

SENSIBLE AWARENESS OF SENSE-OBJECTS*

In his *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* paper, "Are There Sensations?"¹, Professor D. Y. Deshpande takes up the concept of a sensation. He announces his programme, "To examine this concept as it is used by philosophers, and try to remove some at least of the confusion and ambiguity which are associated with the notion in philosophical literature".² Deshpande's analytical frame-work is similar to that of Ryle as exhibited in his paper on "Sensations"³ contributed to the *Contemporary British Philosophy* (to which Deshpande himself refers) and in his book *The Concept of Mind* (to which Deshpande does not refer). As a result of the analysis of the notion of sensation Deshpande arrives at the conclusion that perception involves "Sensible awareness of sense-objects".⁴ Concerning his analysis: Deshpande follows Ryle in distinguishing two senses of the word 'sensation', an ordinary sense (sensation I) and a technical sense (sensation 2). In connection with the identity of his views with those of Ryle on the issue of sensations Deshpande writes, "Professor Ryle has shown clearly that the psychologist's and the philosopher's use of this word 'sensation' is a technical one, quite different from any ordinary use of the word."⁵ In the ordinary sense of 'sensation', i.e., in its unsophisticated sense, we speak of such sensations as "the sensations of toothache, of giddiness, of nausea and the like."⁶ But the philosophers make a technical use of this word, i.e., they use it in a sophisticated sense, when they speak of "the sensations of sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell etc."⁷ In his paper on "Sensations", and also in his book *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle exploded, or attempted to explode, the myth of the sensations of the second kind, i.e., such sensations as the visual sensations, auditory sensations and tactual sensations etc. Referring to these sensations Ryle says, "In its sophisticated use, 'sensation' seems to be a semi-psychological term, the employment of which is allied with certain pseudo-scientific, Cartesian theories."⁸ The view that sensations precede observations or perceptions is a part of the Cartesian myth—the rehearsal of the psychological drama precedes the playing of

the physical drama. Deshpande supports Ryle's view when he argues against the existence of sensations 2. Ryle does not take the trouble of mentioning the name of any physiologist or psychologist or even a philosopher, that such and such a person in such a book has maintained the distinction between sensations 1 and sensations 2. By quoting from Stout the distinction between these two kinds of sensations Deshpande has provided a kind of laboratory test for Ryle's analysis of sensations. In denying the existence of sensations 2, Ryle is not quarrelling with the men of straw. The fiction of sensations 2 is a sufficiently popular fiction to attract the attention of philosophers.

While going through the main body of Deshpande's paper one may feel that he is deviating a little bit from his original programme. He announces in the introductory part of his paper, as has already been pointed out, that he is concerned with removing confusions and ambiguities associated with the notion of sensation in *philosophical literature*. But as a matter of fact he takes up only one book on this issue, Stout's *A Manual of Psychology*. Could this *Manual* be treated as a part of *philosophical literature*? Deshpande's approach may be defended on the ground that the sort of psychology Stout wrote lacked scientific rigour, therefore, his work should be described in our idiom as philosophical-psychology. And fortunately Stout was also a well known philosopher. However, this sort of defence is not available to Deshpande. For Deshpande is in search of the samples of the psychologist's writing on the problem of sensations. Stout's selection is a careful selection. This becomes clear from his preface to the quotation from Stout. Deshpande writes, "As a representative statement of what psychologists mean by sensation I quote a few lines from Stout."⁹ Thus Deshpande is concerned with Stout as a psychologist and not as a philosopher. The whole of the first section of his paper is devoted to the criticism of Stout's psychological views. Even the name of any other psychologist does not appear in this section.

The second section of Deshpande's paper again begins and ends with the views of psychologists. The first paragraph of this section reads, "It might be objected on behalf of the psychologist, that the sensations of the special senses are not of course

bodily feelings...."¹⁰ The second paragraph "The psychologists tell us that sensations are immediate experiences...."¹¹ The third paragraph does not make a direct reference to the psychologist, the views criticised are those of the psychologist. In the fourth paragraph again there is a direct reference, "Having cleared up this apparent complication, let us now turn once again to the psychologist's account of sensations 2."¹² Similarly in the fifth, i.e., the last paragraph of the section, Deshpande writes, "But surely psychologists speak of the attributes of sensations."¹³ Deshpande remains unconcerned about the views of philosophers. He neither criticises nor comments their views in this section.

