

# Modes of the Finite

**Part One: Modes of Being**

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**Section 1**  
**Facts and Truth**



## Chapter 1

### Objective truth?

I suppose you could say that the thesis of this book is that Scholasticism is not dead. True, the revival of Thomism has pretty well played itself out, largely, I think, because either it stayed back in the thirteenth century and ignored the serious problem that philosophy since Descartes has seen but not solved, or it tried various gimmicks with “transcendental Thomism” to get at Thomism from a phenomenological start; but, though these all *asserted* that they were realistic, they suffered from one or another version of the problem that has plagued phenomenology, and as a result convinced no one: neither the phenomenologists nor the dyed-in-the-wool Thomists.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, Joseph Marechal in Volume V of *Le Point de Depart de la Metaphysique* tried to get at the “x” outside experience by noticing that experience is teleological, and tends beyond itself. The problem with this is that he asserts this of *all* experience, and so there is nothing to distinguish imagining (which doesn’t “tend toward” any object) from perceiving (which does). The same goes for Bernard Lonergan’s notion in *Insight* of “being” as opposed to the naive “already-out-there-now-real”; *this* sense of “being” could be the “being” of what is imaginary as well as perceived; and if there is no distinction, who is to say that it’s not *all* imaginary? Again, Emerich Coreth wants to ground realism by the “horizon” of being against which we ask questions. But this also applies to the world of imagination

Contemporary philosophy has finally, I think, got through just about all the permutations and combinations of assertions and denials of the basic misinterpretation of “truth” made by Galileo and Descartes: that “truth” consists in matching the “idea” with the “outside object.” The mistake consisted in thinking that the idea was the *percept* or the sensation<sup>2</sup>. Galileo recognized that the sensation of red was not a *reproduction* of what we would today call that frequency of electromagnetic radiation; but he and Descartes thought that *measurements* were the same mentally as what was measured “outside” us.

Of course, by Hume’s time, this was repudiated, even though science held onto the dogma that measurement got at “the truth” and nothing else did. Unfortunately, with the advent of quantum mechanics and relativity theory, we find that measurement is not necessarily measurement *of* something “real,” and that there can be various equally valid (and incompatible) measurements of the same thing.

Einstein showed, for example, even in the Special Theory of Relativity, that each of a pair of observers in motion with respect to each other would perceive *the other* clock as going too slow (not one too slow and the other too fast); and that two events could be either

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just as much as the real world. So all of these people are really idealists, however much they might say they are realists. After all, Hegel thought that he was a “realist” in the only sense “realism” had any meaning. He was wrong, as I hope to show. The point here is that until one has a mechanism by which it makes sense to say (a) that there is a difference between imagining and perceiving, and (b) that the difference is impossible unless perceiving “talks about” some “already-out-there-now-real” and imagining doesn’t, one is stuck inside the mind, and truth will only be internal consistency.

<sup>2</sup>I will try to show later why this was a mistake, and what it missed.

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simultaneous, the first before the second, or the second before the first, depending on where you observed them from—and there was no way to say any observation point was the “right” one.

As to quantum mechanics, the idea there is that the very act of measuring interferes with what is being measured, and alters the measurement in significant ways (so that, e.g. an object is in two places at once, but in only one of the two places, depending on how you want to measure it; and in principle, your decision to measure it can take place after the event). A recent popularization of quantum mechanics, called *In Search of Schroedinger's Cat*, has an early chapter heading “Nothing is Real.”

“Matching” theories of truth, then, seemed hopeless, and now even physics has caught up with the philosophy of two centuries ago (and, of course, because science now says it, we had better listen). Since Hume, and especially since Kant, the quest for truth has basically been one or another version of internal consistency; but though these different theories themselves *seemed* internally consistent at first, they didn't for one reason or another fit the way we think of truth; and they all, even to the present day, do a very poor job of applying to themselves.

That is, why should I accept an “internal consistency” theory of truth as the *right* one, if I can make up another one that's just as internally consistent?<sup>3</sup> That is, if someone is going to try to convince

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<sup>3</sup>In this connection, I recall a talk given in the mid 80s by Henry Veatch, who was chiding Alvin Plantinga for something like this. Veatch claimed that Plantinga had shown that you could construct just as consistent a world-view on the assumption that there is a God as you could on the assumption that there isn't one (which is the assumption that most “internal-consistency” theorists use). But as Veatch commented, all this amounted to is that there's *no* reason for choosing *either* of the theories over the other. Plantinga hadn't “proved” there was a God; he'd just showed that to say there is a God is just as objectively irrelevant as to say that there isn't one.

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me that truth *does not in fact* consist of a matching of what's in my mind with what's out there, but is *in fact* nothing but internal consistency, how can he do it merely by being internally consistent?<sup>4</sup>

The upshot is that no one knows where he is any more. Truth has become a "value," and can yield to other values which happen to be more pressing. And since values seem to be subjective (they are, though morals aren't), then truth is of course subjective too.

But then is it the *truth* that truth is subjective? Or do we just think it is?

