CHAPTER THREE

The Problem of Objective Being (II) – This chapter will look at the ‘problem of the external world’ in the writings of Frege and Moore. I will argue that, while these philosophers accepted the ‘ideas thesis’, in one form or another it was this very acceptance of the thesis that lay at the root cause of their failure to provide an alternative account of the object. The ideas they developed independently of the theory did nonetheless contribute to the development of a new subject/object paradigm.

I mentioned in the first chapter that the ontology of ideas can be seen as a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense of constituting a generally accepted conceptual framework within the context of which the problems generated by a given discipline, in this case Philosophy, are formulated and either resolved or left unresolved.

Viewed in this light, and keeping in mind the discussion in the last chapter, it can be seen that as a paradigm the theory not only generated the problem of the external world, it also generated the conceptual framework within which those thinkers who tackled the problem tried to solve it.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this paradigm was breaking down, the best evidence for this being the fact that thinkers such as Frege, Moore and Russell were, while accepting the ideas ontology in some form or other, attempting to establish an object-based ontology independently of it. By ‘object-based’ I mean an ontology in which objects of awareness are
not simply subjective objects or mental entities. As discussed earlier in relation to Frege and Moore, this produced interesting conceptual tensions in their thought. What we are seeing here is a transition from the traditional subject-object paradigm derived from Descartes and taken over by Berkeley, Locke and Hume to the beginning of a new paradigm which would ultimately characterise subject and object as separate entities and the relation between them as external and contingent rather than internal and necessary. In the context of this new paradigm the object would no longer be regarded as a subjective object, derivative upon the subject category, but as an object in its own right.

In the writings of Frege and Moore this new paradigm is not coherently explicated; rather, their discourse presents us with disparate concepts that run counter to those of the traditional paradigm but that have not yet been coherently developed into a new one. The principal intellectual impetus behind these new concepts was the desire to resolve the problem of the external world, a problem which, as we have already seen, could not be resolved in terms of the concepts provided by the traditional ideas paradigm.
In this chapter I will discuss the attempts of Frege and Moore to establish an object-based ontology, to enumerate the concepts that were introduced by them which ran counter to the traditional paradigm and to evaluate these concepts in relation to their ability to allow for a conceptual recasting of the problem of the external world in a way that avoided the difficulties encountered in the context of that paradigm.

I will then argue that while these two thinkers did introduce important new concepts into philosophical discourse at this time, the belief in ideas, in the case of Frege, and sense-data, in the case of Moore, remained an ever-present obstacle to any satisfactory resolution of the problem of the external world.

I have already considered Frege and Moore in Chapter One. What I wish to discuss here relates specifically to the question of their desire to establish an object-based ontology and the concepts they employed to bring this about.

Frege’s desire to delineate an object that is not simply a *subjective* object is evident in his discussion of the difference between a thought and an
idea in his article “The Thought: A Logical Inquiry” (1967). Put simply, ideas as contents or elements of consciousness are subject-relative whereas thoughts are not.

This conclusion may seem strange since one normally regards both thoughts and ideas as mental events so that it would seem logical to consider thoughts as being subject-relative along with ideas. Frege’s point in drawing a distinction between the two, however, is that if we characterise thoughts as a species of idea then we leave the characterisation of thought open to the same criticisms regarding solipsism that can be levelled at the ideas theory itself. Just as ideas, as contents of consciousness, belong necessarily to a bearer so too would thoughts, with the consequence that both would be equally inaccessible to anyone but the bearer whose ideas/thoughts they are.

Frege concludes that if this were so, knowledge would be impossible since it would have no common basis and could provide no meaningful context for determining truth or falsity. As a consequence truth and falsity would amount to little more than adjectives applicable only to mental entities pertaining to the inner realm of consciousness. In this context their ascription
would be meaningless. As Frege remarks, in such circumstances it would be more correct to speak of *my* Pythagorean theorem or *his* Pythagorean theorem rather than *the* Pythagorean theorem (Frege 1967, p.28).

The principal characteristic of a thought for Frege is that it can be apprehended by more than one mind and this makes it in his eyes more like an external thing than an idea; the only property it shares with ideas in his view is that it is not perceived by the senses (Frege 1967, pp.28-29).

A second indication of Frege’s desire to establish an object-based ontology comes from the fact that he treats ideas themselves as a particular type of object. Just because they are a type of object they must be distinguished from the bearer whose ideas they are. In contradistinction to ideas, which are momentary mental entities, the bearer of ideas is perceived as a material continuant. Frege’s point is that if this distinction is not maintained, as in the ontology of ideas, which regards every object of awareness, including the subject of experience, as an idea, then we cannot really speak of a subject of consciousness or make a meaningful distinction between the self, as the bearer of ideas, and what is other than the self:
But there is something which is not my idea and yet which can be the object of my awareness, of my thinking, I am myself of this nature. Or can I be part of the content of my consciousness while another part is, perhaps, an idea of the moon? Does this perhaps take place when I judge that I am looking at the moon? Then this first part would have a consciousness and part of the content of this consciousness would be I myself once more. And so on. Yet it is surely inconceivable that I should be boxed into myself in this way to infinity, for then there would not be only one I but infinitely many. I am not my own idea and if I assert something about myself, e.g. that I do not feel any pain at this moment, then my judgement concerns something which is not a content of my consciousness, is not my idea, that is me myself (Frege 1967, p.33).

