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The Ontology of Ideas and the Intentionality Thesis

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CHAPTER ONE

The Primacy of the Subject – In this chapter I look at the characterisation of subject and object in Descartes and the British Empiricists. My argument will be that the object category is derived from, and subordinate to, the subject category by virtue of 'object' being defined in terms of ideas or subjective objects.

This chapter has two objectives: (i) to look at the ontology of subject and object as it is manifest in Descartes and the British Empiricists, and (ii) to answer the question of *why* the subject category held the dominant position that it did in philosophical discourse up until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when it began to be shaken by the emergence of analytic philosophy and the realism of phenomenology. Both these movements attempted to develop object-based ontologies and, in so doing, to supplant the epistemological and ontological primacy that had previously been enjoyed by subject-dominated philosophies.

As is well-known, Descartes' ontology is based on a substance dualism with the two categories bearing an inverse relation to each other. Thus, what characterizes material substance, namely extension, is denied of immaterial substance. What characterizes immaterial substance on the other hand, namely thought, is denied of material substance. In this way the categories and their modifications are mutually exclusive and supposedly exhaustive.

The striking thing here is that *both* ontological categories are conceived along the lines of substance and modification. Schematically, the Cartesian category of subject can be represented by the following four elements:

(i) Mental or immaterial substance;

(ii) Ideas, understood as modifications of (i); [1]

(iii) Consciousness, understood as the element of awareness involved in all mental acts. Consciousness serves to ground such acts.

(iv) Consciousness, understood as reflection by the mind on itself, whereby the mind takes its own acts as objects of reflection.

To the extent that ideas in this schema function as modifications of the immaterial substance called mind they conform to traditional substance/modification ontology. That is, as properties they are conceived of as inhering in immaterial substance and would conform to linguistic analysis in terms of subject/predicate grammar. It is this conformity that is expressed in the assertion that when I have an idea of red, then my mind or consciousness *is* red.

Viewed as properties, ideas lend themselves to consideration *either* as mental acts *or* as the contents of such acts. This has led to the view that the

[1] As such ideas can be either mental *acts* of thought, perception, will, etc. or the *content* of such acts. For a discussion of ideas as modifications of substance see Vere Chappell, *The Theory of Ideas*, in Essays on Descartes' Meditations, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986, pp.177-98.

Cartesian concept of idea is ambiguous between these two meanings. In his paper on Descartes' theory of ideas Vere Chappell reflects on this ambiguity when he remarks that for every *material* idea there is an *objective* idea:

> An idea in the material sense of the word is a mental *act* or event, something that occurs in the mind. An idea in the objective sense, by contrast, is something upon which the mind is directed, a mental *object* (Chappell 1986, p.178).

As Chappell further remarks, we are not dealing with two distinct entities here but rather with one entity and a particular aspect of it:

> ……. these are not distinct entities at all – not one individual thing and then a second, different one – but are rather one thing on the one hand, and an aspect or component of that same thing on the other. The idea(m) and the idea(o) only differ from one another, to use Descartes' own expression, by a 'distinction of reason' (Chappell 1986, p.178).

Chappell then goes on to elucidate the differences between material and objective ideas in Descartes' thought and the relation between them, in particular that of representation. This relation, he points out, is not to be construed as one of correspondence between a mental and a non-mental entity; rather, it is *intra-mental* in nature.

In my view Chappell's account of Descartes' theory of ideas is correct as far as it goes. We can take it further, however, for it seems to me that the conception of idea under discussion here doesn't simply introduce an act/object distinction relative to the mental; it introduces that distinction *within*

the subject category itself so that we are dealing with what should properly be called an *intra*-subjective distinction and not just an intra-mental one.

Let me explain more fully what I mean by this. The notion of subject is broader than, but includes, the notion of mind. In Descartes' writings mind and thought are regarded as co-extensive, with the latter being defined so widely as to include feeling and perception, attributes that are normally associated with the concept of person and not simply the concept of mind. When Descartes says of himself that he is 'a thing which thinks' he therefore means more than a thing which just has ideas and thoughts in the strict sense of these terms; he is also attributing perceptions and feelings to himself and these belong to the wider category of subject.

But why does he subsume these under the more narrow rubric of thought? The answer lies in the fact that, in their self-presenting nature as perceptions and feelings, Descartes treats them as being on a par with the self-presentation of thoughts and ideas even though, qualitatively, they are very different. We see this clearly in the following passage from *Meditation II*:

> Finally, I am the same who feels, that is to say, who perceives certain things, as by the organs of sense, since in truth I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat. But it will be said that these phenomena are false and that I

> am dreaming. Let it be so; still it is at least *quite certain that it seems to me that I see light, that I hear noise and that I feel heat. That cannot be false; properly speaking it is what is in me called feeling; and used in this precise sense that is no other thing than thinking* (Descartes 1911-1912, p.153).

In thereby attributing these qualities to himself Descartes is referring to more than his mind; he is referring more properly to his person as the subject of the attribution. It is for this reason, then, that I feel it is more appropriate to refer to 'subject' and 'subject category of being' here than simply to that of 'mind', and to speak of the distinction to which Chappell refers as *intra*-subjective rather than just *intra*-mental.

The supposed ambiguity of Descartes' conception of idea aside, there is another point at issue here which seems to have escaped consideration in the literature.

This relates to the suitability of substance/modification ontology to account for the *relational* aspect of mental acts. That such an aspect is a feature of the mental is borne out by the fact that, taken as an individual mental act, an idea is an awareness of a content which is, logically speaking, the idea's object. It is this relational element, expressed by the connective *'of'*, which is left unaccounted for in the traditional model.

Just because awareness is relational and appears to concern two terms rather than one, it doesn't seem quite correct to view mental acts as properties of the subject in the way that redness and roundness are properties of substance.

In addition to being relational, mental acts can also be *reflexive* between the subject and itself, something Sartre takes note of when he draws a distinction between non-reflective and reflective consciousness (Sartre 1996, pp.24-25). Any description of the mental must be able to account for this reflexivity and, again, the traditional model doesn't seem to be the best way to do this.

Cartesian dualism, then, doesn't conform to a simple dyadic structure with the subject category (immaterial substance or mind) on one side and the object category (material substance or matter) on the other. The subject category itself is dyadic in structure because of the dual subjective/objective function of ideas.

Again, there is clear evidence for this in the *Meditations.* In the following passage, for example, Descartes, after having first established *that* he is, asks *what* he is: [2]

> But I do not yet know clearly enough *what* I am, I who am certain *that* I am; and hence I must be careful to see that I do not imprudently *take some other object in place of myself*, and thus that I do not go astray in respect of this knowledge that I hold to be the most certain and most evident of all that I have formerly learned (Descartes 1911-1912,p.150. Italics mine).