—By the way, I do not intend here to give a technical definition of "truth," because it presupposes too much. Suffice it that here "truth" has its ordinary meaning: the fact that what I *think* is the case *is in fact* the case. It is my *knowledge or opinion* that is true, not the facts "out there" (they just are what they are). In the ordinary sense, then, my knowledge is true when it "matches" the fact it is supposed to know.

Similarly, it turns out that "fact" is not the simplest of all terms. It's not the same as a "thing"; but what it in fact *is* is something we will have to investigate in detail much later. For now, what a "fact"

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<sup>4</sup>The same goes for texts. I once attended a meeting in which a person defended Kurt Gadamer's position that there is no way to assert that any one interpretation of a text (as long as it's internally consistent) is "more correct" than any other. When he got through, a member of the audience objected, "I was a student of Gadamer, and he vehemently denied that your view was what he meant." Then obviously *his* text had a "preferred" interpretation. This also applies to Jacques Derrida's thesis that any text doesn't express meaning or truth, but is simply a way to gain "hegemony" or power over others. Either Derrida is "telling it like it is," in which case there is at least one text that expresses "the truth" (and if one, why not others?), or it is simply a way for Derrida to gain prestige or power, and doesn't mean what it says, in which case why listen to it? In either case, Derrida's thesis has to be false.

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is taken to be is “something to be known ‘out there.’”

If one’s theory of truth is that it’s *not* the matching of what you think the fact is with what the fact in question really *is*, then the burden of proof is on the theorist who holds this, since presumably *his own theory* of “truth” should agree with what truth actually is (i.e. what it is for everybody, not just himself), or why would he bother to formulate it?

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## Chapter 2

### Where we are

We are so mixed up that we think truth has to be “democratic,” somehow. Nobody really knows what “the facts” are, not even the scientists (because even they say they don’t), and so “everybody has a right to his own opinion.”

This apparently innocuous statement is the pus of the intellectual infection that is killing our age. It needs addressing right at the outset, because it is not only the symptom of a disease, but of a disease like an addiction, a disease that resists calling itself a disease, which thinks of itself as health, and which for that reason is proof against any attempt to cure it or even diagnose it.

The first thing to note about “everyone has a right to his own opinion” is that as a rights claim, it is completely meaningless. To claim a right to something makes no sense unless it is in principle possible to violate it. But how could I prevent you from having an opinion? I can give you evidence, but if you refuse to accept it because you want to hold your opinion, I can’t stop you. I can’t even know you’ve kept your opinion unless you tell me. I can torture you and make you *say* you’ve given up your opinion, but that doesn’t take it away from you.

True, I may be able to prevent you from *expressing* your opinion, but not from *having* it. But the “right” that is claimed here is *not* merely the right to *express* opinions; it is deeper simply than “free speech.” What people want seems to be to be allowed to *hold* any

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opinion they please *and have that opinion "respected"*; they become very angry when a person presumes to say, "You're wrong." It's okay to say "I disagree with you; I hold the exact opposite to be true"; what is a "violation of the right" is to say, "The *fact is* that the opposite of what you hold is true; what you think is simply wrong."

Now if a person doesn't just look at you smugly and say, "That's *your* opinion, of course," he becomes angry and replies, "Who are you to tell me I'm wrong? I'm not trying to change your opinion; but I have a perfect right to my own opinion, too!" *That* is what people are driving at when they say that "everyone has a right to his own opinion." It amounts to saying "Nobody may express himself in such a way that he is 'stating the facts,' which would make *false* any opposing view. This is not to respect other people and their right to hold as true what they hold."

But notice a couple of things here. The first thing that's implied in either "That's *your* opinion, of course" or "Who are you to tell me I'm wrong?" is "You're *wrong* if you think your opinion is any better than mine." But why could this be said? Only if *in fact* all opinions are on an equal footing.

So this view implies *as a fact, not an opinion*, the opinion that all opinions are equal; this opinion is the Orwellian opinion that is more equal than its opposite.

Secondly, "Who are you" implies that *authority* is the only grounds for saying that any opinion is erroneous; factual evidence (independent of the person) has nothing to do with it. That is "Who are you to tell me I'm wrong?" is very different from "What are the facts you know that would indicate that I'm wrong?" The latter statement would imply a willingness to change the opinion once the evidence is brought forward; but "Who are you?" rejects this; the person who asks this question is not interested in the *grounds* the other person has for saying that he's wrong, because we all know that

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no one can really know what the facts really are.

So the second “fact” that is behind, “Who are you to tell me I’m wrong?” is that opinions are not “really” based on facts, but only depend on the person who holds them.

A third point, of course, is the Jeffersonian dogma that “all men are created equal.” That is, no single person has any authority to pronounce on “what is true,” not even, any more, the scientists; we see this with those who demand that the Pope “change his mind” about Christian dogma and morals, because he’s “out of touch with the consensus.”<sup>5</sup>

But of course, who says that all men—pardon, human beings—are equal, so that nobody’s view is any better than anybody else’s? Who says that *it’s a fact* that the best we can do is reach “consensus” on opinions, and that the majority opinion *should in fact* prevail?