When one opens the third section of the paper, i.e., the section in which Deshpande inquires into the genesis of one's belief in the existence of sensations 2, for the first time Deshpande introduces philosophers along with the psychologists. As he says in the introductory paragraph of the section, "I think it will be instructive to inquire into the causes which may have led philosophers and psychologists to postulate sensations of the second kind."¹⁴ Considering the discussion of the problem in the first and the second section of the paper the introduction of philosophers in the third section seems to be quite unauthorised. One cannot avoid the feeling that Deshpande has not been fair to philosophers, particularly so when he already announced his intention of doing something with their literature. Just as he picked up Stout's psychological work on sensations, he could have picked up somebody's philosophical work on sensations. If there was no philosophical work on the issue worth consideration, then it is wrong to drag philosophers along with the psychologists. But at one time belief in the existence of sensations-2 became such a common-place belief in the philosophical circles that Ryle did not feel the necessity of referring to anybody's name for holding this belief.

There is a further reason why Deshpande should have diverted his attention to the philosophical literature on sensations. While concluding his paper he gives preference to sense-data over sensations. He rejects the view that observation entails sensation-2, but accepts the view that observation entails having of sense-data. There is no doubt that sense-data are the

sorts of entities that have been at one time, extremely favoured in the philosophical circles. Though not only the philosophers, even the scientists, the artists and the artisans on occasions happen to see only colour-patches and hear buzzing-sounds, particularly when they are in their drunken state. However, colour-patches and buzzing-sounds have been given a new ontological status, or at least a new name, sense-data, only by philosophers. Are sense-data different from, or identical with, sensations-2? Deshpande does not feel the necessity of raising this question and, therefore, he arrives at certain questionable conclusions in his paper. Before we discuss these conclusions it would be proper on our part to assess Deshpande's argument against the views of Stout; whether or not Deshpande has succeeded in eliminating sensations-2.

Deshpande appears to have explored some new grounds for the elimination of sensations-2. He argues, "When we have sensations of fatigue, we have fatigue (which is a sensation), whereas when we experience (as the psychologist says) a sensation of blue, we experience blue which is not a sensation at all."¹⁵ This argument is not meant for demolishing sensations-2, but simply for distinguishing them from sensations-1. What Deshpande means to say is that blue is not identical with the sensation of blue; the relation between the sensation of blue and blue is that of an *act* to its *object*. But the sensation of fatigue is identical with fatigue, that there is no such thing as the act of fatigue over and above the object-fatigue. The preposition 'of' plays two quite different roles in the expressions 'sensation of blue' and 'sensation of fatigue'. From this it follows. If there is such a thing as the sensation of blue, it is of a different *kind* from such a thing as the sensation of fatigue. Neither the Ryleans nor those who oppose Ryle should disagree with Deshpande on this issue.

Questioning the ontological status of sensations-2 Deshpande argues further, "In fact all that one finds when one looks for the *sensations* of colours and sounds, is colours and sounds, of the sensations themselves there is never a hint. If anyone should doubt this, let him try to differentiate between the sensation of colour and that of sound without mentioning colours and sounds."¹⁶

This argument against the sensations of colours and sounds is equally applicable to the sensations of fatigue and nausea. Try to look for the sensation of fatigue. Do you find a separate sensation in addition to fatigue? In looking for the sensation of fatigue one finds nothing but fatigue; of the sensation itself there is never a hint. Now try to look for the sensation of blue? Do you find a separate sensation in addition to blue? In looking for the sensation of blue, one finds nothing but blue, of the sensation itself there is never a hint. But this implies that the two expressions 'sensation of fatigue' and 'sensation of blue' have the same logical structure, or that the preposition 'of' plays the same role in both the expressions. All sensations, be they about fatigue and nausea or about blue and sound, exhibit the same ontological structure. Deshpande's present argument demolishes his own earlier argument through which he attempted to establish a distinction between two different kinds of sensations.

