CONTENTS:

I. Proto-philosophy of Perception: Crucial Data, Desiderata, and Problems

II. A Philosophical Theory of Perception and Belief (Informal Presentation)

This is an ontological, not an epistemological, study of perception. Here, as always, philosophy is a search for the most general patterns of experience and the world. Thus, no philosophical theory of perception can be fully illuminating unless it is embedded in a comprehensive theory that deals at once with the structure of physical objects, the nature of consciousness, and the contents of belief. Philosophical theories, like scientific ones, must, of course, be simple; but, as always, simplicity is secondary to adequacy to comprehensive and complex data.

Here I develop a comprehensive theory of perception, consciousness, and physical objects based on a large collection of data; yet it is simple enough. It is versatile and fruitful, providing ready-made solutions to other problems, as I will sometimes indicate. Nevertheless I urge that
alternative theories based on at least the same rich data, including the additional data gathered by the fruitful extensions of our theory, be developed. Some such alternatives may be simpler than ours; but until such equally comprehensive alternatives are formulated any remark about the excessive complexity of our theory is premature.

Part I discusses some crucial data for any philosophical theory of perception. Part II enriches the data and formulates informally our comprehensive theory of perception. Part III, not included here, will contain a precise formulation of that theory.

A general idea of the theory can be gleaned from Part II Section 1 and from an examination of the section headings in the Contents above.

NOTE. For convenience we shall for the most part discuss visual perception. I claim, however, that our discussion applies (mutatis mutandis) to hearing and touch. (See also footnote 1.)

1. PROTO-PHILOSOPHY OF PERCEPTION: CRUCIAL DATA, DESIDERATA, PROBLEMS


1. Unity of consciousness vs. physical objectivity. Perhaps the single most important datum about vision is the tension between: (a) the impressive and obvious unitary character of all visual experiences, whether veridical or not, and (b) the obvious fact that the function of vision is to reveal physical reality, yet some visual experiences are illusory, even hallucinatory, and on examination veridical perception turns out to be impregnated with illusion. This tension between unity and reality lies at the heart of the dispute between phenomenalists and perceptual realists. The former build on (a) an account of (b); the latter seize (b) and deny (a). Here we shall cut across that dispute.

Consciousness is, in the happy term of G. E. Moore's, diaphonous; that is, as others have emphasized, consciousness is nothing except the revelation of this or that: its being is just its intentionality or its being toward something else. Thus, the unity of all visual experiences can only consist of the unitary character of the family of aspects or qualities