You can see that all these views suppose that it’s a *fact* that no one can know what the facts really are. That is, this “fact” is a hidden premise behind, “everyone has a right to his own opinion,” and it simply follows from this that to presume to say that someone is flat-out wrong is (a) flat-out wrong and (b) disrespectful of the other *person*.

This means there’s something fishy somewhere. You can’t hold

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<sup>5</sup>This “consensus” view of truth has even poisoned professionals, who ought to know better. Theologians like Charles Curran “dissent” from the Pope with confidence, because the “consensus” of Theologians (who are experts) is that, for instance, contraception is okay—as if the fact that a majority holds a view made it correct. Granted, there’s a problem in *finding out* what the truth is, and consensus among experts can be a strong indication of where the truth lies; but after all, the world *wasn’t* flat when the consensus of the experts thought it was; or to take another example dear to people’s hearts, when Galileo was said to have muttered, “But it moves anyway,” he was right, and the “consensus” (of Theologians, interestingly) was wrong.

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this view without basing it on its opposite. Of course, the reason the premise (that it's a fact that no one can know the facts) is hidden is that nobody in his right mind is going to propose it explicitly as something he knows for a fact.

But this is not just a silly position or even an error. It is, as I said, a disease; because when a person says, "Who are you to say I'm wrong? I'm not trying to change your opinion; but I have a perfect right to my own opinion, too," what he is *also* saying is, "Don't try to give me evidence; my mind is made up."

On the grounds of "respect for the person" he refuses to learn; and—here is the insidious part—on the grounds of being "open-minded" and "respecting other people" and "letting everybody have his own opinion," he has actually *closed* his mind because he doesn't want anyone interfering with his *own view* of things.

And this closed-minded "open-mindedness" which will let anybody say anything but will learn from no one is impossible (at least in its extreme form—which is all too common) to break through, because even if you point out that the view contradicts itself, you simply get in reply, "Well, that's *your* opinion, and I'm comfortable with mine."

The intellectual disease of the present describes itself in *moral* terms as "open-mindedness" and "respect for everyone's opinion"; and if you don't have it, you are not merely mistaken, but some kind of a sinner; you don't "respect people."

This is another way the disease resists any attempt to cure or diagnose it; it has dressed itself as virtue, and those who attempt to assail it are attacking persons and their rights, not presenting

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evidence<sup>6</sup>. The attitude of the medieval Church toward heresy was nothing in comparison to the attitude the present age has toward those who do not go along with “everyone has a right to his own opinion.”

But this “open-mindedness” that is supposed to be so virtuous is not “open-mindedness” to the *facts*, but to other *people*; it is the kind of “open-mindedness” that lets everybody talk, but listens only to “where you are coming from,” and pays no attention to what you are saying.

And it has terrible repercussions. We wonder why our educational system is a disaster and we can’t compete with other societies any more. It isn’t because we’re not trying to teach; it’s because we don’t *allow* ourselves to teach. We want to “make Johnny able to *think*, not just fill his head with facts,” because in fact we think there *aren’t* any facts.

Even in the sciences we hear, “But chemistry (or physics, or biology) is changing so fast that by the time they graduate, every ‘fact’ we’ve taught them will be obsolete; you can’t teach them ‘facts’ any more. You have to teach them how to *do science*, not ‘facts.’” Besides, if you teach “facts,” then you stifle their “creativity,” and everybody knows that Einstein was a poor student because the teachers were busy trying to “fill his head with facts” and he was trying to *think*. We don’t want to stifle Einsteins do we? If you force “facts” into kids heads, you don’t—here’s the buzz word—respect their minds.

So we teach “methods”; and our educators themselves don’t learn

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<sup>6</sup>Believe me, this happens. I have had students in my classes quit the course after leaving me nasty notes saying that because I would not “let them hold their own views” even while they “listened to mine” they were going to report me to the dean (and a couple of them actually did, recently).

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“facts” to teach, but “methods of teaching—what? Teaching ‘methods of discovery,’” and our students wander about in a contentless void—and we wonder why the Asians do so much better (the Europeans are fast succumbing to the disease).

*They do so much better because they learn facts.*

And the facts and how they’re learned give you the methods, as well as some hope that the enterprise means something. And the facts don’t “become obsolete.” They form the basis of further development and refinement, even when the refinement involves a contradiction of the naive sense in which the original discovery was understood.

But with the attitude prevalent in our schools, why would a kid go into science, if he was constantly bombarded with the impression that he wasn’t learning about the way things really work, and was just learning a complicated and tricky way of how to learn—nothing?

Kids in the early grades like science and math, they tell me; but they’re quickly turned off. By the incompetence of the teachers? I don’t think so. By the disease of the age: that it’s a fact that there aren’t really any facts. We’re killing people’s minds.