Deshpande's demand is questionable when he demands to differentiate between the sensation of colour and that of sound without mentioning colours and sounds. Could one refer to the sensation of colour without referring to colour? Could one refer to the sensation of fatigue without referring to fatigue? Could one refer to any sensation whatsoever without referring to the object of that sensation? Sensations are not independent particulars, therefore, the question of referring to them independently of referring to their objects does not arise. How could one talk about the sensation of blue without referring to, or mentioning, blue; or about the sensation of fatigue, without referring to, or mentioning, fatigue? But the fact that one cannot refer to, or talk about, sensations without referring to, or talking about, the objects of those sensations does not imply that there are no such things as sensations. What it implies is simply that sensations depend for their *identification* on things that are not sensations. I cannot refer to, or talk about, the Prince of Denmark, without referring to, or talking about, Denmark. This does not imply that the Prince of Denmark does not exist, or that the existence of the Prince of Denmark does not exist, or that the existence of sensations—2 cannot be questioned simply on the ground that in referring to them one is bound to refer to the objects of those sensations.

Continuing his attack on sensations—2 Deshpande denies that these sensations can have any sort of attributes. As he says, “The alleged attributes of these sensations are in reality qualities of the objects of those sensations.”¹⁷ And he has come to this conclusion because he believes that “Sensations themselves (as distinct from the objects of those sensations) are nowhere open to view.”¹⁸ It is a questionable view to maintain that sensations are not open to view. However, for the sake of argument let us grant that they are not open to view. But the fact that they are not open to view does not imply that they do not have attributes, or that we are not in a position to know about their attributes. Obviously, if sensations are not open to view then their attributes are not observed, they are inferred. Again, Deshpande has taken for granted that if something is a quality of an object then it is not an attribute of the sensation. But this implies that sensations cannot have anything in common with their objects. This view is obviously false. A sensation would remain different from its object even if it had only one attribute that is not a quality of the object in question. To maintain a distinction between a sensation and its object it is not required that nothing should be common to them. So certain attributes may really be attributes of a given sensation, and the very same attributes may also be the qualities of the object of that sensation.

Let us now consider the fourth, i.e., the conclusive section of the paper. In the opening paragraph of the section Deshpande raises the question, “If there are no sensations (of the special senses), then how does perception take place?”¹⁹ There is a simple, straight forward, answer: Perception takes place directly without pre-supposing, involving, or entailing anything else. There are no sensations, so also there are no *substitutes* of sensations. But this alternative does not occur to Deshpande. And if it does occur to him, it is not acceptable to him. If not the sensations, then some other objects or entities must be there so that perception may take place. As Deshpande says, “I think that our denial of sensations—2 need cause us no insuperable difficulties. We can say that perception does not involve sensations—2, but it does involve sensible awareness of sense-objects. I think what philosophers have called sense-data are such objects.”²⁰ So sense-objects, according to Deshpande, are not *material*; one

cannot have sensible awareness of material objects. Deshpande is making a claim which requires sufficient backing. However, let us take for granted that sense-objects are identical with sense-data. And sense-data have been distinguished from sensations-2. Denying the existence of sensations-2, according to Deshpande, is not denying the existence of sense-data. He further confirms this view when he says, "Between sensations-2 and sense-data I favour the sense-data because we are certainly aware of them, whereas we are certainly never aware of sensations-2."²¹ One would get the impression that Deshpande prefers the myth of sense-data to the myth of sensations-2. But are they two different myths ?

A Rylean would really be puzzled with both the remarks of Deshpande quoted above, in which he prefers sense-data to sensations-2. For sense-data according to Ryle are nothing but personified sensations. Ryle's attack on sensations-2 is meant for demolishing the myth of sense-data. Referring to the sense-datum theory Ryle says, "This theory is primarily an attempt to elucidate the concepts of sense-perception, a part of which task consists in elucidating the notions of sensations of sight, touch, hearing, smelling and testing."²² To have a sensation, according to the sense-datum theorist, means the same thing as to be aware of a sense-datum. As Ryle further points out, referring to the sense-datum theory, that, "Having a visual sensation can be described as getting a momentary look, or visual appearance, of something, and having an olfactory sensation as getting a momentary whiff of something."²³ The momentary whiffs and looks are identical with sense-data. This becomes clear from Ryle's further remark, "You cannot get the look that I get, any more than you can suffer the tweak that I suffer. A sense-datum, i.e., a momentary look, whiff, tingle, or sound is property to one perceiver."²⁴ Can there be any doubt that sense-data, according to Ryle's interpretation, are identical with sensations-2 ?