As observed in the first chapter, this failure to distinguish between consciousness and object is one of the reasons why Frege condemns the major premise of the ideas ontology. The subject-object distinction is a real distinction in Frege’s view and one that we can confirm by appealing to experience. Frege’s principal refutation of the theory, however, rests on the straightforward assumption that different objects have different properties which enable us to classify them into distinct groups. Unless we can admit these groups of objects into our ontology we cannot avoid ontological and epistemological solipsism. This is evident in the following passage:

So it seems to me, the matter becomes intelligible. If man could not think and could not take something of which he was not the bearer as the object of his thought he would have an inner world but no outer world (Frege 1967, p.34).

While this conclusion is an obvious and correct response to the solipsism inherent in the ontology of ideas it is not enough to simply assert of external
objects and thoughts that they, too, are objects of awareness and that as a consequence external reality is restored to us.

We want to know more. If external objects and thoughts are objects of awareness in what way are we aware of them? In what way, for instance, does our awareness of them differ from our awareness of ideas? In what way do their properties differ from those of ideas, if they differ at all? In what way do their properties differ from each other? As Lewis points out, any resolution of the conflict between realism and idealism rests upon an adequate analysis of material objects together with our awareness of them (Lewis 1965, p.118).

Frege doesn’t give us much to go on here. He does imply, however, and indeed this is the primary ground for his claim that external objects form a separate class of objects of awareness, that our relation to them is contingent rather than necessary (Frege 1967, pp.34-35).

This is an important point to make when one remembers that ideas as objects of awareness are regarded within the context of the traditional paradigm as being necessarily related to the mind. If external objects and
thoughts do not possess this relation of necessity but are rather contingently related to the mind then they would certainly seem to possess a property sufficiently different to justify their classification as a unique and separate class of objects, different in character to ideas. What we need here is some account of how our awareness of them, under these circumstances, would differ from our awareness of ideas. Frege does not, however, provide an answer to this question.

Frege nonetheless makes several important points. He sees correctly that if philosophy is to solve the problem of the external world the object category must range over a domain that is wider than that of simply subjective objects or ideas. He is also fully aware that unless subject and object are treated as two and not one, no meaningful distinction can be drawn between the subject of experience conceived as a continuant, and experience itself.

Of course once subject and object are so viewed the relationship between them that prevailed in the context of the traditional paradigm, whereby the object was viewed either as a property of the subject and standing in a part/whole relationship to it, or as a constituent of a bundle of
ideas, can no longer hold. In fact the nature of this relationship is then completely thrown open. Here again Frege has some important insights which could be, but are not in his hands, developed further.

When discussing the difference between thoughts and ideas, for instance, he is careful to distinguish between the mental process of thought and thoughts themselves indicating that the former is relational in nature and must not be confused with the latter:

The apprehension of a thought presupposes someone who apprehends it, who thinks. *He is the bearer of the thinking but not of the thought. Although the thought does not belong to the contents of the thinker’s consciousness yet something in his consciousness must be aimed at the thought itself.* But this should not be confused with the thought itself. Similarly Algol itself is different from the idea someone has of Algol (Frege 1967, p.35).

The relation between thinking and a thought is analogous to that between an idea and its object in that both instantiate a connection between the mental and the non-mental.

As mentioned earlier, Frege struggles to further differentiate thought. Nonetheless the direction of his thinking is clear enough: to avoid the solipsism of the ideas thesis, subject and object must be regarded not simply as logically separate entities but as actually separate existents.
Moore’s response to the problem of the external world is interestingly similar to Frege’s. For Moore, as for Frege, the problem arises primarily as a consequence of the limitation of awareness or experience to the inner world of the mental and the structuring of the latter in accordance with the substance/property model of mind, that is, the model generated by the traditional Cartesian-inspired paradigm. Accordingly, many of the criticisms that Moore levels at this view of mind are identical to those of Frege. In particular Moore takes aim at the relation between awareness and its object where the latter is construed as a part or content of the former rather than an object in its own right.

Just as Frege realizes that if the object of awareness is regarded as an inseparable or necessary aspect of the act of awareness itself the subject-object structure of experience is compromised, so, too, does Moore:

But further I think it may be seen that if the object of an Idealist’s sensation were, as he supposes, not the object but merely the content of that sensation, if, that is to say, it really were an inseparable aspect of his experience, each Idealist could never be aware either of himself or of any other real thing (Moore 1922, p.28).

Moore, like Frege, realizes that subject and object must be two and not one (Moore 1922, p.13); he is also aware that the object category must range
over a wider domain of objects than simply sensations or ideas and he is intent upon making the relation between subject and object external and contingent rather than internal and necessary. In all these respects his thought is very much in step with Frege’s.

However, whereas Frege extended the object category to include thoughts and external objects as objects of awareness, retaining the notion of contents of consciousness only in respect of ideas, Moore in his paper “The Refutation of Idealism” generalizes the relational structure of awareness to include the entire domain of consciousness. In this respect his analysis goes much further than that of Frege who retains a commitment to ideas as contents or elements of consciousness while maintaining that awareness in perception and thought is relational. Moore also recognizes intentionality as the unique mark of the mental although he fails to see the full implications of this for an account of perception.