The knowledge referred to here is, of course, that of his own existence, expressed in the *cogito ergo sum*. Taking 'some other object in place of myself' would involve predicating attributes or qualities to himself that properly belong to something else; in determining *what* he is Descartes must only attribute to himself those qualities that he believes *necessarily* belong to him as thinking substance, so necessity here is determined by those actions the performance of which is known only by means of mental awareness.

Although thinking and thought come to mind as the most obvious mental qualities, Descartes quickly expands the list to include perception, imagination and volition since the acts that fall under these categories all involve the act/object distinction, implicit in his conception of idea, in addition

[2] While I agree here with Thomas Vernon, that Descartes' objective in the *Meditations* is primarily ontological, I disagree that he goes into the discussion fully-armed with a representative theory of perception and the thesis of solipsism. See Thomas S Vernon, *The Metaphysical Role of Ideas in the Philosophy of Descartes,* PhD thesis, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1963.

to the element of awareness or consciousness itself. As Descartes reiterates on several occasions in the *Meditations*, regardless of what the objects of these acts are, it is undeniable that the acts themselves are real and can be attributed to the one, indivisible mind or soul:

> I am a thing that thinks, that is to say, that doubts, affirms, denies, that knows a few things, that is ignorant of many [that loves, that hates], that wills, that desires, that also imagines and perceives; for as I remarked before, although the things which I perceive and imagine are perhaps nothing at all apart from me and in themselves, I am nevertheless assured that these modes of thought that I call perceptions and imaginations, inasmuch only as they are modes of thought, certainly reside [and are met with] in me (Descartes 1911-1912, p.157).

We can see clearly here the distinction drawn in these passages between the *act* of thought as an attribute of the mind whose thought it is, and the *object* of the thought itself. What that object might be, and how we would know it, is, however, for the moment left open. (We will see later in this work that this *lacunae* in respect of the object had important philosophical consequences.)

Descartes admits that his knowledge is 'little'. In order to try and extend it he decides to 'look around more carefully and see whether I cannot still discover *in myself* some other things which I have not hitherto perceived' (Descartes 1911-1912, pp.157-58).

This line of enquiry leads to a discussion of sense perception, which qualifies for analysis because it has in the past presented certain phenomena

as real that have subsequently proved to be otherwise. It therefore falls within the ambit of Descartes' overall project, which is to submit all his previous knowledge to the test of methodic doubt with a view to finding out his nature or essence, that is, *what* he is.

Two important themes are brought in at this point: (i) ideas are mentioned for the first time in the *Meditations* (with the exception of the *Preface*) and they are treated as synonymous with thoughts, and (ii) Descartes eschews the belief, formerly held, that these ideas proceed from, and are similar to, external objects. He clearly now regards this as a possibly false belief:

> But there was yet another thing which I affirmed, and which, owing to the habit which I had formed of believing it, I thought I perceived very clearly, although in truth I did not perceive it at all, to wit, that there were objects outside of me from which these ideas proceeded, and to which they were entirely similar. And it was in this that I erred, or, if perchance my judgement was correct, this was not due to any knowledge arising from my perception (Descartes 1911-1912, p.158).

Further on in the Meditation the same point is made:

> But the principal error and the commonest which we may meet with in them [i.e. judgements], consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me are similar or conformable to the things which are outside me; for without doubt if I considered the ideas *only as certain modes of my thoughts*, without trying to relate them to anything beyond, they could scarcely give me material for error (Descartes 1911-1912, p.160. Italics mine).

We have already seen why ideas considered as modes of thought cannot be erroneous: grounded as they are in self-awareness, and only attributable to

the mind whose thoughts or ideas they are, we can only be mistaken about them on pain of contradiction. Even though I might be mistaken about *what* I judge, see or feel, I cannot doubt *that* I do so. (I can, of course, *lie* about my state of mind but, as Sartre points out in his analysis of 'bad faith' *(la mauvaise fois),* such deception assumes a knowledge of the state of mind I am concealing (Sartre 1943*,* pp.82-104).

The problem regarding the connection between ideas and external objects, then, does not lie with ideas as such; that is, it is not that ideas don't, on occasion, *accurately* refer to what is beyond them, but rather in the fact that there is nothing in the external world or in the mind itself that can ground the *reality* of their external referents. This seems to me to be the crux of the problem for Descartes.

That the inference from idea to referent would need to be as certain in respect of external objects as it is in the case of mental objects, in order to ground the reality of the former, is clear in Descartes' discussion of the imagination when he says:

> I easily understand, I say, that the imagination could be thus constituted if it is true that body exists; and because I can discover no other convenient mode of explaining it, I conjecture with probability that body does exist; but this is only with probability, and although I examine all things with care, *I nevertheless do not find that from this distinct idea of corporeal nature, which I have in my imagination, I can derive any*

argument from which there will necessarily be deduced the existence of body (Descartes 1911-1912, pp.186-187. Emphasis mine).

Not being able to 'necessarily deduce' the existence of body (as one can so deduce the existence of mind from thoughts and perceptions), Descartes concludes that there is *no valid reason* for holding the belief that there is *any* connection whatsoever between ideas and external objects. This is evident from the following passage:

> It seems indeed in the first place that I am taught this lesson [that certain ideas proceed from objects external to the mind] by nature; and, secondly, I experience in myself that these ideas do not depend on my will nor therefore on myself – for they often present themselves to my mind in spite of my will. Just now, for instance, whether I will or whether I do not will, I feel heat, and thus I persuade myself that this feeling, or at least this idea of heat, is produced in me by something which is different from me, i.e. by the heat of the fire near which I sit. *And nothing seems to me more obvious than to judge that this object imprints its likeness rather than anything else upon me.*
>
> Now I must discover whether these proofs are sufficiently strong and convincing. When I say that I am so instructed by nature, I merely mean a certain spontaneous inclination which impels me to believe in this connection, *and not a natural light which makes me recognize that it is true*. But these two things are very different; for I cannot doubt that which the natural light causes me to believe to be true, as, for example, it has shown me *that I am from the fact that I doubt, or other facts of the same kind*. And I possess no other faculty whereby to distinguish truth from falsehood, which can teach me that what this light shows me to be true is not really true, and no other faculty that is equally trustworthy. But as far as [apparently] natural impulses are concerned, I have frequently remarked, when I had to make active choice between virtue and vice, that they often enough led me to the part that was worse; and this is why I do not see any reason for following them in what regards truth and error.
>
> And as to the other reason, which is that these ideas must proceed from objects outside me, since they do not depend on my will, I do not find it any the more convincing. For just as these impulses of which I have spoken are found in me, notwithstanding that they do not always concur with my will, so perhaps there is in me some faculty fitted to produce these ideas without the assistance of any external things, even though it is not yet known by me; just as, apparently, they have hitherto always been found in me during sleep without the aid of any external objects.
>
> And finally, though they did proceed from objects different from myself, it is not a necessary consequence that they should resemble these. On the contrary, I have noticed that in many cases there was a great difference between the object and its idea. I find, for example, two

> completely diverse ideas of the sun in my mind; the one derives its origin from the senses, and should be placed in the category of adventitious ideas; according to this idea the sun seems to be extremely small; but the other is derived from astronomical reasonings, i.e. is elicited from certain notions that are innate in me, or else it is formed by me in some other manner; in accordance with it the sun appears to be several times greater than the earth. These two ideas cannot, indeed, both resemble the same sun, and reason makes me believe that the one which seems to have originated directly from the sun itself, is the one which is most dissimilar to it (Descartes 1911-1912, pp.160-161).