And by the time they get to college, they’ve been so carefully taught that there’s nothing to learn, that all they want to do is “discuss,” and “be exposed to other views.” But this is intellectual pornography, this exposure; because they don’t want to *learn* from ways of thinking that are alien to their own view; they want just to look at them like intellectual voyeurs, and maybe pick out what they can “be comfortable with,” irrespective of any connection it may have with the way the world actually is. They’ve been trained so well that the last thing they are willing to do is examine their own opinions to find out whether they’re defective and should be abandoned. “Everyone has a right to their own opinion.” (Even grammar is a matter of opinion, after all, and who are you to say that

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“their” in the preceding sentence is “incorrect”? It may be incorrect in the way *you* speak. So, for example, out of “respect for their Blackness” Black kids have their Black dialect reinforced, with disastrous results when anyone wants to hire them. You see how pervasive the infection is?)

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## Chapter 3

### The starting-point

I am now going to assume that there are those who are not totally brainwashed by this mindlessness and are willing to look at things seriously, and don't want to hold views that are their own opposites. I think we arrived at this despair by trying to get at the truth and failing; I think I see how we arrived where we are, and I think I can see a way to get from here to the truth again. We *can* know what the facts really are; and quite a few of them, if we're careful.

And once this view of mine becomes widespread, the hope is that sanity will drive out the intellectual degeneracy of our present skeptical relativism.

But then where do we start? This is, of course, the perennial problem of a philosopher; and in a sense, no matter where you start, you should have started somewhere else. I think that in the present age, given what I've said, we have to start with knowledge, because even if knowledge is meaningless without its being knowledge *of* some reality (which I don't happen to think is always the case), still, because of the history of philosophy ever since Descartes, it is not enough to assert this; one must now make a case for it.

But of course, you can't start there, because before starting with knowledge, you have to have some method as to how to proceed;

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phenomenology of either Kant's or Hegel's or Husserl's variety seems to have been found wanting, however brilliant; because none, I think, can account for how we make such a clear distinction between our dream world (which we think isn't real) and our waking world (which we think is); logically, for them, both would have to be equivalent.

The fear is that if you start from knowledge, you're stuck there, and can never get outside your mind. But I think that this fear is groundless, because in point of fact, in our early childish lives we are starting from knowledge, and learn by the time we are five that *esse* is precisely not *percipi*, when Mother tells us that there really isn't a lion at the foot of the bed, ready to bite our feet off when we stretch them out.

So the "somewhere else" I think we have to start is to look seriously at the skepticism and relativism of our age; but not simply describe it, as I was doing, but see what we can do with it. Not critique it, exactly, but think it through.

Of course, we can deal rather easily with the silly version of this which actually thinks it *knows* that nobody can really know anything, or actually thinks it is *objectively true* that nothing is objectively true: where skepticism or relativism are held as positive positions. The refutation is simply the position itself, which is in the first case unknown if it is known, and in the second is untrue if it is true.

But this refutation is too simple; there are those who honestly don't know whether anything could ever be known for certain, but are willing to be shown. These are the minds that haven't yet been killed by the poison of the "wisdom" of the age. This book is an attempt to reach them.

It will be rough going, from beginning to end, make no mistake about it. But what will emerge from this investigation into what we can be certain of is a different way of looking at causality, which will

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allow us to get out of our minds without actually ever leaving them (which is what is behind our present quandary), and will provide us with a method that can give us some confidence that we are actually finding out what the facts are. Once we do this, we will be able, I think, to approach reality through knowledge; and many of the important discoveries of the earlier centuries will turn out to have been basically true.

3: The starting-point

## Chapter 4

### Doubt

If we start, then, from where the deconstructed world of thought is at the moment, we find, as was said, that the primary aspect of the general attitude is that we can't know what "the facts" really are; indeed, whether there is anything that can be called "the facts" to be known.

And what is behind this, as I also mentioned, is the Galilean-Cartesian discovery that the sensation I have of red *is not* a copy of the electromagnetic energy, so that I *perceive* red as a lesser *degree* of the same thing as blue, and a greater degree of the same thing as heat. But the energy which gives me the sensation of redness *is* simply a lesser degree of the same energy which gives me the sensation of blueness and a greater degree of the energy I feel as heat.

But the very fact that we recognize this as a real problem implies that there is a solution, because if we couldn't somehow know that the two colors "as they are out there" are different degrees of the same type of energy, we could never be aware that our sensations of the colors did not match what was giving us the sensations. *Somehow* we have to be able to get at what is "really going on out there".

But the actual way we manage this is too far down the road for us to talk about now; I mention it to give hope that we somehow *do* manage it, and if we take small steps, we can discover how we do it.

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The problem before us at the moment is more primitive. How do we know we can know anything at all for sure: that we can know something that we *can't* be mistaken about? Can we ever *really* know what the facts are?

Of course, either it's a fact that no one ever knows what the facts are, or it isn't. But maybe we shouldn't be too confident one way or the other. Maybe we can know some facts, but maybe we can't know any; but the question is, how could we know we knew?