Moore’s move here is a bold one since in generalizing a relational structure to the entire domain of consciousness and therefore to ideas he has supplanted the substance/modification model of the subject present in the
ontology of ideas with a model in which subject and object are independent entities even at the level of sensory experience. This has several important consequences. Firstly, reflective awareness no longer serves as the only ground of mental acts. In the ontology of ideas reflection fulfils this function because every object cognized, regardless of the mode of cognition, is reduced to the status of an idea or subjective object. In Moore’s scheme of things reflective awareness, like any other type of awareness, is a relation exemplified by an object on one hand and consciousness on the other. Reflection enjoys no epistemological or ontological priority over any other type of consciousness. This can be clearly seen in the following passage:

If, on the other hand, we clearly recognize the nature of that peculiar relation which I have called “awareness of anything”; if we see that this is in fact the only essential element in an experience – the only thing that is both common and peculiar to all experiences – the only thing which gives us reason to call any fact mental; if, further, we recognise that this awareness is and must be in all cases of such a nature that its object, when we are aware of it, is precisely what it would be, if we were not aware; then it becomes plain that the existence of a table in space is related to my experience of it in precisely the same way as the existence of my own experience is related to my experience of that. Of both we are merely aware: if we are aware that the one exists, we are aware in precisely the same sense that the other exists: and if it is true that my experience can exist, even when I do not happen to be aware of its existence, we have exactly the same reason for supposing that the table can do so also (Moore 1922, pp.29-30).
The claim here is that the relation of awareness has the same structure regardless of whether or not the object apprehended is non-mental (a material thing) or mental (an awareness of the thing).

It is interesting to see the similarities between Moore and Jean-Paul Sartre on this issue. Sartre (1996, p.24) speaks of positional and non-positional consciousness. Non-positional consciousness is an awareness that doesn't take consciousness itself as its object; an awareness of a material object would be such a consciousness on Sartre’s view. Sartre also refers to this type of consciousness as non-reflective (*la conscience irréfléchie*). Positional consciousness, on the other hand, is reflected consciousness or an awareness that takes an awareness as its object, as in Moore’s second example above.

It would be wrong to see here a dichotomy of two different types of consciousness since Sartre claims that a positional or reflected consciousness is at the same time a non-reflective consciousness. What he means is that although the object of reflection may itself be an act of awareness the act of reflection directed towards it is itself non-positional or
unreflected and must in turn be posited as an object if it is to count as an instance of reflected consciousness. Non-reflective awareness is thus a condition of reflection in Sartre’s view. The relevant passage is:

Or, ma conscience réfléchissante ne se prend pas elle-même pour objet lorsque je réalise le Cogito. Ce qu'elle affirme concerne la conscience réfléchie. En tant que ma conscience réfléchissante est conscience d'elle-même, elle est conscience non-positionnelle. Elle ne devient positionnelle qu'en visant la conscience réfléchie qui, elle-même, n'était pas conscience positionnelle de soi avant d'être réfléchie (Sartre 1996, p.28).

[My reflecting consciousness doesn’t take itself for an object when I perform the Cogito. What it affirms concerns the reflected consciousness. In so far as my reflecting consciousness is aware of itself it is non-positional. It only becomes positional by referring to reflected consciousness which itself was not positional prior to reflection.]

Sartre’s language is rather awkward but his meaning seems to be similar to Moore: a mental act comprises two elements, consciousness or awareness, and an object which is not a constituent of the act itself. The element of awareness is what all mental acts have in common whilst the object is what differentiates them. This structure holds equally well for acts of reflection as for any other mental act.

I mentioned above that the claim that reflective awareness no longer serves as the ground of mental acts removes the necessity to reduce all objects to the status of the mental. However, this does not mean that all objects are now elevated to the status of the non-mental. Both Sartre and
Moore acknowledge a category difference between the mental and the non-mental. What has changed, however, is that the mental entities are now accounted for differently. A mental entity is no more a constituent of a mental act than a non-mental entity is. It, like its non-mental counterpart, is the object of the intention of the act.

Moore expresses this, as we see in the quotation above, by saying that my experience (a mental entity) can exist even when I am not aware of its existence whereas Sartre gives expression to the same claim by saying that there is no ‘I’ (or self, another mental entity) in non-reflective consciousness. The choice of language here is perhaps unfortunate since it tends to give the impression that both thinkers are positing a realm of mental entities in the way Frege did for thoughts when in fact they are making a claim about the nature of awareness and its objects.

Sartre supports the claim by a direct appeal to phenomenological evidence. In discussing an instance of reading he comes to the conclusion:

Le résultat n’est pas douteux: tandis que je lisais, il y avait conscience du livre, des héros du roman, mais le Je n’habitait pas cette conscience, elle était seulement conscience de l’objet et conscience non-positionnelle d’elle-même (Sartre 1996, p.30).

[There is no doubt about the result: while I was reading there was awareness of the book, of the heroes of the story, but the ‘I’ was not part of
such awareness [that is, was not itself an object of awareness], which was only of the object and non-positionally of itself.]

There is no confusion here between the two uses of ‘I’ if one remembers that it is being used in two senses: in the first to refer to whoever is the *subject of* the reading experience itself and in the second, where it appears in inverted commas, to that same subject constituted as an object of reflection. Sartre’s point is that what makes this particular experience of reading an instance of non-reflective conscience is the absence of this second conception of the ‘I’ as an object of any of the awarenesses involved in the experience. In fact as an object of reflection Sartre considers the ‘I’ to be an extremely sophisticated mental construction (Sartre 1996, pp.32-37). But this mental construction is only possible in Sartre’s view because consciousness exists as a real unity *prior* to any reflective process:

...que le *Je Pense* peut accompagner nos representations parce qu’il paraît sur un fond d’unité qu’il n’a contribué à créer et que c’est cette unite préalable qui le rend possible au contraire ...(Sartre 1996, p.19)

[ ... that the I Think can accompany our representations because it appears on a foundation of unity that it hasn’t created and that it is this pre-existing unity, on the contrary, which makes the I Think possible ...]

Moore’s claim that my experience can exist even when I am not aware of it and Sartre’s claim that the ‘I’ as object is absent from some instances of

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experience is based on a conception of consciousness as a relation as well as on the view that the unity of consciousness is located in this relational element rather than in any particular subject term to which consciousness may be somehow related a posteriori.