More often than not, then, external objects are not what they appear to be, with the result that judgements based on spontaneous inclination, the principal cause of the belief that there is a connection between such objects and ideas, are on the whole less reliable than those based on reason.

But why does this conclusion render the belief in a connection between ideas and external objects *mistaken?* For part of Descartes' meaning here, as we saw in the quotation above from *Meditation III*, is that even when there is no error in judgement the belief in the connection is misplaced.

The answer lies in Descartes' notion of what constitutes an indubitable belief. A belief is indubitable, or absolutely certain, according to Descartes when it grounds both subject *and* object within the confines of the one mental act and the only entity capable of doing this is an idea. Hence the clarity of the cogito where every mental act, as an act of awareness, is directed towards a content and this content is *known* as being the object of the act.

This irreducible duality with its objective, representative, content is peculiar only to ideas in so far as they are attributes, or modifications, of mind.

The thinking, perceiving, doubting or judging subject, in so far as it thinks, perceives, doubts or judges, is presented with this duality through the simultaneous awareness of the ontological (the thought, perception, doubt or judgement as *act*) and epistemological (the *content* of the thought, perception, doubt or judgement) elements that constitute its mental acts.

In the Cartesian system, then, it is possible to look at mind from either a first person perspective, which would involve describing all mental acts from the point of view of the subject or person whose mental acts they are, or from a third person perspective, which would involve describing such acts from the perspective of content alone, without reference to any particular subject. (It is this latter aspect that Husserl so successfully exploited in phenomenology with his conception of the epoché, which brackets all questions of existence and describes mental phenomena simply from the point of view of essential content).

Another way of putting the matter would be to say that what is *experienced* as a subjective mental act becomes *known* as an objective

attribute of the mind whose act it is. In this way the mind grounds both *act* and *content* and, with regard to the latter understood as object, this is the only reality the mind can ground. If, for instance, it could ground the *real* or *actual* objects of its perceptions, where such objects are understood as external to it, in the way that it grounds perceptual acts themselves, that is, with the same degree of awareness and certainty, those objects would have to be *necessarily* as they appear to be to the mind. If not, they would not satisfy the certainty condition and would hence fall outside the scope of what counts as indubitable.

If such were the case, however, error in judgement would be, by definition, impossible. There would simply never be a divergence between thought and reality, where the latter is understood as external to, and other than, thought.

While Descartes certainly recognized such a divergence he was unable to give a satisfactory account of it because of his commitment to the ontology of ideas and his insistence that all knowledge claims be based on indubitability. Yet it is within this 'space', so to speak, that a theory of objectivity must be worked out. Thus, whilst he asserts that there is a relation

of necessity between the objective element, or content, of ideas and such ideas as mental acts, he acknowledges no such relation between ideas and what is external to the mind. Indeed, Descartes is very specific on this point when he says that thought does not impose any necessity upon things (Descartes 1911-1912, p.181).

Notwithstanding the above, Descartes does nonetheless try to account in some measure for external reality since he refers to ideas as having both *objective* and *representative* being. What meaning do these terms have?

It is clear from the above discussion regarding the connection between ideas and external objects that Descartes is not propounding a sense-data type representative theory of perception whereby ideas are construed as *resembling* a world external to them. To quote A D Smith in this regard:

> It is astonishing that the Cartesians have been saddled with a sense-datum theory and a veil of perception problem. I can only think that such wild attributions have been made because of the besetting sin of historians of philosophy: namely, that of reading history backwards, from one's own viewpoint (Smith 1985, p.44).

Some ideas, such as those of the imagination, for instance, Descartes maintains *do* resemble their objects, but in such cases Descartes conceives

the imagined image as a material entity in the brain, rather than as an immaterial element in the mind. [3]

Representative theories assume a necessary relation of correspondence between idea and external object but, as I have already indicated, we do not find this in Descartes. Indeed, as has already been remarked, it is Descartes' view that thought imposes no necessity upon things. Also, in those cases where an idea does seem to conform to an object external to it, where there would be, on a representational theory, a good 'fit', so to speak, between idea and object, such correspondence in Descartes' view is, as discussed earlier, purely contingent.

But if the representative function of ideas is not to resemble external objects then in what does it consist? That ideas have a representative role is clear from the following passage in *Meditation III:*

> There is no doubt that those [i.e. ideas] which represent to me substances are something more, and contain so to speak more objective reality within them [that is to say, by representation participate in a higher degree of being or perfection] than those that simply represent modes or accidents; and the idea again by which I understand a supreme God, eternal, infinite, [immutable], omniscient, omnipotent, and Creator of all things which are outside of Himself, has certainly more objective reality in itself than those ideas by which finite substances are represented (Descartes 1911-1912, p.162).

[3] For further discussion of this see Michael J Costa, "What Cartesian Ideas Are Not", in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, October 1983, pp.537-549.

From this passage it is clear that the representative function of ideas is not measured by the degree to which they *resemble* external objects. We are not dealing with a relation between an original and its image or copy. Correspondence is not the issue.

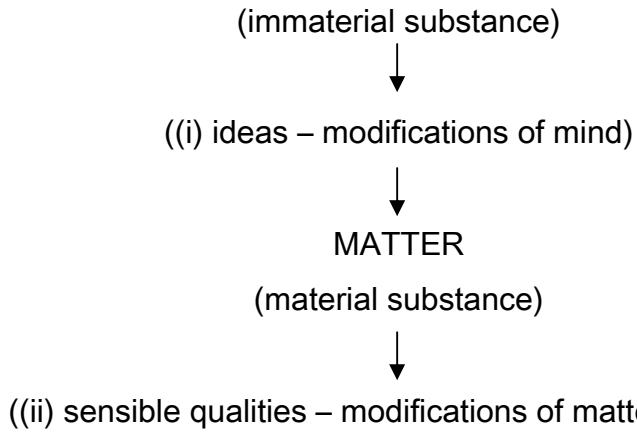
The key to understanding how ideas 'represent' lies, I believe, in understanding what Descartes means by 'participation in being'. Descartes envisages being as a hierarchy with God at the top and modes or accidents more or less at the bottom. There is a vertical relation of perfection emanating downwards from God, as the most perfect being, to modes and accidents as the least perfect. Another way of putting this is to say that as one goes down the chain there is a gradual *degradation* of being from being to non-being.