Logically, if you say we should suspend judgment on this, because we don't know if we know that we can't know (or that we can), then by implication, we're saying that we can't *really* know what the facts are; still, we're not after logical consistency necessarily (who says logical consistency *has* to be correct or inconsistency incorrect?), but what is the case—and we just don't know. Whether we *can't* know, or whether we can *know* we can't know is one thing; but whether we *know* we can know (or can't know) is something else.

That is, in the state of horrendous skepticism we're in at the moment, we are not necessarily open to refutation, because our diffidence in knowing "the facts" is not really a confident assertion that we can't know them, and we are not so sure about logic (aren't there even different logics nowadays?) that we can be refuted. Our view of our knowledge is so shaky that even its inconsistency can't shake it back into any kind of solidity.

There are those<sup>7</sup> who say that once you get into this kind of doubt, you're locked in, because you're doubting *the ability of your mind* to reach certainty (for whatever reason, either because of a

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<sup>7</sup>For instance, Reginald O'Neil, in his book *Epistemology*, on which I cut my epistemological teeth, and to whom as a teacher I owe a great deal (in spite of the fact that I think he would be shocked at what I believe he would interpret—incorrectly, I think—as my "mediate realism").

defect in your mind or a defect in “reality” or a defect in the relation between the two); and since the only tool you have to get rid of the uncertainty is the (uncertainly reliable) mind itself, then you can never get rid of it. Thus, once you doubt the ability of the mind to get at certainty, it is impossible ever to *get* at certainty; and since it’s impossible, it’s certain that you never *will* arrive at certainty.

But once again, all this says is that *logically*, if you doubt whether you can arrive at any certainty, you can be certain that you never will—which, of course, contradicts the doubt. But in the actual state of people’s minds, that doesn’t solve the problem, because who says that just because logically you’d have to admit that you’re certain of something, it has to be true? The fact is that people *do* seriously question whether we can know anything at all with absolute certainty (that is, without the slightest possibility of a doubt), and yet are willing to be shown; that is, they think that it *might* be possible to arrive at certainty; they are not certain that certainty is impossible. “You show me one fact,” they say, “that can’t be seriously doubted, and I’ll believe you.”

Now we can’t use Descartes’ statement, “I think, therefore I am,” because however intuitively convinced we are that we exist, subsequent philosophers (like Locke, Hume, and Dewey, to name just a few) have contended that maybe there isn’t an “I” that is doing the thinking, and all there is is a stream of consciousness. And the past and future consciousness in this “stream,” as Derek Parfit has recently pointed out<sup>8</sup>, might conceivably be not parts of it—or,

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<sup>8</sup>I have only heard of this second hand by papers critiquing his views, and so what I think he is saying about “past selves” may be unjust. I mention it here because from what I gather, he thinks that my *present* self is the only self I am, and my past is the past of another self that’s just connected with it more intimately than the other selves around me. I must say that I think this view is silly (and so do the commentators I have heard); but it’s a view that’s being commented on nowadays, and so presumably

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to make somewhat more sense, might just be just peculiar aspects of the present moment, which are *taken* to refer to consciousness gone by.

Be that as it may, “I think, therefore I am” is not by any means so “clear and distinct” that no one could possibly doubt it. And even Augustine’s version that even if I doubt I can’t doubt the doubter, suffers from the same defect. *Augustine* couldn’t doubt the doubter; but he wasn’t as sophisticated in doubting as we have become since Descartes. Nowadays, you have to give evidence to *show* that there’s a “self behind” the consciousness; you can’t just assert it and get away with it.

But what about the consciousness itself? Surely you can’t doubt that. Well, what *is* consciousness? God knows, there have been any number of theories about it, and people have found what they thought were good reasons for not holding each of them.

No, if there is to be something that *can’t* be doubted (from any point of view), it has to be something even more primitive, if possible, so that it doesn’t rest on some world-view (which might be dubious) in order to hold it as indubitable. But there can’t be anything like that, can there?

Take the following:

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is “respectable.” (If you wonder why I think it’s silly, note that if it’s true as I understand it—that the present self doesn’t contain the past—then you can’t even *know* “my present self,” because the “self” that knows the word “self” is a *different* self from the one that knew the word “present.”)



### There is something<sup>9</sup>

Now by “something” here is meant the *contradictory*<sup>10</sup> of “nothing at all.” That is, I do not assert by this that “something” has to be “material” or “mental” or whatever; *anything* with *any* characteristic (or the characteristic itself, whether or not it is

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<sup>9</sup>Ayn Rand starts with this same statement, but in my view immediately makes what is in part an illegitimate leap. She concludes that this shows that knowledge is knowledge of *being*, and that therefore being is prior to knowledge. But she seems to imply that knowledge is somehow *different* from being, as if the act of knowledge were not in itself a reality (i.e. that the only being it knows is the being of something other than itself). But then how can anyone discuss what his knowledge *is*? How could we possibly know it?