In fact both Sartre and Moore deny a subject of consciousness claiming rather that there are only acts of awareness and their objects and that consciousness itself is impersonal. As Thomas Baldwin notes in his book on Moore, there is no place in his early philosophy for a persisting substantial subject (Baldwin 1990, p.53).

Sartre’s definitive statement on the matter is found in *La Transcendance de l’Ego*, where he claims that the field of consciousness is impersonal or pre-personal, without an ‘I’ (Sartre 1996, p.19). For both Moore and Sartre the metaphor appropriate to consciousness is that which describes it as a transparent awareness of an object which is other than itself.

In Moore the relevant passage is:

…when we refer to introspection and try to discover what the sensation of blue is, it is very easy to suppose that we have before us only a single term. The term ‘blue’ is easy enough to distinguish, but the other element which I have called ‘consciousness’ – that which sensation of blue has in common with sensation of green – is extremely difficult to fix. .. it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent – we look through it and see nothing but the blue (Moore 1922, p.20).
Compare this with the following:

Tout est donc clair et lucide dans la conscience: l'objet est en face d'elle avec son opacité caractéristique, mais elle, elle est purement et simplement conscience d’être conscience de cet objet, c’est la loi de son existence (Sartre, 1996, p.24).

[Everything is clear and lucid in consciousness: the object faces it with its characteristic opacity but consciousness is purely and simply consciousness of being conscious of this object. This is the nature of its existence.]

We can appreciate the difference between this conception of consciousness and the conception based on the substance/property model if we remember that according to the latter model all consciousness is essentially reflective because it involves the subject taking its own ideas as objects of reflection; reflection is a matter of the subject looking inward on itself.

For Sartre and Moore consciousness exists as an entity in its own right (and not as a property of something else) and this existence takes the form of an awareness to an extrinsic object expressed in the phrase ‘consciousness of ……’. The effect of this, as we have seen, is to locate the unity of consciousness in the relation itself rather than in the subject term of the relation and to define conscious acts by their objects. Further, both thinkers generalize this relational structure to all conscious acts, regardless of whether or not reflection is involved.
I believe that what we are seeing here is the beginning of a metamorphosis in respect of both the subject and object categories. Whereas the object category had previously been dependent upon that of the subject by virtue of the relation of necessity between subject and object (expressed most succinctly in the *esse est percipi* formula whereby it is a property of the object that it be *perceived or experienced*) Frege, Moore and Sartre make the relation between subject and object *contingent* by removing such a requirement. To be experienced or perceived is no longer a necessary attribute of the being of an object. The object need no longer be an idea or mental object; it need only be an object of *some sort*.

As I mentioned earlier, this would allow external or corporeal objects to be admitted into an ontology as objects of awareness since our experience of them does suggest that our relationship to them is of just such a contingent nature. Viewed in this way, external or corporeal objects would correctly form another class of objects of awareness alongside ideas, subject to the conditions mentioned earlier in regard to what we want and need to know about our awareness of them and how it differs from that of ideas.
In addition to having the above-mentioned points in common both Sartre and Moore share the same intellectual motive in introducing them, namely their opposition to the main premise of the ontology of ideas.

Moore attacks the failure of Idealism to distinguish between the act of awareness and its object:

And at this point I need not conceal my opinion that no philosopher has ever yet succeeded in avoiding this self-contradictory error: that the most striking results both of Idealism and of Agnosticism are only obtained by identifying blue with the sensation of blue: that esse is held to be percipi, solely because what is experienced is held to be identical with the experience of it (Moore 1922, p.19).

These two elements in his view are ontologically distinct and different. Consciousness is one thing; its object another. Moore offers several possible explanations for why the two have historically been regarded as indistinguishable: on the one hand, he attributes it to the fact that language offers no means for distinguishing between sensations and their objects so that both are referred to by the same term; on the other, he claims that we have no natural means for referring to abstract objects such as causality and identity except by referring to them as ideas or notions (Moore 1922, p.19). He also offers a third, and for our purposes, a rather more interesting reason.

When introspecting a sensation it is extremely difficult to see that we are
dealing with a two-term rather than a one-term relation, a difficulty which he claims is due to the transparent nature of consciousness itself:

And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent – we look through it and see nothing but the blue: we may be convinced that there is something but what it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognized (Moore 1922, p.20).

The result of this failure to distinguish consciousness as an element distinct from its object leads to the mistaken conclusion that what is being dealt with here is a single term only.

Moore then goes on to consider the consequences of regarding the object of a sensation or experience as merely its ‘content’ and his critique here is similar in nature to that of Frege’s reductio of the ideas theory. Moore realizes that if this ‘contents’ view is accepted then the relation of object to consciousness must of necessity be interpreted along the lines of a thing and its properties. Analysing sensation or experience this way, and using a blue flower as an analogy, ‘blue’ in the sensation of blue would be a property of the sensation just as ‘blue’ in a blue flower is a property of the flower. On this analogy, then:

Any sensation or idea is a “thing”, and what I have called its object is the quality of this thing (Moore 1922, p.23).
And:

The relation of the blue to the consciousness is conceived to be exactly the same as that of the blue to the glass or hair [Moore is here using a blue bead and a blue beard as an example]: it is in all three cases the quality of a thing (Moore 1922, p.22).