Ideas as entities would come fairly close to the bottom here, although as modifications of immaterial substance they would be further up in the hierarchy than sensible qualities which are modifications of material substance. The concept can be represented schematically as follows:

GOD

↓

MIND



This hierarchy generates an order of objectivity that correlates with the different levels of reality. An idea that represents, or puts, God before the mind, for instance, must *of necessity* convey more reality than one that represents substance because God is more perfect than any substance.

Similarly, an idea that represents a sensible quality conveys less reality than one that represents material substance because sensible qualities are less perfect than material substances.

It is not that ideas themselves are more or less real according to what they represent. The reality of an idea *as idea* is determined by the position ideas hold within the hierarchy, not by the reality of what they represent. It is only their content that varies.

A useful metaphor here is that of the colour spectrum. Some colours are brighter and more distinct than others, although all are equally real.

Similarly, some ideas convey more reality than others by virtue of their content, although all are equally real *as ideas.*

This is why Descartes can say of ideas that their objective reality is just as real as those more perfect beings which have actual reality (i.e. God and substances, for instance). We see this in the following passage from *Meditation III* :

> For, pray, whence can the effect derive its reality, if not from its cause? And in what way can this cause communicate this reality to it, unless it possessed it in itself? And from this it follows, not only that something cannot proceed from nothing, but likewise that what is more perfect – that is to say, which has more reality within itself – cannot proceed from the less perfect. And this is not only evidently true of those effects which possess actual or formal reality, but also of the ideas in which we consider merely what is termed objective reality (Descartes 1911-1912, p.162).

According to this reasoning an idea derives its reality from its cause. But what is the cause of an idea? Since the mind can have ideas of anything from the lowliest mode or accident to the highest principle of being, namely God, then being itself must be the cause of ideas.

I mentioned earlier on that in Descartes' system ideas can be regarded either as mental acts or mental objects. In the context of this distinction, and bearing in mind the above, we can see that ideas understood as mental acts would have more objectivity, or actual reality, than ideas understood as representative objects.

This is because as acts they are modifications of immaterial substance but as objects (that is, considered only in terms of their content) they are modes or attributes and the latter have less reality in Descartes' system than the former. [4]

Descartes' theory of objectivity is extremely complex and owes much to his Scholastic predecessors. It is also intimately tied up with his conceptions of causality and necessity. In the *Meditations*, for example, he insists that the relation between ideas as effects and the causes which produce them is a necessary relation, and he is very specific on the point that an idea cannot contain more or less reality than what is contained eminently or formally in its cause. This is why he looks within himself for the causes of his own ideas and, since he conceives himself to be less perfect than God, regards both himself and his ideas as a less perfect form of being. This is also why the relation between an idea as a mental act and its objective or representative content is one of necessity in so far as the former is the cause of the latter.

[4] Again, Chappell makes this point, although he arrives at it in a slightly different manner. See Chappell, p.189.

There is, then, in Descartes a relation between idea and reality but it is not a relation of correspondence. Apart from this, the presuppositions of Descartes' theory of objectivity and representational theories are very different.

Descartes questions the very existence of material objects; whereas representative theories *presuppose* them in some form or another. The problem for the latter is the *adequacy* of the relation of correspondence that supposedly holds between such objects and the mediating entity; for Descartes the problem lies with the origin, or ground, of the object term itself.

In the end, when he does concede in *Meditation VI* that external objects exist, he reaches this conclusion by means of a teleological argument in respect of God's inability to deceive rather than by any reference to the identity of the originating term.

Although there is something unsatisfactorily gratuitous about an appeal to God when it is brought in to fill a gap that the ontology itself cannot fill, it does illustrate Descartes' sensitivity to the fact that our beliefs in external objects need some sort of ontological ground.

Descartes is right, of course, to think that external objects can never be grounded by the mind in the manner of ideas because the certainty that we

have of our own mental acts can never be extended to such objects. This does not mean that the latter do not have *any* ground in subjectivity, however, as Descartes seems to assume because he cannot so ground them. Nor does it mean that all relations between the mind and its objects must be necessary relations, an assumption implicit in the restriction of the latter to the domain of ideas. Indeed, as cases of non-veridical perception illustrate, there need be *no* necessary causal connection between the two.

At this point it may be worthwhile briefly to sum up the ground covered so far.

I pointed out at the beginning of this discussion that although Cartesian ideas are regarded as properties inhering in immaterial substance, there is a dual structure within the Cartesian category of subject itself. This structure arises out of Descartes' conception of ideas as mental entities that exhibit two distinct elements, one relating to content and the other relating to act. Content is related to act as its object, that is, as object it forms a constituent part of the act itself.

This *intra-subjective* distinction precludes us from considering Cartesian ontology in terms of a simple dyadic structure with immaterial substance as one term of the dyad and material substance as the other.

Drawing the distinction between act and object *within* the subject category, and identifying that category with immaterial substance, has significant ontological and epistemological consequences.

Firstly, the only objects the ontology can admit are *subjective* objects, internal to the mind of the knowing subject. We saw that in Descartes' case ideas, understood as objective entities, are just such objects.

Secondly, because ideas as mental acts are modifications of immaterial substance and, as this provides, with consciousness, the only ground of subjectivity, there is no basis within the subject category itself on which to ground externality or otherness. Yet surely, if the external world is to be represented as external, this element must somehow find a place within the conception of the subject itself?

As R C S Walker notes in his discussion of Kantian and Berkeleyian idealism, 'whatever else the concept of objective reality involves, it must *at*

least require that the existence of what is objectively real should not wholly depend on my present perception' (Walker 1978, p.114. Italics mine).

In Descartes' system the objectively real *does* seem to so depend upon present perception because ideas are the only objects perceived. For these reasons, then, it does not meet even this minimum requirement in respect of any conception of the objectively real that one might attempt to derive from it.

Another way of putting this is to say that the only entities Cartesian ontology admits are ideas; everything else has merely participative being by virtue of the objective element present in ideas.

On an epistemological level Descartes' grounding of the subject in the self-awareness of consciousness means that every object is directly apprehended as *known* by a knowing subject. Subject and object are simultaneously founded in the indubitability of self-conscious awareness, and as such bear a necessary relation to each other. Because awareness is treated as a property of ideas there simply cannot be an idea of which the subject is unaware. Equally, there cannot be an awareness which doesn't

have an idea as its object. The subject exists in one mode only: that of cognition.