And this arbitrary “separation” of consciousness from being does not refute idealism, unless one says that consciousness is (à la Jean-Paul Sartre) non-being or nothingness. Hegel, for instance, could agree with her (that knowledge is a knowledge of being), but say, “Well yes, but there isn’t in fact any being *apart from* the being of the act of consciousness.” I assert here that since consciousness *is* a form of being, and since the act of consciousness knows *itself* as well as whatever other being it might also be “referring to” (as when you know this page, you also are aware of the *reality* of your act of knowing this page), then this immediate knowledge of the act in the very same act is why we can use doubting or questioning or whatever as the “something” we are aware of as existing—and since there is no “medium” between the act of knowing and the act of knowing that you know, we can’t be mistaken about this knowledge. We will see more of this later. At the moment, I think we have to stick with the fact that we *do* know that there is not absolutely nothing at all, and only discuss the implications that necessarily follow from this fact.

<sup>10</sup>There are two sorts of “opposites”: opposites of the black-white kind (called “contraries”) where there are “in-betweens” that are neither black nor white (as the shades of gray and the other colors as well as anything that isn’t a color at all); and the black/non black kind (“contradictories”), where anything that doesn’t belong on one side is (by definition) on the other (gray is non-black, and so is red, and so is sweetness, nothingness, etc., etc.).

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supposed to be a characteristic “of” something) will do as an example of “something.”

Now then, suppose you doubt this. Then there is the doubt—and that is something; it’s certainly not *absolutely* nothing. And of course, if you *recognize* that you doubt this, there’s the recognition, which, whether it’s identical with the doubt or not, is *something*.

Suppose you entertain that it might be false that there is something. All right, it might be, *but not while you’re entertaining this possibility*, because entertaining the possibility is something. That is, it might be conceivable that everything would go out of existence, and then there would be nothing at all, in which case “There is something” would then be in fact false. But in that case, it could not be *known* to be false or *thought* to be false, because the knowledge or thought would be something.

So as long as “there is something” can be either known or doubted, it *has* to be *in fact* true, because the knowledge or doubt verifies that it is true.

Note that I am not saying here that “There is something” is *necessarily* true (that it *can’t* be false); I am just saying that it is *in fact* true, and (if the meaning of the words is understood) it cannot be *denied* to be in fact true, because the denial is something—which would make it true.

It might be that somehow or other it is “necessary” in some sense that there be something<sup>11</sup>, and that for there to be nothing at all is an impossibility. But for us to be absolutely certain, this kind of “necessity,” with all of its pitfalls, is not necessary. (“What pitfalls?” you ask. Ones like this: Does “necessary” mean “logically necessary,” so that its falsity involves a *contradiction*? But then you have the

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<sup>11</sup>It is, in fact, but for reasons which will emerge considerably later.

problem of the “move” from the “logical” to the “ontological” order, and who says that it *can't* be the case that what is self-contradictory can't exist? And so on.)

No, remember, we are not dealing with the person who is so absolutely convinced that nothing can be known for certain that he can't be shown, but with the person who is willing to look for himself. What he wasn't sure of was whether we could ever know a *fact* in such a way that we *couldn't* be mistaken about it; and here we have one. Even if you are mistaken about some fact, the mistake isn't *nothing*; and so there is something; so the *fear* that you might be mistaken if you assert that there is something is *also* something, and verifies that there is something.

There is nothing you can do, no way you can twist or turn to get yourself into a position by which you could be mistaken that there is something; because the position itself as well as the mistake would then be something and not just nothing at all. There is no point of view from which it could be false that there is something—even supposing that everything can go out of existence—because that point of view would not be nothing at all, and would not exist if everything went out of existence.

So yes, *we know at least one fact: there is something*. And we know it with *absolute certainty; there is no way we could be mistaken* when we assert this fact, because the assertion itself is something. Not only *is* it true; it is *known* to be true, and known in such a way that it is *not possible* for the knowledge to be mistaken.

Note what this implies:

**Conclusion 1: The mind is capable of reaching absolute certainty.**

It is *capable* of reaching absolute certainty because in at least one

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case (however trivial it may be) it actually *does* reach absolute certainty. So in all those cases in which you make mistakes, or even those in which you don't actually make a mistake but could conceivably be making one, this is not due to the fact that your mind is radically incapable of (1) knowing something to be true, (2) knowing that it cannot be false, and (3) knowing that it knows this.

Note that the *fact* might conceivably (some day) be false (if everything some day goes out of existence because it is not "necessary" in some sense that there be something). But the *knowledge that the fact is (now) a fact* is "necessary" in the sense that it *cannot* be a mistake; to entertain it as a mistake is to show that it is *not* a mistake, because this "entertaining" is something and not nothing at all.

The contingency of *the fact known* does not necessarily, therefore, mean that *the knowledge of it* is uncertain. How do I know? Not from some theory, but from the example of "There is something," supposing it to be a contingent fact and not necessary. It still cannot be *known* as "possibly not true at the moment" for the simple reason that there would be this knowledge, which, however contingent it is, is still something.

Need I belabor this any more? For those who are still not convinced, I can only say, "Look at yourselves and ask yourselves *why* you are not convinced. Is it because you can see a way in which "There is something" can be entertained as false, or because *you have some theory* that "we can't really ever be absolutely sure of anything," and you are so eager to hold onto it that you will do so even to insanity?"