Moore notes that the upshot of this view is that ideas are ultimately mental images which are related to consciousness in the same way that reflections are related to the substance reflecting them:

A mental image is conceived as if it were related to that of which it is the image (if there be any such thing) in exactly the same way as the image in a looking glass is related to that of which it is the reflection: in both cases there is identity of content, and the image in the looking-glass differs from that in the mind solely in respect of the fact that in the one case the other constituent of the image is 'glass' and in the other it is consciousness (Moore 1922, pp.23-24).

This in turn leads to an epistemology based on the correspondence theory of truth:

And owing to the fact that sensations and ideas are all considered to be wholes of this description – things in the mind – the question: What do we know? is considered to be identical with the question: What reason have we for supposing that there are things outside the mind corresponding to these that are inside it? (Moore 1922, p.23-24).

It was just this theory that Frege found so unsatisfactory, as his discussion of truth shows (Frege 1967, pp.18-20).

What is interesting here is that while Moore’s critique is a very succinct analysis of the ideas ontology, what he completely fails to see is that the ontology itself cannot possibly generate a conception of experience or sensation as a two-term relation.
Since the ontology represents the mind and its ideas as analogous to a thing and its properties, to refer to the idea of blue or red is simply to refer to a property of the mind. If the property referred to is a mental act of awareness reference is subjective. If it is the representational content of such an act reference is objective. As discussed earlier this is the nature of the ambiguity of the Cartesian concept of ‘idea’ which vitiates the ontology of ideas.

Moore is incorrect to rebuke earlier thinkers, such as Berkeley, for failing to see that subject and object are existentially two and not one and of using the same name, sensation or idea, to refer indifferently to subject and object instead of finding the grammatical means to distinguish between the two (Moore 1922, pp.19-20). It is precisely because the ontology of ideas views the mind as analogous to a thing and its properties that it is quite natural to take the view that we are dealing here with one entity rather than two and to regard acts of awareness and objects of awareness as simply two different aspects of the one thing.

In so far as a relational analysis of the model is possible, all relations will be necessary and internal rather than contingent and external. In a similar
vein, all relations will be *logical* rather than *real*. This, of course, was
precisely the case with the Idealist conception of mind (Hylton 1990,
pp.21-72). These thinkers read the model correctly, and not incorrectly, as
Moore contends.

To conceptualise subject and object as being existentially two rather
than one is to call for a completely different metaphysic to that provided by the
Cartesian/Empiricist tradition. Moore needs a model which posits
consciousness as a real relation to an object which is other than
consciousness itself and which is capable of presenting awareness as a two-
term rather than a one-term relation. As the second term of such a relation
the object must not be dependent upon the subject category and it must be
more than the representational content of a mental act. It cannot, therefore,
be a Berkeleyan or Lockean idea, nor a Humean idea/impression.

At this point it would be worthwhile to summarise the ground covered
so far. I stated at the beginning of this chapter that the traditional Cartesian-
inspired subject-object paradigm, which had given rise to the philosophical
problem of the external world, was breaking down in the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries. We can see this in the discourse of thinkers like Frege, Moore and Sartre who were developing conceptions of consciousness and object that were very different to the substance/property conception that dominated the traditional paradigm.

Although it is usual to regard each of these thinkers as belonging to very different philosophical traditions I have delineated several points on which their thinking converges. In particular these thinkers share the belief that subject and object are two distinct entities (in which case the subject term is not bifurcated as is the case in the traditional paradigm), that consciousness is a relation to an object other than itself and that the domain of objects of consciousness or awareness should be wider than the realm of ideas.

I subsequently pointed out that while none of these thinkers succeeded in fully articulating a new paradigm in opposition to the tradition, they nonetheless depart significantly from tradition and, as we will see in the next chapter, they ultimately find a place within the newly articulated paradigm.
I mentioned above that in generalizing a relational structure to the entire domain of consciousness Moore supplants the substance/modification model of the traditional ontology of ideas with a model in which subject and object are independent entities even at the level of sensory experience. This implies that Moore broke with the ontology of ideas in a definitive manner, particularly in respect of the object category. One of the principal arguments of this dissertation has been that the only objects available to the ontology of ideas were *subjective* or mental objects and that the problem of the external world arose as a direct consequence of this. However, throughout his philosophical career Moore believed that sense-data were the immediate objects of perception, a view which seems to carry the implication of a commitment to subjective objects given that sense-data are subject-relative entities.

In the final section of this chapter I want to look at the status of sense-data in Moore's work with a view to determining whether or not this is in fact the case. My view is that sense-data have an indeterminate status in Moore's work and that he is moving towards an account of mental acts in which such
entities are redundant. That he doesn’t drop them altogether is, I believe, indicative of the hold of the traditional orthodoxy on his thought.

We need look no further than Moore’s paper “The Refutation of Idealism” (1922) in which he sets out to refute the claim *esse is percipi* to understand the extent of his break with the ontology of ideas in respect of mental acts. Idealism, whether it is based on a substance/properties ontology or that of properties alone, renders the principle *esse is percipi* (‘to be’ is to be perceived or experienced) true because it limits reality to the realm of mental entities (ideas) and maintains that the tie between subject and object is a necessary one. As we have seen above Moore maintains that reality encompasses not only the mental but also the non-mental and that the tie between subject and object, even in respect of mental entities, is contingent rather than necessary. How does he establish these claims? Let us look at that concerning the mental and non-mental first.