In the above I have looked at the structure of Descartes' conception of idea as well as its function as the locus of objectivity in his thought. We need to now ask a more specific question, 'What sort of entity is an idea?'

An idea is an awareness of an object internal to the mind of the knower; as such it is an event in time and its object appears exactly in proportion to the duration of the awareness of it. Whether looked at from the point of view of awareness (act) or content (object) it is a discrete, momentary entity.

We have seen Descartes tackle the question of *how* such an entity could ground a reality external to it, but without success. This failure left a *lacunae* in respect of the object category since experience tells us that *not* all objects are subjective and relative to the mind of the knower. Those that are not, however, hold only a *de facto* place in Cartesian ontology.

The ontology of ideas was taken up enthusiastically by Locke, Berkeley and Hume. It is important to note here, however, that although each of these thinkers tried to account for the objectively real on the basis of an essentially

Cartesian conception of idea, this appears as an unchallenged *presupposition* in their thinking.

Because of this I believe we are justified in speaking of this conception of idea as a *paradigm* in the Kuhnian sense of an unprecedented achievement that replaces hitherto dominant concepts in a discipline with new ones that throw up all sorts of new problems for subsequent researchers to resolve (Kuhn 1970, p.10).

Kuhn's discussion centres on conceptual revolutions in the natural sciences but the principle can certainly be extended to other fields of endeavour.

From an historical point of view Descartes' ontology falls well within the ambit of this definition since it shifted the locus of objectivity from the Scholastic notion of the form, which was essentially a concept having external application, to that of the idea, a concept with internal application.

On a conceptual level, it functioned as a paradigm in that it provided the concepts *within which* the practitioners of the craft, in this case philosophy and philosophers, operated.

In the case of Locke, Berkeley and Hume three factors can be cited in support of this view. Firstly, the subject category exhibits, with the notable exception of Hume,[5] the same structure as it does in Cartesian thought; secondly, the locus of objectivity resides in the idea as the object of the mental act, although the nature of the idea as representative changes (more on this later); and thirdly, the ontological status of external reality, already problematic in Descartes, *remains* a problem in the thought of each of these thinkers, despite their various attempts to overcome it. In fact, it would not be overstating the case to say that each of these thinkers can be regarded as having formulated a variation of what is, in effect, a common ontology of ideas. Let us look at each of these elements more closely.

That the locus of objectivity resides in the idea as object of the mental act of awareness is clearly seen in the following passages:

> Every man being conscious to himself, That he thinks, and that which his mind is employ'd about whilst thinking, being the *Ideas …* (Locke 1982, p.104).

> It is evident to any one who takes a survey of the *objects of human knowledge*, that they are either *(a) ideas* actually imprinted on the senses; or else *(b) ideas* perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or lastly *(c) ideas* formed by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways (Berkeley 1901, p.257).

[5] Hume abandoned the Cartesian notion of 'thinking substance' and replaced the subject-act-object triad with the simple duality of act-object. His reasoning in this respect is similar to Sartre's: namely, that reflection reveals the 'I' only as an *object* of thought but not as a subject. See J-P Sartre, *La Transcendance de L'Ego,* 1996, pp.31-33.

> All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness (Hume 2003, p.9).
>
> Having by these divisions [i.e. impressions and ideas] given an order and arrangement to our *objects,* we may now apply ourselves to consider with the more accuracy their qualities and relations (Hume 2003, p.10. Italics mine).

In Berkeley and Locke we find the same dyadic structure in respect of the subject category with the idea functioning as the object term, and the subject term, consciousness or mind, functioning exactly as it does in Descartes, that is, as the substantial ground of the act/object relation. As in Descartes, we are dealing with a bifurcated subject category.

Hume's introduction of the impression/idea distinction indicates an expansion of the object category by introducing another subjective object, the impression, which can, I think, be regarded as the precursor of the sense-datum, but I will discuss this more fully in the next chapter.

Locke introduces a similar expansion in respect of the object with his distinction *within* the category of ideas between primary and secondary qualities. We can also see clearly in these passages that the locus of objectivity lies in the idea; that is, only ideas are known and as such only ideas constitute the real.

The effect of this on the ontological status of reality conceived as *external* was to make the latter seem simply incomprehensible, as can be seen in the following passages from Berkeley and Hume. In discussing the question of existence and external reality, Berkeley and Hume come to the following, similar conclusions:

> We may observe, that 'tis universally allow'd by philosophers, and is besides pretty obvious of itself, that nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion. To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see; *all this is nothing but to perceive* (Hume 2003, p.44).

> Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd (Hume 2003, p.44. Italics mine).

> And to me it is no less evident that the various sensations, or ideas imprinted on the Sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose) cannot exist otherwise than in the mind perceiving them. I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this by any one that shall attend to what is meant by the term *exist* when applied to sensible things. The table that I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed – meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelt; there was a sound, that is, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. For as to what is said of the *absolute* existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that is to me perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*; nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them ((Berkeley 1901, pp.258-259).

In these passages the reduction of the external world to ideas is complete. And, as in Descartes, the term 'idea' is cast very wide, extending to acts of volition as well as sensation and perception.

It is because of this extreme reductionism that Berkeley can say that to believe of an external object that it can exist unperceived is a contradiction. For if an external object is an idea, and if an idea cannot exist unperceived (because, as we saw earlier, it is a property of an idea that it be perceived), then it is indeed a contradiction to say that an external object can exist unperceived for this amounts to saying that an idea can exist unperceived, which is a contradiction in terms of the accepted definition of idea. Berkeley's thought throughout the *Principles* is completely consistent with this argument.

A consequence of this reduction of the external to ideas on the part of both these thinkers was the attempt to describe objects as complex agglomerations of ideas. No one took this further than Hume for whom all objects consisted of ideas related in various ways by similarity, contiguity and causation:

> The qualities, from which this association [of ideas] arises, and by which the mind is after this manner convey'd from one idea to another, are three, *viz.* RESEMBLANCE, CONTIGUITY in time or place, and CAUSE and EFFECT (Hume 2003, p.17).

> 'Tis likewise evident, that as the senses, in changing their objects, are necessitated to change them regularly, and take them as they lie *contiguous* to each other, the imagination must by long custom acquire the same method of thinking, and run along the parts of space and time in conceiving its objects (Hume 2003, p.17).

And on cause and effect:

> 'Tis sufficient to observe, that there is no relation, which produces a stronger connexion in the fancy, and makes one idea more readily recall another, than the relation of cause and effect betwixt their objects (Hume 2003, p.17).

The reduction of external reality to ideas, however, only exacerbates the ontological problem by asking us to believe the implausible, namely, that what *appears* to the mind as external is *in fact* on the same footing ontologically as ideas and impressions.