I don't mean to cast aspersions, to make some *ad hominem* argument that will shame anyone into admitting as certain something that he's not sure of. What I am simply saying here is that if you aren't sure that there is something, what's got to be going on in your

mind is something like, “Well, yes, Blair; you’ve come up with all kinds of arguments and I can’t answer them at the moment; but how do I know that someone sometime won’t be able to find a point of view from which ‘There is something’ is false? I mean, how can you be so *sure* it can’t be done?”

Because the point of view would not be nothing at all. Any “refutation” of “There is something” is *something*.

But there is a move that can be made that might cast doubt on “There is something,” and that I think must be at least mentioned. This is the contention that the sentence “There is something” is actually meaningless, because every meaningful statement has to be of the form Fa, asserting some property of some object (i.e. it has to be of the form, ‘X is a something-or-other’ and not just ‘X’).

To put this another way, “There is something” is asserted to be the equivalent of “Something is”; but (it is alleged ) you can’t say that, because all *that* says is “Something.” That is, if you say, “Something is,” a person will ask “Something is what?” Or in other words, “Something is” is an incomplete sentence masquerading as a complete one; it really should be written “Something is...” and is waiting to have the dots replaced with content.

One answer to this difficulty is that every language seems to have locutions such as this “forbidden and meaningless” one. *Il y a* in French (Literally, “it has there”); *es gibt* in German (it gives); *hay* in Spanish (it has), and so on, where the “subject” of the sentence is simply asserted, without giving a characteristic or property of it. If it is meaningless, why have all the known languages found it indispensable? If it is simply incomplete, why have all the known languages accepted it without the “such that” addition? “Is there an Abominable Snowman?” is a legitimate question, whose answer might be, “Yes, there is an Abominable Snowman,” without adding “such that he has enormous feet.”

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So the first answer is, “On what grounds do you say that a statement like, ‘There is something,’ or ‘Rome exists’ or ‘George Blair is real’ is meaningless?” After all, “George Blair is real” is recognized in ordinary talk as not only meaningful but true, while the statement, “There are unicorns” is recognized as false.

It sounds suspiciously as if a person who would say that “There is something” is meaningless is a person who has constructed a theory of language for the express purpose of disallowing as meaningless what users of just about every language have always considered meaningful. When one’s theory doesn’t fit the facts, it isn’t the facts that are the problem.

A second answer is that “There is something” need not be formulated in this way to get the idea across. It could be stated, “Knowledge is not absolutely contentless,” meaning that if you know, you can’t know absolutely nothing, because you would at least know that you are knowing. If you “know” nothing at all, not even that you are knowing, then there is no meaning to the word “know,” because (to use William James’s criterion for “truth,”) then “knowing” in this case would be absolutely indistinguishable from “not knowing.”

Now someone might object that “Knowledge has some content” is not the same as “There is something,” because the latter supposes that something *exists*, and this is not necessarily the same as “to be the contents of knowledge.”

True, “to exist” doesn’t mean “to be the contents of knowledge” (as we will see later, but can be shown now by saying that we know precisely that unicorn’s *don’t* exist, which we couldn’t say if their being the contents of our knowledge meant they existed). But in the case in question, either the person making this last objection has conceded the point that “Something exists” (“There is something”) is a meaningful statement—in which case I revert to it—; or he wants

to say (if he is still objecting to the certainty that there is something) that *knowing* is not itself anything at all, so that nothing has happened when you know, and if you know you know, you know about nothing at all.

That is, on this second type of objection, you would be *distinguishing* between knowing and “being something,” which would make the act of knowing not a special case of “being something” or a member of the class “something” but totally different: absolutely nothing. But then I don’t know what you mean by “absolutely nothing,” if your “absolutely nothing” has definite, describable characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

I think this is another dead horse I don’t have to beat further. We *do* know that there is something and not absolutely nothing, and even those who would construct bizarre grammars in the attempt to make it possible to say we don’t can’t do so in any coherent way.

As I mentioned several times already, if you’re so determined to be sure that you can’t really be sure of anything, you can perhaps come up with some rationalization which, however inconsistent it might be, will satisfy you that it is (unreasonably) reasonable to believe that you’re not sure when you are; but in that case, you have

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<sup>12</sup>There are those who make a radical distinction between knowledge and being, like Jean-Paul Sartre, and, in a peculiar sense, Ayn Rand. She doesn’t *say* this, but her analysis of why “thought” can’t produce “being” (and therefore there can’t be a creator-God) seems to me to imply that consciousness is *something different from* being. If it is *also* a form of being, then why can’t it have effects *insofar as it is being* rather than as thought? Granted, you (or at least we humans) can’t make something exist just by asserting or thinking (however fervently) that it does, which is what she is driving at: the facts determine our consciousness, not the other way round. But after all, we decide (a conscious act) to move our hands, and lo and behold, they move. So consciousness *does* have an effect on the material world. If you say, “But only through our bodies,” then you have missed the point. If consciousness can’t have an effect on the material world, it can’t have an effect on our own bodies either.