Moore starts from the premise that an awareness and its object are two entities and not one so that a distinction needs to be drawn between the two. Idealism, too, recognizes this but fails to maintain the ontological integrity of
the two either because it confounds the object of awareness with the act of awareness or because it asserts that the two are inseparable parts of an organic whole. Since the latter are undifferentiated nothing can be asserted of a part which doesn’t equally apply to the whole itself with the result that act and object are again confounded and treated as one entity (Moore 1922, pp.13-16). In this context the relation between act and object is construed as being one that either holds between a property and a substance or one that holds between properties themselves. The relation between act and object in both cases is one of inherence or containment (Moore 1922, pp.20-24). Both these idealistic positions lead to self-contradiction since a distinction is asserted on the one hand but denied on the other (Moore 1922, pp.14 –15). This model is inappropriate in Moore’s view when applied to mental acts because it treats as constituents of such acts elements which in his view are not parts of wholes at all. A mental act of thinking is not part of a larger whole, anymore than the object to which such thinking is directed or the relation between the two. Moore wants to secure a position that removes this consequence and that assures the ontological integrity of the act of
awareness as well as its object. It is not enough simply to assert a distinction between the two to achieve this as Idealism shows. Rather, the issue is one of structure: if the traditional view of mental acts as wholes of which awarenesses and objects are integral parts has led to the unfortunate solipsistic consequences of Idealism then the logical place to look to correct this would be at the level of structure itself. We can see this approach in Moore's analysis of a sensation or idea:

The element that is common to them all, and which I have called 'consciousness' really is consciousness. A sensation is, in reality, a case of 'knowing' or 'being aware of' or 'experiencing' something. When we know that the sensation of blue exists, the fact we know is that there exists an awareness of blue. And this awareness is not merely, as we have hitherto seen it must be, itself something distinct and unique, utterly different from blue: it also has a perfectly distinct and unique relation to blue, a relation which is not that of thing or substance to content, nor of one part of content to another part of content. This relation is just that which we mean in every case by 'knowing'. To have in your mind 'knowledge' of blue, is not to have in your mind a 'thing' or 'image' of which blue is the content. To be aware of the sensation of blue is not to be aware of a mental image – of a “thing”, of which 'blue' and some other element are constituent parts in the same sense in which blue and glass are constituents of a blue bead. It is to be aware of an awareness of blue: awareness being used, in both cases, in exactly the same sense. This element ... is certainly neglected by the 'content' theory: that theory entirely fails to express the fact that there is, in the sensation of blue, this unique relation between blue and the other constituent (Moore 1922, pp.24-25).

From this passage it is evident that Moore considers the idealist model an inappropriate description of mental acts not simply because it treats the constituents of such acts as parts of wholes but also because it fails to
account in an appropriate way for what he considers to be a unique relation between consciousness and object. That relation in Moore’s view finds its proper expression in the phrase ‘consciousness of …’ where ‘of’ is the linguistic expression of a connection between awarenesses on the one hand and the objects of such awarenesses on the other. In treating sensations and ideas as passive states of the subject the idealist paradigm completely overlooks this relational element.

It is hard to imagine a more definitive break with the traditional Cartesian-inspired paradigm than Moore’s claim that sensations and ideas have a relational structure. As he himself notes, of all the things which idealists believe constitute inseparable aspects of their own experiences, of nothing are they so firmly convinced in this regard as ideas and sensations (Moore 1992, p.27). By claiming that *they* have a relational structure Moore strikes at the very heart of the traditional Cartesian-inspired paradigm.

But how does this claim regarding the structure of sensations and ideas lead to Moore’s second claim that the relation between act and object is contingent rather than necessary? What allows Moore to claim that the
objects of sensations and ideas are no more necessarily related to
awarenesses of them than tables and chairs are related to perceivings of
them? The clearest expression of this claim is Moore’s statement in “The
Refutation of Idealism” when he says:

... “blue” is as much an object, and as little a mere content, of my
experience, when I experience it, as the most exalted and independent
real thing of which I am ever aware. There is, therefore, no question of
how we are to “get outside the circle of our own ideas and sensations.”
Merely to have a sensation is already to be outside that circle. It is to
know something which is as truly and really not a part of my experience,
as anything which I can ever know (Moore 1922 p.27).

What does a perception of a material object have in common with an
awareness of blue, what Moore terms a sensation, that leads him to believe
that as mental acts they both share the same structure?

Moore’s claim is based on his belief that the object experienced in all
mental acts must be distinguished from the experience of it. This assertion
on its own, however, is not sufficient to secure the status of the object as an
entity in its own right as Idealism attests. The point at issue concerns the
number of entities involved in a mental act. Idealism presents only one entity,
the knowing or experiencing subject. Distinctions made between act and
object are made within the subject category and hence are intra-subjective.
Moore, in insisting that the object experienced must be distinguished from the experience of it, claims that there are two entities involved. The dichotomy is not one of subject and object, however, since Moore is concerned with the structure of mental acts rather than with any analysis of minds as such. Consequently his distinction revolves around awarenesses and their objects: he is less concerned with questions concerning the nature of the entity to which such awareness might be attributed\(^1\). Moore’s claim is that for any awareness and its object awareness and object must be numerically distinct and independent of each other and this does allow for the further claim that the objects of mental acts are in no way constituents of such acts. Not being constituents, or elements, of acts objects need only be contingently, or factually, related to them.

In the traditional ontology of ideas the relation between the mind and its objects was one of logical necessity imposed by the structure of the ontology itself. There is still an element of necessity in Moore’s restructuring of the mental act since there cannot be an awareness that doesn’t have an object.

\(^1\) Moore briefly alludes to this question in ‘The Status of Sense-data’ when he frankly admits that he is undecided about whether the subject of experience is an entity that endures through time or one which lacks a continuant altogether. (Moore, 1922, p.174)
Whether that object is mental or non-mental, however, is purely a matter of fact.

Given that Moore doesn’t deny that acts might be ultimately attributable to minds as the subject term of such acts we would be dealing with three entities if we took the latter into account, namely, mind, act and object. Deducting mind from the equation we are dealing with two entities, act and object.