As Sartre remarks, external objects have an opacity quite unlike that of the mind or consciousness and, indeed, it is just because of this quality that they ultimately resist the type of reductionism referred to above (Sartre 1948, pp.17-18).

Once the model of the mind as a finite domain, of which ideas are properties, is accepted it is but a small step to the assimilation of *all* being to that of ideas *unless* a grounding principle such as God is introduced (as with Descartes and Berkeley) *or* some sort of representational theory is brought to bear, as with Locke. Where both of these are absent, as is the case with Hume, such an assimilation is made all the more easy as a result.

Thus far I have traced the ontology of the subject category from its origins in Descartes through to Locke, Berkeley and Hume. We have seen that, with the exception of Hume, who abandoned the notion of thinking substance, the category in Locke and Berkeley is essentially Cartesian in structure. And, in all four thinkers the idea, as a subjective object, functions as the locus of objectivity in their thought.

Although it functions as the locus of objectivity in all four thinkers, however, its representative role is not the same in Berkeley, Locke and Hume as it is in Descartes.

In Descartes, as we saw earlier in this discussion, the principal function of the idea as content is to represent reality by conveying degrees of objectivity relative to an entity's place in a hierarchy of being rather than by any similarity in representational content between idea and object. And the objectivity of ideas themselves, as we also saw, is governed by indubitability.

In Berkeley, Locke and Hume, however, the element of *content* in respect of ideas comes to the forefront of philosophical thinking. I will not go into the theory of objects which results from this until the next chapter. My main concern at this point is to show that, as the primacy of the subject

category became entrenched in philosophical thinking through the acceptance of ideas as the locus of objectivity, so the problem of the external world, a problem which had its genesis in Descartes, was greatly exacerbated. This can be seen clearly in the thought of Locke, Berkeley and Hume.

The extent to which this ontology of the subject had itself became, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a *presupposition* of philosophical thought can be seen in two thinkers who are not normally associated with the Cartesian and Empiricist traditions, namely, Gottlob Frege and G E Moore.

Remnants of the substance/modification model of mind surface clearly in Frege's discussion of thought and the 'ideas' thesis and come under attack as part of Moore's general onslaught against idealism.

Frege is more usually recognized for his contributions to philosophical logic than for anything specifically related to ontology. However, in an article entitled "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry" (1967), Frege gives himself over to largely ontological considerations.

In this article his discussion of the concept of a thought arises out of a prior discussion of truth and concerns thought both as a mental process and as the object of such a process (that is, the thought as a proposition).

Rejecting the notion of truth as being any sort of correspondence between an idea and its object, Frege turns to a discussion of thought as 'something for which the question of truth arises. So I ascribe what is false to a thought just as much as what is true' (Frege 1967, p.20).

As such truth and falsity are qualities of thought which is itself immaterial. Yet Frege is obviously dissatisfied with the explanatory force of this since he sums up this initial enquiry into the nature of truth and thought thus:

> May we not be dealing here with something which cannot, in the ordinary sense, be called a quality at all? In spite of this doubt I want first to express myself in accordance with ordinary usage, *as if truth were a quality*, until something more to the point is found (Frege 1967,p.21. Italics mine.)

But if truth is a quality, what sort of a quality is it? Clearly not a secondary quality since it is not based on any material, perceptible property as Frege himself notes (Frege 1967, p.20).

Further on in this article Frege devotes several pages to a discussion of what he calls the 'ideas' thesis or the thesis that the only objects of awareness are ideas. During the course of this discussion he raises the question of whether thoughts and ideas are the same; his final conclusion is

that they are not and that thoughts belong to a different ontological realm to ideas.

This conclusion is crucial for two reasons: in the first instance it is a radical departure from the Cartesian/Empiricist model that we have been considering, whereby 'thought' and 'idea' are synonymous, including as they do perceptual and volitional states and, secondly, it is critical to Frege's ontology. For, were Frege to maintain that thoughts are a sub-class of ideas, as we have seen them to be in the ontology of Descartes and the Empiricists, there would be no way for him to avoid the solipsism that he correctly perceives to be inherent in the 'ideas' thesis. Let us look at Frege's arguments more closely.

Ideas for Frege are 'contents' or elements of consciousness. As such they are ascribable only to the person whose mind or consciousness they are the contents of and who, strictly speaking, is the only one who can have access to them.

As mind-dependent, temporal entities they are to be contrasted with the person who is their bearer and of whom they are predicated as belonging to any one of the different psychological and sensual modes represented by

perception, imagination, feeling, sensations and moods (Frege 1967, pp.26-27).

Frege realizes that there are weaknesses in this ontology of consciousness. In particular he realizes the solipsistic tendencies inherent in it. On one occasion he raises the question of the possibility that:

> The entire content of my consciousness might be at the same time the content of a more embracing, perhaps, divine consciousness (Frege 1967, p.27).

and on another he raises the possibility that perhaps everything is a dream:

> But I think I hear an unusual objection. I have assumed several times that the same thing that I see can also be observed by other people. But how could this be the case, if everything were only a dream? If I only dreamed I was walking in the company of another person, if I only dreamed that my companion saw the green field as I did, if it were all only a play performed on the stage of my consciousness, it would be doubtful whether there were things of the outer world at all. Perhaps the realm of things is empty and I see no things and no men, but have only ideas of which I myself am the bearer (Frege 1967, p.30).

In the case of the divine consciousness objection, Frege concludes that it oversteps the limits of human understanding to such an extent as to not even be worth considering as a possibility (Frege 1967, p.27).

The reference to the dream metaphor introduces a lengthy discussion in which the 'ideas' thesis is subjected to a sustained examination in respect of the arguments to solipsism that can be drawn from it.

If the thesis were true, Frege argues, then not only would our knowledge of the external world (both sensory and scientific) and of other people be undermined, even self-knowledge would be an illusion.

If the self is dissolved into contents or elements of consciousness the 'I' cannot be conceived as a continuant (which is the function of the bearer of experiences in Frege's universe) but must be considered fleeting and temporal like all other ideas.

Each new first-person awareness would give rise to a new 'I'. [6] In addition, all awareness would be *intra*-mental, consisting of relationships between ideas as mental elements and nothing else. This would give rise to a regress:

> 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* (Frege 1967, p.33. Italics mine).

The self on this conception would be nothing over and above ideas. But, Frege claims, while '*I have an idea of myself I am not identical with this idea'* (Frege 1967, p.33).

[6] Sartre makes the same point when criticising the 'contents' theory of consciousness. See J-P Sartre, *La Transcendance de l'Ego*, 1996, p.52.

In other words, bearer and idea are *two*, not one, and the relation between them is not an internal relation of part to whole but is rather an *extrinsic* relation involving two different entities. This seems to be the sense of the statement:

> 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* (Frege 1967, p.33).

