CHAPTER II
ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL OBJECTS
Prof. G.E. Moore defines a "material object as something that occupies space, is not sense datum of any kind, and is not a mind or an act of consciousness."¹

Alan R. White says that Moore treats general questions, such as "Are there any material, or physical objects?"; "Can we ever know that they are there?", "Do we really see material objects?", as questions about specific judgements of perception. He calls these judgements "perceptual statements" and gives as examples such as "I see a book", "I hear a clock", "I feel a shirt". Moore takes the phrase "material object" to be a general term to cover an undefined set which includes books, clocks, shirts, hands, etc. He believes that philosophers, e.g. Berkeley and Kant, used the phrase "material object" in such a way that one could consistently deny that there were any material objects, whereas at the very same time affirming that there were indeed, such things as books, clocks and shirts. Moore, however, insists, that some philosophers² who inquired about or doubted the existence of material objects inquired about or doubted the existence


of books, clocks and shirts. In a discussion Moore says that

"some philosophers have used 'material thing' in such a sense that from "There are no material things" there does follow "There are no human hands"...".3

These philosophers, such as Kant and Berkeley would be refuted if Moore establishes the truth and our knowledge of the truth of perceptual statements (I see a book, etc.). For, if books and hands are members of the set of material objects, then from the statement, "Here is a hand" it follows analytically, "Here is a material object".

In 1910 lectures, Moore defines 'material things' as "that it is not identical with any sense data". This definition can be compared with that which is given by him in "Lectures on Philosophy", which he states and intends to define the notion of "material object" by means of three properties, one of which is a positive property and the other two are negative ones. The positive property is that "Nothing can be a material object except what has a position in space?"4 Usually "no sense datum, or part of a sense datum, or collection of sense data, can possibly-

4 G.E. Moore, Some Main Problems of Philosophy, p. 128.
be a material object".\(^5\) This part of the definition of material object gives rise to the question — What does Moore mean by "sense data"? This question will be examined in detail in Chapter IV. For many years, Moore held the view that sense data were in fact, identical with the surfaces of material objects. The third property in terms of which Moore defines a 'material object', is that "no mind, no act of consciousness can be a material object."\(^6\)

Thus Moore finds it necessary to define what he means by the notion of a 'material object' in *Lectures on Philosophy* to clarify his concept of "Nature". There are two senses of the term "Nature", a wider sense which includes minds or mental events, and a narrower sense which excludes the mental events. It is in this latter sense of "Nature" that Moore is interested in calling it a 'material object'. The definition in this sense of 'Nature' depends upon the definition of the Material Universe, as Nature in this sense is identical with the material universe. The material universe is made up of at least two different types of entities, physical things and physical events. Examples of physical things are the sun, the earth, the planets, the stars, etc. The physical events are, e.g.

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 130.

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 131.
earthquakes and the eruption of a volcano. Therefore the material universe is the sum of all physical things, together with all physical events which occurred in the past and can occur in the present and in the future. For there can exist material things which have not yet possessed any real relation with this material universe. Thus, for Moore the material universe constitutes a unity by virtue of two features namely "all the things within it are of a certain sort" and "there's a certain real relation which holds between any 2 of them", so then the material universe cannot be defined as the sum of all material things and physical events. But it must be defined as the sum of all those material things and physical events which have a certain relation to one another. If Nature is to be identical with this material universe (that is, of our everyday experience) then, it cannot be identical with the whole universe. In order to avoid the paradox as created by defining material universe in terms of material objects, Moore gives another definition of the material universe that it is something more than the sum total of material things. By adding the second condition to the definition of material universe Moore sets himself free from the

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criticism, for now the material universe does not necessarily involve all perceptible material things. It is logically possible that there can be material things which do not belong to this material universe. He means by a material thing.

"... a thing which is material in the sense in which my body most certainly is so; there is such a sense, what it is we shall be engaged in trying to define: but it certainly includes 2 things (a) having shape and size in 3 dimensions, in the sense in which my body has — a sense with wh. we are all familiar, though the analysis of it is difficult & (b) continuing to exist for a certain time, in the sense in which my body has done so."