Lewis claims that there are three entities involved in Moore’s assay of a mental act: an awareness, its object and the relation that the two jointly exemplify which in Lewis’ view is that of intentionality. Lewis argues that although Moore successfully refutes the ‘esse est percipi’ formula of Idealism he doesn’t secure realism because he doesn’t, among other things, succeed in abandoning the part/whole model of mental acts. Lewis interprets Moore’s assay of a mental act as a complex involving two mental individuals and one non-mental individual. The two mental individuals are the awareness and the relation of intentionality. The one non-mental individual is a sense-datum (Lewis 1965, pp.158-159).
As we have already seen there can be no doubt that Moore regards
awarenesses as entities in their own right. He distinguishes them from that to
which they might be attributed on the one hand, and the entities to which they
are directed, or their objects, on the other. And, while I agree with Lewis that
Moore has correctly diagnosed a failure to account for intentionality as a
fundamental weakness of Idealism, I disagree that he views intentionality as
a relational entity distinct from awarenesses and objects themselves. My view
is that Moore regards awarenesses as being intrinsically intentional or
relational in nature in the same way that Sartre views consciousness as being
intrinsically intentional, and that he regards this property as the distinguishing
characteristic of the mental. In this case he need only claim that mental acts
involve two entities and not three as Lewis believes.

I mentioned above that I believe sense-data to be problematic in
Moore’s discourse. I will now discuss this claim more fully. Moore’s
problems arise from an ambiguity in respect of what he understands sense-
data to be. The ambiguity is most clearly reflected in his use of the

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2 Moore never refers to the relation between an awareness and its object as an intentional relation. However, his claim that consciousness is always of an object which is other than consciousness itself clearly indicates that he is referring to intentionality.
demonstrative which appears to vacillate between reference to the perceived part of a material object and reference to the entire object (that is, its perceived and unperceived parts) as the object of reference. When Moore uses the demonstrative in the first way it refers to a stand alone entity as the subject of perceptual judgements. When he uses the term ‘sense-data’ in this way to refer to the immediate objects of perception it is clear that he is using it to refer to entities intermediate between the perceiving subject and the material object itself. In this case sense-data, like ideas, are subject-relative and bring in their train all the problems associated with such relativity.

This claim, however, does not sit well with his further claim that sense-data are material parts of material objects since a part is not a stand alone entity, even if it is the immediate object of perception. When Moore uses ‘sense-data’ to mean the directly-perceived material parts of material objects he is not referring to intermediate entities at all but rather to entities whose elucidation belongs more properly to a concept of presented object than to one of sense-data understood in the traditional sense of mental entities. On this second understanding, as material parts of material objects, sense-data
would not be subject-relative at all since, as presented objects, they would be those parts or aspects of material objects that fall within the intentions of acts. Moreover, this understanding of sense-data is compatible with our use of the demonstrative in a way in which the first understanding is not.

Moore’s use of the demonstrative in the first sense can be seen in the following passage:

Thus, when I judge, as now, that That is an inkstand, I have no difficulty whatever in picking out, from what, if you like, you can call my total field of presentation at the moment, an object, which is undoubtedly, in a sense in which nothing else is, the object about which I am making this judgment: and yet it seems to me quite certain that of this object I am not judging that it is a whole inkstand. And similarly when I judge, with regard to something which I am feeling in my pocket, ‘This is a coin,’ I have no difficulty in picking out, from my field of presentation, an object, which is undoubtedly the object with which my judgment is concerned; and yet I am certainly not judging with regard to this object that it is a whole coin (Moore 1922, p.229).

Normally, when one uses a demonstrative one uses it to refer to an object in its entirety, that is, to both its seen and unseen aspects. Yet Moore is claiming that the demonstrative is used to isolate and refer to only the perceived part of the object in question, and that that part serves as the subject of perceptual judgements. This is unequivocally his position in the following passage:

Nobody will suppose, for a moment, that when he judges such things as ‘This is a sofa,’ or ‘This is a tree,’ he is judging, with regard to the presented object about which his judgment plainly is, that it is a whole
sofa or a whole tree: he can, at most, suppose that he is judging it to be a part of the surface of a sofa or a part of the surface of a tree (Moore 1922, p.230).

It is true, of course, that what is presented in perception is always only a part of the particular object in question. If I am looking at the front of my desk I don't actually see the back of it; similarly, if I pick up a coin I may only touch two of its three surfaces. However, it doesn't follow from this that the part seen or touched is the object referred to and in fact our use of demonstratives suggests that this isn't the case since I do, in fact, say 'that desk over there against the wall' and I mean to use the demonstrative to refer to the desk in its entirety and not to just that particular part of it which I am presently seeing. Moore's understanding of sense-data as material parts of material objects accommodates this second and more normal use of the demonstrative whereas his understanding in the first sense doesn't.

Although Moore tends to the view that sense-data are material parts of material objects he is reluctant to accept this position. The reason for this rests on his belief that for this claim to be true there must be an identity between sense-data and material object. Moore believes that cases where we judge of the surface of a material thing that it is the same surface of the
same object that we saw earlier although it *looks* different provide examples

of non-identity between sense-data and material object and hence falsify this

claim. Moore presents the argument like this:

It seems, therefore, to be absolutely impossible that the surface seen at
the later time should be identical with the object presented then, and the
surface seen at the earlier identical with the object presented then, for the
simple reason that, whereas with regard to the later seen surface I am not
prepared to judge that it is in any way perceptibly different from that seen
earlier, it seems that with regard to the later sense-datum I cannot fail to
judge that it *is* perceptibly different from the earlier one: the fact that
they are perceptibly different simply stares me in the face. It seems, in
short, that when, in such a case, I judge: ‘This surface is not, so far as I
can tell, perceptibly different from the one I saw just now,’ I cannot
possibly be judging of the presented object ‘*This* is not, so far as I can tell,
perceptibly different from that object which was presented to me just
now,’ for the simple reason that I *can* tell, as certainly, almost, as I can
tell anything, that it is perceptibly different (Moore 1922, p.244).