If the bearer of ideas is not itself an idea and can, as subject term of the awareness relation, take something else as the object term there is no need, logically, for the latter term to be restricted only to ideas.

Frege, accordingly, draws a sharp distinction between ideas on the one hand and objects of thought on the other:[7]

> What is a content of my consciousness, my idea, should be sharply distinguished from what is an object of my thought (Frege 1967, p.33).

This distinction, Frege believes, overcomes the solipsism inherent in the 'ideas' thesis and restores the external world to us. Thus, immediately subsequent to the above statement, he draws the following dramatic conclusion:

> Therefore the thesis that only what belongs to the content of my consciousness can be the object of my awareness, of my thought, is false. *Now the way is clear for me to recognize another person as well as to be an independent bearer of ideas.* I have an idea of him but I do not confuse

[7] Ideas can, however, also be objects of thought. See p.34 where Frege says '…*that not only a thing but also an idea can be the common object of thought of people who do not have the idea.*'

> it with him himself. And if I state something about my brother I do not state it about the *idea* that I have of my brother (Frege 1967, p.33.).

The interesting thing about Frege's analysis up to this point is that it contains elements of the two competing models of mind to which I referred in the introduction: the notion of ideas as content comes from the traditional model deriving from Cartesianism whereas the notion of thought as a mental process that can take both mental and non-mental entities as its objects bears striking similarities to the intentional or relational model of mind reintroduced into modern philosophy by Brentano. Brentano's claim, however, was that consciousness itself is intentional. Frege's claim is far more modest; he restricts the relational aspect to the thought process alone; nowhere does he claim that consciousness *itself* is relational.

For Frege thoughts (understood as propositions and hence objects) and ideas are alike in that both presuppose a bearer but they are unalike in that whereas an idea is restricted to an individual consciousness or mind a thought is not (Frege 1967, p.35). And, that he regards thinking as relational is clear from the following:

> But by apprehending a thought I come into a relation to it and it to me (Frege 1967, p.37).

Why has Frege not generalized this claim about thought to consciousness as a whole? Why not simply say that consciousness is a relation involving a subject (in Fregean terms a bearer) and an object (which need not be a mental entity)?

I believe that Frege was unable to make this move because the Cartesian/Empiricist belief that ideas as content constitute real elements of consciousness, and the metaphor of the mind as an internal, private space that went with it, was so strongly present as a *presupposition* in his thought that he never questioned it. He directed his attention to the consequences of it (that is, to solipsism) but not to the concept itself.

Directly addressing the concept itself would involve seeing that any conception of mind which views awareness or consciousness as an *intra-mental* relation between parts of a whole is *in essence* solipsistic. The only way to avoid it is to replace it with something else.

Frege comes closest to challenging the concept when he draws the distinction between ideas and thoughts, maintaining that the latter should be considered differently from an ontological standpoint. By adhering to the ontology of ideas Frege *maintains* solipsism in relation to ideas, rejecting it

only in relation to thoughts. This is not the only area where Cartesian/Empiricist elements influence his thinking, however.

Frege believes that he can establish his object category by virtue of the relation between thought and its object (where that object is non-mental) and we have seen that he draws the realist conclusion immediately upon making that distinction. Here again, however, there are tensions in his thought brought about by the competing elements referred to above.

On the one hand he characterizes the external world as a negation of, and in opposition to, the subjective, where the latter conforms to the metaphor of mind cited above.

On the other hand he attempts to characterize it by reference to the intrinsic properties of objects themselves. Thus we find the external world referred to as an 'outer realm' of things opposed to the 'inner realm' of consciousness; whilst there is certainty in respect of the inner world doubt 'never altogether leaves us in our excursions into the outer world' (Frege 1967, p.34).

And, although Frege rejects any notion of correspondence between ideas and reality as a possible basis for developing a theory of truth

he is forced at times to use just such language to express himself (Frege 1967, pp.18-19, p.34).

The duality of inner and outer, the certainty of the former and the uncertainty of the latter, together with the problem of the correspondence between them, are all themes associated with traditional Cartesian/Empiricist ontology.

The reference to the intrinsic properties of objects, on the other hand, should be seen as an attempt to establish an object-based ontology. It is clear in the following passages:

> In judging something not to be my idea I would make it the object of my thinking and, therefore, my idea. On this view, is there a green field? Perhaps, but it would not be visible to me. For if a field is not my idea, it cannot, according to our thesis, be an object of my awareness. But if it is my idea it is invisible, for ideas are not visible. I can indeed have the idea of a green field, but this is not green for there are no green ideas. Does a shell weighing a hundred kilogrammes exist, according to this view? Perhaps, but I could know nothing of it. If a shell is not my idea, then according to our thesis, it cannot be an object of my awareness, of my thinking. But if a shell were my idea, it would have no weight (Frege 1967, p.30).

And again:

> An idea, being something which can as little exist independently of me as my feeling of fatigue, cannot be a man, cannot look at the same field together with me, cannot see the strawberry I am holding (Frege 1967, p.30).

On this reasoning ideas are *one kind of object* (the non-substantial or 'mental' kind) and green fields, shells and men another (the substantial or 'non-mental' kind). They are simply differentiated by their properties.

I earlier drew attention to Frege's distinction between ideas and objects of thought in connection with his claim regarding the external world. It is this distinction between the two that underlies his further claim that thoughts are not subject-relative in the way that ideas are.

Further ontological differentiation of thoughts poses a considerable problem for Frege, however, due to the constraints outlined above in relation to the Cartesian/Empiricist elements in his thinking.

We have already seen that the subject-relative nature of ideas precludes him from admitting thoughts as a sub-class of ideas, yet he cannot allow them the same ontological status as external objects because they are not given through sense perception (Frege 1967, p.35).

He is thus forced to allocate them a realm of their own, the so-called 'third realm':

> A third realm must be recognized. *What belongs to this corresponds with ideas, in that it cannot be perceived by the senses, but with things, in that it needs no bearer to the contents of whose consciousness to belong.* Thus the thought, for example, which we expressed in the Pythagorean theorem is timelessly true, true independently of whether anyone takes it to be true. It needs no bearer. It is not true for the first time when it is

> discovered, but is like a planet which, already before anyone has seen it, has been in interaction with other planets (Frege 1967, p.29).

Although this is blatant Platonism I believe that this ontological position was forced on Frege far more by the constraints imposed by the Cartesian/Empiricist elements in his thought than by any desire to espouse a particular version of the theory of forms. Frege himself says that there would be no value in 'the eternally unchangeable which could neither undergo effects nor have effect on us' (Frege 1967, p.37).

