there goes a view that the connexion between such 'sensuous' experiences and a bodily organism is only a well-established empirical generalization. Such experiences are indeed dependent upon material things in the sense of being occupied with them; but they are not identifiable with any describable physiological processes in a living organism, and their connexion with such processes is only something empirically determined. There is no necessary, conceptual, connexion between the experience we call "seeing" and the processes that physiologists tell us happen in eye and brain; the statement "James can still see, although his optic centres are destroyed" is very unlikely on inductive grounds but perfectly intelligible—after all, people used the word "see" long before they had any idea of things happening in the optic centres of the brain. It therefore appears to be clearly conceivable that seeing and other 'sensuous' experiences might go on continuously even after the death of the organism with which they are now associated, and that the inductive reasons for doubting