The question arises, whether Deshpande's concept of a sense-datum is the same as that of Ryle. For, Ryle does whereas Deshpande does not identify sense-data with sensations-2. Though Deshpande does not elucidate his own conception of a sense-datum, an account can be obtained from his writing which refers to the

distinction between a sense-datum and a material object. While referring to the case in which one fails to obtain knowledge of a material object in spite of the fact that one happens to *see* it, Deshpande says, "If by 'seeing' one meant (as was not unnatural) a purely visual mode of knowledge, what one sees would not be an orange, but only its visible aspect or look."²⁵ Could one mean by 'seeing' a non-visual mode of knowledge? Could one obtain the taste or smell of an orange just by seeing it? The full import of Deshpande's remark is not clear. But it is quite clear that Deshpande makes a distinction between knowledge of such a material object as an orange, and knowledge of its visible *aspect* or *look*, i.e., the visual sense-datum of an orange. It is possible to have a look at the *look* of an orange without having a look at the orange itself. Deshpande's notion of a sense-datum is not very different from that of Ryle except that Ryle does whereas Deshpande does not identify a sense-datum with a sensation. There is a further point of disagreement. According to Ryle it is nonsense to talk about the existence of sense-data. To talk about the existence of a visual sense-datum would be to talk about the possibility of looking at the *look* of things. Sensing a sense-datum, as is clear from Deshpande's remark is accepting the possibility of having a look at the *look* of things. But it is quite absurd to have a look at the *look* of things. This absurdity can be swallowed only by a sense-datum philosopher.

The above quotations from Ryle are sufficient to show that Ryle does not distinguish sensations-2 from sense-data. The thesis that observing entails sensations and the thesis that observing entails sense-data are not two different theses, but one and the same thesis, or one and the same pseudo-scientific, Cartesian explanation of observation. While explaining the sense in which "observing entails sensations" Ryle points out, "A man could not be described as watching a robin who had not got a single glimpse of it, or smelling a cheese who had not got a whiff."²⁶ The expressions 'a single glimpse' and 'a whiff' stand for sense-data. Watching a robin (material object) entails having a glimpse (sensation, sense-datum) of it. Similarly, having the smell of a cheese (material object) entails having a whiff (sensation, sense-datum) of it. It is because of the identity between a sensation and a sense-datum that Ryle argues against the sense-datum theorists

that they have assimilated "the concept of a sensation to the concept of observation."²⁷ If having a sensation is the same thing as being aware of a sense-datum, then the distinction between sensation and observation disappears. A sensation itself becomes a species of observation.

Before casting his vote in favour of sense-data against sensations-2, the proper course for Deshpande would have been to show that sense-data are different from sensations-2. It is quite possible that Ryle is wrong about the issue and Deshpande is right. But he has to establish that he is right. Concerning the difference between sense-data and sensations-2 Deshpande gives only one argument in the whole of his paper, that we are aware of sense-data whereas we are never aware of sensations-2. What would it mean to be aware of a sensation-2? If the momentary glimpses and whiffs etc., are sensations-2, then we are certainly aware of them. Deshpande does not deny one's awareness of a sense-datum, therefore, he should also not deny one's awareness of a sensation-2. For he seems to maintain the position that he is using the word 'sensation' in the same sense in which Ryle has used this word. Nowhere in his paper Deshpande is found arguing that the momentary glimpses and whiffs etc., are not sensations-2, that they are simply sense-data. Deshpande does not mention anywhere in his paper that he has any sort of disagreement with Ryle on the issue of sensations, that Ryle is wrong in dissolving the distinction between sensations-2 and sense-data. Rather, he gives an opposite impression in his paper, that he is advocating and defending Ryle's position on the problem of sensations.