And there is certainly evidence that he conceives thoughts as causes, as the following passage makes clear:

> How does a thought act? By being apprehended and taken to be true. This is a process in the inner world of a thinker which can have *further consequences in this inner world* and which, encroaching on the sphere of the will, can also make itself noticeable in the outer world (Frege 1967, p.38. Italics mine).

But what of the process of apprehending a thought? If apprehension is a relation, what sort of relation is it? Unfortunately, we have very little to go on here.

That Frege considers there to be another element involved, over and above ideas, in our apprehension of the world is clear from his claim that visual sensations (which are a sub-class of ideas) are necessary but not sufficient for perception to occur (Frege 1967, p.36).

We need what he calls a 'non-sensible something' as well. This non-sensible element is not only necessary if we are to relate to external reality, it is also implicated in our awareness of the non-sensibly perceptive, that is, the realm of thought and truth. This element is on the side of the subject:

> So that in which the distinction between the way in which a thing and a thought is given mainly consists in something which is attributable, not to both realms, but to the inner world (Frege 1967, p.36).

I believe that by drawing a distinction between ideas and thoughts, and taking the latter out from under the Cartesian/Empiricist ontological umbrella, so to speak, Frege made an important departure from traditional ontology even though he clearly remained committed to the view that there are such things as ideas, that they are contents, or elements, of consciousness and that as such they constitute the 'inner' world of each one of us.

At the same time he realized the unsatisfactory implications of this in the form of the 'external reality' problem, a problem he tried to solve by developing the object, as opposed to the subject, category of being.

Another philosopher who shared the same concerns as Frege in this regard, and who tried to solve them from the side of the subject, was G E Moore.

In his famous paper on Idealism Moore sets out to refute the proposition '*esse est percipi'* on the grounds that, by maintaining that subject and object are necessarily connected, it precludes consideration of them as separate entities:

> The Idealist maintains that object and subject are necessarily connected, mainly because he fails to see that they are *distinct,* that they are *two,* at all (Moore 1922, p.5. Italics mine).

This inability to see subject and object as two distinct entities is not a failing on the part of the Idealist, however.

As we have already seen in Descartes it arises out of the very structure of the ontology itself whereby ideas are mental objects of which awareness is a property. Subject and object *are* necessarily connected because they are parts of the one, unextended, thinking substance.

Moore's solution here is to analyse sensation into two distinct components: consciousness and object. Sensations are differentiated by their respective objects whilst the element of consciousness is what they have in common as sensations:

> We have then in every sensation two distinct elements, one which I call consciousness, and another which I call the object of consciousness. This must be so if the sensation of blue and the sensation of green, though different in one respect, are alike in another, and consciousness, which both sensations have in common, is different from either (Moore 1922, p.17).

According to Moore this solves the objectivity problem by distinguishing between *what* is experienced, that is, the *object of* experience, and the *experience of* it, in this case the sensation. To quote Moore again:

> For we can and must conceive the existence of blue as something quite distinct from the existence of the sensation. We can and must conceive that blue *might* exist and yet the *sensation of blue not exist.* For my own part I not only conceive this, but conceive it to be true (Moore 1922, pp.18-19. Italics mine).

If we accept Moore's interpretation of *esse est percipi* as 'whatever *is,* is experienced' whereby the relation between subject and object is construed as a necessary relation in virtue of the fact that it is a property of the object that it *be experienced*, then we can see that the outcome of this analysis of sensation is to make the relation between consciousness and its object *contingent* by removing such a requirement.

The only requirement imposed on the object is that it be an object of *some sort.* It can, but does not have to, stand in an awareness relationship to a subject. As it is everyday material objects such as chairs, tables, cups and saucers and so forth that Moore wants to account for in his ontology this certainly seems to work since our everyday experience of these objects suggests that our relationship to them is of just such a contingent nature. We

are sometimes aware of them and sometimes not and, when we are not, we do not suppose that they are not there simply by virtue of our non-presence.

This does not mean that there won't be objects which *do* possess, as a necessary feature, the property of being experienced or being part of a mind. Indeed, ideas seem to possess just such a property, as do pleasures and pains. It simply means that not *all* objects possess this property.

Frege and Moore are taking a similar approach here, arguing that unless we admit objects other than ideas into our ontology we will be committed to the solipsism entailed by the ontology of ideas. Like Frege, however, Moore doesn't succeed in rising above the concepts of which he is critical, as his later commitment to sense-data shows.

It would be useful at this point to draw together the various themes of this chapter.

Its principal aim was to delineate the ontology of the subject and object categories in Descartes and to show the extent to which the ideas ontology influenced the works of the British philosophers, Locke, Berkeley and Hume.

Frege and Moore were then brought in to illustrate the presence of important aspects of this ontology in the writings of two philosophers who are normally considered to belong to very different philosophical traditions.

A second aim of this chapter was to show *why* this ontology was so strongly entrenched in the post-Cartesian period.

We saw that a large part of the answer to this question lay in the ready acceptance of the notion of the idea as the indubitable given of consciousness which, as such, served to both ground and demarcate the category of subject.

While this is perhaps the most fundamental element shared by these philosophical traditions, it is not, however, the only feature that they have in common. In fact we can say that a *theory of ideas* common to both can be derived from them. This theory is constituted by the following claims:

1. Ideas inhere as properties in the mind conceived as immaterial substance (but, as already noted, Hume is the exception here);
2. Ideas so conceived stand in a *necessary* relation to the mind;
3. All the mind is aware of is its own ideas;
4. Ideas have temporal continuity in that they exist only in so far as they are entertained by the mind whose ideas they are;
5. Ideas are *subjective* in so far as they are acts of awareness of the mind whose ideas they are, but *objective* in so far as they serve as the content of mental acts. Such content serves as either the termini of *all* conscious acts (Berkeley and Hume) or as

intermediate between such acts and the external world (Descartes and Locke);

6. The existence of ideas is *logically and actually prior* to the existence of things. This follows from the acquaintance principle, namely, that ideas are directly and immediately known; things, on the other hand, are only indirectly known;

7. Claims 2, 3 and 5 result in a subject-object distinction being introduced into the subject category, whilst claims 3 and 6 entail a conception of ideas as subjective entities.

The price of this ontology, however, was the so-called 'problem of the external world' or the status of objects other than the mental. We have seen that this arose initially in Descartes because of the impossibility of applying the certainty principle beyond the realm of the mental. Not being able to ground the reality of the external world with the same certitude as that of ideas, Descartes turned to God as guarantor of its veracity.

In the writings of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, however, the problem is exacerbated by the reduction of being to ideas. By the time we get to Frege and Moore the problem is seen as acute and we see both these philosophers attempting to overcome the limitations of the conceptual paradigm from which it initially arose. It is to a discussion of those concepts that I will turn in the next chapter.