Broken down, the argument can be paraphrased as follows: at t¹ there is no

identity between sense-data and surface; at t² there is no identity between

sense-data and surface; as a consequence at t² I judge that there is no
difference between the perceived surface and that perceived at t¹, that is, that

an identity holds; at t² I judge that there is a difference between the sense-
data seen then and that seen at t¹, that is, that no identity holds between

them. This would lead one to conclude that if an identity holds at t² and t¹ in

respect of the two perceived surfaces I cannot be judging this on the basis of

the perceived sense-data since my judgement in relation to the sense-data is
that no identity holds either between the sense-data seen at \( t^2 \) and those seen at \( t^1 \) or between either set of sense-data and the perceived surfaces.

Schematically, the argument looks like this:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
T^1 \quad T^2 \\
\text{Surface} = \quad \text{Surface} \\
\neq \quad \neq \\
\text{sense-data} \neq \quad \text{sense-data}
\end{array}
\]

If I am not judging in respect of the perceived surfaces on the basis of the respective sense-data then I must be judging on the basis of the material object alone. In that case the sense-data cannot be a part of the surface of the material object in question.

Moore believes, erroneously, that in cases like this we are making a judgment about two objects, the material object on the one hand and sense-data on the other. This is why he claims that the above example involves a judgment relating to the perceived surface of the material object and another in respect of the sense-data which differ from it. If we think of sense-data as objects additional to the material object about which we are judging then
Moore’s conclusion of non-identity between part of the surface of the material object and sense-data is correct. However, if we interpret the claim that sense-data are the material parts of material objects not as a judgment about two objects but rather as a judgement about one object and its perceived or ‘presented’ parts then we are not embroiled in these difficulties. We can account for the cases that Moore finds so problematic, those cases where the perceived surface ‘looks different’ at a later time but actually isn’t, because we know that in saying that the perceived surface ‘looks different’ we are not attributing any new properties to the material object at all. As a consequence we can say that the perceived surface, and hence the material object itself, hasn’t changed.

Moore attempts to find a way around the material object/sense-data dilemma by appealing to the language of seeming:

What now seems to me to be possible is that the sense-datum which corresponds to a tree, which I am seeing, when I am a mile off, may not really be perceived to be smaller than the one, which corresponds to the same tree, when I see it from a distance of one hundred yards, but that it is only perceived to seem smaller ......(Moore 1922, p.245).
The introduction of the language of *seeming* and *being* should be a step forward here since such language aims to preserve the integrity of the material object in the face of apparently conflicting appearances.

In saying that the tree *seems* to be smaller we are not making any claim with regard to changes in the actual properties of the tree; rather the claim is made only in respect of appearances or apparent properties. If we couldn't say that the tree *seemed* smaller at a distance then we would be committed to saying that it *was* smaller when seen from afar which would be absurd since trees don't grow larger and then shrink as balloons do, for example, when being blown up.

Similarly, it is this distinction between *seeming* and *being* that allows Moore to claim in the case of his example of the inkstand that the 'presented object' or sense-data is quite possibly identical with part of the surface of the inkstand because they *seem* to be the same (Moore 1922, p.246).

The problem that I see with Moore's use of this language is that he misapplies it to sense-data rather than to the physical or material object itself, as can be seen in the example quoted above where he talks of the sense-
data *seeming* to be smaller, when it is the actual tree that appears or seems smaller. Similarly, in the case of the inkstand Moore refers to the sense-data *seeming* to appear in a certain way rather than the inkstand itself.

There is something anomalous about applying the *seeming*/*being* distinction to sense-data because in the traditional paradigm the being of sense-data is defined by appearances. Sense-data cannot *be* other than what they *appear* to be. *Seeming*, on the other hand, implies that a thing can appear to be other than it is.

That Moore never satisfactorily resolves the ambiguity in his discourse relating to sense-data whilst clearly tending towards the view that as the immediate objects of perception sense-data are the material parts of material objects serves to illustrate the limitations imposed on his discourse by the traditional paradigm, especially the claim that sense-data are the subjects of perceptual judgements (Moore 1922, pp.250-251).

In “The Status of Sense-Data”, for example, he argues against sense-data being material parts of material objects on the grounds that sense-data are subject-relative (Moore 1922, pp.186-87). In “Some Judgements of
Perception”, on the other hand, he states that he believes sense-data *do* form part of the material object itself although he is well aware that this view flies in the face of orthodox opinion and his own previous stance on the matter (Moore 1922, pp.250-51).

The ambiguity in respect of sense-data has consequences for Moore’s attempt to give an account of external objects. In particular it prevents him from developing his second understanding of sense-data into an account of external objects in which the presented object functions as the perceived aspect of a material object. The conception of the presented object has this potential because it does away with intermediate entities and the necessity to give an account of the external object in terms of a representative theory of perception. That Moore’s account of externality is dominated by the first understanding of sense-data, however, can be seen in his claim that material or external objects are only ever given obliquely in perception as entities which stand in a certain relation to sense-data. As such they can never be known independently of the latter and can certainly never be the objects of acquaintance (Moore 1922, pp.232-234).