Ryle's position on the issue of sensations-2, i.e., his refusal to observe them, is not free from objections. I may refer, as an example, to the objections raised by Professor Campbell Garnet. In connection with Ryle's arguments concerning the problem of sensations Garnet points out that Ryle "Substitutes the phrase 'glimpse of' and 'whiff of' for 'sensation of' (pp. 206-7). Yet he has himself noted that these are observation words, not sensation words. A glimpse of a robin is not a sensation of robin, but a brief observation of a robin".²⁸ One of the reasons for Garnet's distinction between momentary glimpses and whiffs and the so called sensations is to avoid the absurd situation that in observing a sensation, "one must have a sensation of a sensation."²⁹

However, Garnet's distinction between 'glimpse of' and 'sensation of' fails to provide much support to Deshpande's view. For Deshpande denies whereas Garnet maintains the possibility of sensations being observed. As Garnet says, "In the observation of a physical object sensations are a part of what is noticed. They are, therefore, part of the total object observed and the only sense in which it can be claimed that sensations are not observed is that they are not observed in isolation, because observation is a process of connecting and linking up the distinguishable items of experience by noticing their relations—including the time setting in which they occur."³⁰ Garnet accepts the absurdity of the view that one obtains the *glimpse* of a glimpse, i.e., the look of a *look*. But there is no absurdity in obtaining the glimpse of a sensation. What is required to obtain the glimpse of a sensation is simply that one should have a glimpse of a robin or any other material object. A separate glimpse of a sensation is an absurdity. Again in saying that one has a glimpse of, i.e., notices, a sensation, it is not required that one should be led to accept the absurd position that 'one has the sensation of a sensation'. Thus Deshpande's position remains objectionable even if Ryle is wrong in identifying sensations with sense-data. For what is absurd is not observing a sensation but observing a sense-datum.

Deshpande is found advocating the popular form of phenomenalism when he says, "The senses present to us their immediate objects, out of which then the mind constructs a perception of a physical object."³¹ Deshpande's *immediate objects* are sense-data. The physical objects are constructions out of sense-data. Whether they are logical constructions or just non-logical constructions is not clear. What is clear is that the perception of a physical object is preceded by the presentation of sense-data. But it is against such views as these that Ryle wrote what he wrote about sensations. Even a cursory glance over the chapter on "Sensations and Observations" from *The Concept of Mind* would reveal that Ryle's distinction between the two kinds of sensations, sophisticated and unsophisticated, is meant for attacking phenomenalism.

The most puzzling feature of Deshpande's paper, particularly its conclusion, is the expression of his *intuitive* faith in phenomenalism. He does not provide, nor feels his responsibility to do

so, any argument in favour of his sense-datum analysis of perception. Rather, he clearly refuses to put forward any argument in favour of his position. As he says, "I wish to make one thing absolutely clear—I do not wish to advocate or defend the sense-datum theory."³² Though he does not defend he does advocate the sense-datum theory. But what is the significance of advocating a theory if one fails, or refuses, to defend it? After showing his preference for the sense-datum analysis of perception Deshpande concludes his paper, saying, "The larger questions of Epistemology and Metaphysics I leave to those who are qualified to tackle them."³³ Thus, the responsibility of defending the status of sense-data depends on others. Deshpande's own job is over once he successfully brought the sense-data into existence. But it is a bad Ethics to impose one's own offsprings on others.

Indian Institute of Advanced Study,
Simla.

Suresh Chandra

NOTES

1. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, (second series) Edited by Margaret Chatterjee, London, 1974.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
3. *Contemporary British Philosophy*, (Third series), Edited by H. D. Lewis.
4. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 49.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
8. *The Concept Of Mind*, p. 191.
9. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 43.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
22. *The Coucept Of Mind*, p. 200.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
25. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 48.
26. *The Concept of Mind*, p. 197.
27. *Ibid* , p. 203.
28. *The Perceptual Process*, London, 1965
29. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
31. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, p. 48.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
33. *Ibid* , p. 50.