So this would mean that nature is a particular material thing together with all those other material things which are related to it in both these two respects: (1) they are similar to the initial material thing in the sense of having shape and size in three dimensions and (2) they continue to exist for a certain time. Moreover, the additional material things are related to the initial material things in this respect that they either have been existing or will be existing or both, together at every moment of their existence, in the same space in which it is, it was or will be. For A to be in the same space with B means that either A is a part of B, or that A is in contact with B, or that A is at some distance from B. This definition

\[\text{\textsuperscript{8}Ibid., pp. 5-6.}\]
assumes that, for A to be in the same space with B implies that A and B must exist at the same time. But Moore does not analyse what he means by "same time". Here it seems that he wants to say, that it is not sufficient to define nature by referring to all the existing things that have the property of being material objects, because there may be things which are yet not related to the material universe in the same sense of being in the same space with the existing material objects.

Moore does understand the problems or difficulties which arise from his analysis of nature. There have been material things which have ceased to exist and yet which do belong to nature and there would be material things which do not yet exist but which will exist and will belong to nature. The difficulty is that neither of these things, which once did exist and no longer do exist and the things which do not yet exist but will exist have a similar relation expressed by saying that they are in the same space with nature now. Moore introduces the term "relation R" to express this relation. For this reason, he says that his analysis of nature is a 'part of what we mean by nature'. That A should have a relation R to B is a sufficient condition for saying that A is part of nature, where A and B are material objects. But it is not a necessary condition, because it could be possible that A should have ceased to exist before B came into existence. To make this clear
and sound Moore introduces a new symbol "R". Thus, if A bears the relation R to B and then A ceases to exist but B continues to exist and, thereafter, C comes into existence then it follows that if B has the relation R to C, then A bears relation R* to C. The relation R* is thought to be a relation which can exist between two things which are not existing at a particular time but which include the possibility that these things can exist.

In the second lecture, "Are material things real?", Moore gives another definition of material thing.

I think I can give a very clear definition — a definition much clearer than philosophers generally give, but as you'll see when I give it, it's a queer sort of definition & unsatisfactory in many ways. It's a definition by examples, i.e. all I can tell you is that I use "material thing" in such a sense that if there are any chairs or desks, or blackboards, or planets, or human bodies etc. etc., then there certainly are material things."\(^9\)

This definition was considered to be unsatisfactory by Moore, for it does not consider the question about certain kinds of things, e.g. rainbows, whether they are material objects or not. Second, it is the case that there are several different senses of a material thing. If so, the definition does not state which sense is intended. For example, one sense of material thing might include rainbows and all the things mentioned in the definition, that is,\(^9\)

chairs, desks, blackboards, human bodies. Another sense might be one in which the things given in the definition are material things and rainbows are not. The third definition does not state any condition which would be both necessary and sufficient for a thing to be called a material thing; rather Moore only names a few material things and hopes that features shared by them shall state the class of essential properties of material things to his readers.

In the first definition, Moore made a condition that something should have a "position in space" in order to qualify as a material object. In second definition this requirement has been dropped from the explicit definition. In the context of discussion, however, it becomes clear that material object must be in space. In order that a material object be a part of nature, it is necessary that it must have a special relationship, i.e. the relation R to other material objects. In the third definition, nothing is said about the condition which would be both necessary and sufficient for a thing to be called a material thing. In the earlier definition, Moore explicitly denies that a sense datum or part of a sense datum or a collection of sense data is a material object or a part of material object. The second definition omits all reference to sense data as does the third definition. Finally, the third part of the early definition stated that no mind and no act of consciousness could be a material object. Again all reference to minds and acts of
consciousness is eliminated in definitions two and three. The context in which definition two is given, however, shows that Moore clearly intends to exclude mental entities from the meaning of "material object", for he states clearly that he, is concerned with nature in the narrow sense in which "Nature doesn't include our minds and mental processes...". The two explicit conditions for a material object mentioned in the second definition are new. It is now necessary that something have shape and size in three dimensions. It is also required that it continue to exist for a certain time.

In *The Common Place Book*, Moore refers to the problem of the physical. There, he asks, "But physical does not mean merely not involving consciousness." What does it mean positively? Is it possible that Moore might be using 'physical' in a different sense from the term 'material'. But the example of the term 'physical' which he gives:

"My body is an object of the kind in question; so are its parts — my hand, head etc. so are trees, stones, buildings, coins, leaves, trousers etc. the sun and the moon." He goes on to say that these things all have in common the feature that they are "three-dimensionally extended in a

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certain sense - the sense in which a penny is...."\(^{13}\)

As seen earlier, the discussion of physical things is not possible without the consideration of space. "Physical space" means the space in which physical objects are perceived or remembered to be situated. The common feature of all physical objects is their extension in three dimensions. The extended object can be partially understood in three dimensions, i.e. finite length, breadth and thickness. Moore sometimes refers to objects which are thus three dimensional as "solid bodies". But he is aware of the fact that there is a sense in which the sun, being gaseous throughout is not a solid body.

In The Common Place Book Moore again makes the point clear that for something to be a solid body does not entail that it is or was in physical space. That it is or was in physical space, however, entails that it is or was in the same space in which a solid body, which I am now or as perceiving, is situated. In Lectures on Philosophy, for something to be in the same space with something being perceived means that it is either a part of the thing being perceived or is in contact with it, or at some distance from it. He gives a new analysis of this relationship in The Common Place Book. Moore begins by asking:

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 268.$
"But what is meant by saying (a) that the sun is now in the same space in which my body is? and (b) that Napoleon's body was in the same space in which my body is? or (c) that the sun, ever since it existed, has been in the same space in which it is now." 14

To say that the sun is now in the same space in which my body is, is to say that there are two distances, $d_1$ and $d_2$ such that it can be said truly that the sun is less than $d_1$ and greater than $d_2$ distant from my body. Again, in order to say that Napoleon's body was in the same space in which my body is, either

"... it can be said with truth that any part of Napoleon's body was, at any time, in the same place, in which some part of my body is" — or (2) "... there is any 3rd solid body (e.g. the sun, or the moon, or the Great Pyramid) such that at every time at which Napoleon's body existed there were a pair of distances $d_1$ & $d_2$ such that Napoleon's body could have been said "with" truth to be $>d_1$ & $<d_2$ from that body at that time, & there are a pair of distances $d_1$ & $d_2$ such that it can be said with truth that my body is $>d_1$ and $<d_2$ from that same body." 15

Third, what would it mean to say that Napoleon's body was in the same space in which my body is if neither condition (1) nor (2) is fulfilled.

"That it might have moved in such a way that some part of it was in the same place in which some part of mine is." 16

It is for this reason that he adopted the relation $R$. Finally, what is meant by saying that the sun, ever since it has existed has been in the same place in which it is now? Moore has pointed out that we do not call a body in physical space now the same body unless it was in physical space ever since it had begun to exist. "It must have been in some place which was either the same as that in which it now is."$^{17}$ Something is in the same place at a subsequent time as it was at an earlier time if (1) "it has been at rest during the whole period between the two times, including them..." or (2) "though not at rest but rotating during the period it has undergone no translatory notion..." and (3) "though it has undergone translatory motion it has returned to the same place."$^{18}$ This makes it clear as to how Moore uses the expression "in the same place" but it is not a definition, for the third part assumes that the very phrase to be explicated is already understood. The expression "at rest" is not very clear. This notion is essential but no sense can be made of the idea of "absolute rest". It is true that with regard to sense data we can detect whether they are moving or not.

"But in case of physical objects we seem to have no means of finding out more than that one body has undergone or is undergoing a translatory

$^{17}$Ibid., p. 269.

$^{18}$Ibid., p. 269.
Moore's writings on material or physical objects have offered seventeen sufficient conditions for something to be an object under discussion. The sufficient condition for something to be a member of the class of physical objects is an instance of any one of the following subclasses: One's own body and its parts, trees, stones, trousers, leaves, coins, buildings, chairs, desks, blackboards, the earth, the moon, the planets, the sun, the stars. To the extent that he attempted to list necessary conditions for something to be a material object he proposed (1) the shape and size in three dimensions, where extension in three dimensions means to have a finite length, breadth and thickness, and (2) the existence for a certain time, i.e. (duration, persistence, etc.). Sometimes Moore phrased (1) as "position in space". But the space mentioned is not necessarily the space of our physical nature. He also said that there can be one additional sense of "material object", a sense in which the rainbow can be considered a material object. There are negative conditions also. First, no sense datum or part of a sense datum can be a material object and second, no collection of sense data is a material object. The first entails the abandonment

\[1^{19}\text{Ibid.}, p. 269.\]
of direct realism and the second highlights the Phenomenalism of the Mill-Russell type. Third, no mind or act of consciousness can be a material object. This rules out most, if not all, forms of Idealism as possible views.