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probably been so indignant by this time that I haven't shown "respect" for your opinion that you've stopped reading.

If you are still with me, I assume that you've assured yourself that you can't in fact doubt that there is something, and that nobody who understands what the words mean can doubt it either.



## Chapter 5

### Certainty

Let us be clear, now, about what doubt and certainty are, and make a couple of distinctions. First of all, certainty is the opposite of *doubt*, not “probability.” We will have occasion to talk about probability and its laws much later; and it turns out that the “laws of probability” are not probable (still less dubious) but certain. But that is another topic.

What I mean by *certainty* is **the knowledge that what one thinks is true is not mistaken**; it is a conviction that what you think is true *is* in fact true. Now “subjective” certainty is this conviction when you don’t have any objective grounds for it (any evidence for it); it is an *emotional* state of confidence that you’re “right.”

This emotional conviction may go along with *objective certainty*, which can give the *factual* grounds for knowing (i.e., the evidence) that you aren’t mistaken. In the case in question, the mere statement that you are certain that there is something is the grounds for knowing that you are not mistaken, because that statement is (and is known to be) something.

“There is something,” in other words, is **absolutely self-evident, because the statement itself is evidence** that the statement is true, because it is something. It cannot be denied without asserting it. Hence, the statement (or the thought, or whatever) gives one objective confidence that one knows in this instance what is true, and one cannot be mistaken.

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The contradictory of certainty is *doubt*, which is **the state of mind where one thinks that he might be mistaken**. If you think you *are* mistaken, of course, you then are conscious of being in *error*, and you don't have a doubt. That is, if you as a reader held the view that it's never possible to be absolutely certain, and then you began to see that "There is something" can't be false from any point of view, you at some point realized that your view that absolute certainty is impossible was a *mistaken* view. You didn't *doubt* it any more; you now (I hope) *know for certain* that it is false that absolute certainty is impossible.

But there is also *subjective* doubt, which is the opposite of the pig-headed type of subjective certainty: the *emotional and groundless fear* that the thought you are now having might be mistaken. You are *afraid* that you might be mistaken, not because there is any reason to believe that you *are* mistaken, or even that there is any reason to believe that some fact might refute your position, but because, "Well, you never know..."

It is this kind of doubt which is so pervasive, and which is in fact a subjective certainty that objective certainty can't be attained. What I am saying when I ask you (if you have this fear) to look into yourself is to question whether this fear is groundless or not. If you still want to hold onto it, because, "Well, you never know..." I can't help you, and you might as well stop reading right here.

There are going to be a lot of things that we will find we can't be *absolutely* certain of; but this should not necessarily make us doubt them. The fact that it is *conceivable* that you *could* be mistaken is not grounds for thinking that you *are* mistaken, or even wondering whether you are or not. If you have reason to think you *aren't* mistaken and *no* reason to think you *are*, then (even if it isn't impossible for you to be mistaken), it would be precisely *unreasonable* for you to doubt. Why? Because you have reason not

to doubt and no reason to doubt.

This means that there are certainties that are not absolute: you can be certain that in fact you are not mistaken, even though you recognize that it is *not impossible* for you to be mistaken. Descartes messed up the theory of knowledge by taking absolute certainty as the only certainty there is, and everything that was not known with absolute certainty was (according to his “method”) to be assumed not only to be dubious but provisionally false unless it could be proved with absolute certainty from something that was absolutely certain.

But as Descartes himself saw, we are *in fact* certain of a number of things, because we can't *really* doubt them, except on his supposition of a malevolent demon who is tampering with our minds so that we can't help believing things which aren't true, such as that there is a real world and that we're not always dreaming, that (for instance) you're reading this page, and you didn't make it up, and so on.

Let me call “**physical certainty**” **this level of certainty in which you can't prove it's impossible for you to be mistaken, but where you know that in fact you aren't mistaken.** For physical certainty, you have to have *objective facts* to back up what you think is true *and also no facts* to indicate that it is not true. That is, there might (somewhere) *be* facts that contradict your view, but you have no knowledge that they exist. You then have reason to think that you are not mistaken, and no reason to think you are; though you can't prove that you *can't* be mistaken. You have physical certainty (you don't doubt), but not absolute certainty.

You may not have direct evidence of something and still have physical certainty. For instance, if someone you have reason to believe is an expert is telling you that something is a fact (and you have no reason to believe that he's lying or biased), then you have

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reason to think that what he says is a fact and no reason not to. Practically everything we learned in school is knowledge of this type, because even if we did experiments in the lab and “learned on our own,” they were constructed with our education in mind, and we had to take the instructor’s word for it that the experiment is valid.

At a still lower level is the type of certainty you have when you don’t have any particular *proof* or solid evidence that what you think is the case is actually the case, but at the same time you have *no* hint of evidence that it’s not the case. A great deal of our knowledge is on this level; hearsay from a non-expert when we simply have *no* reason to suspect that we are being lied to or the person telling us doesn’t know what he’s talking about or is biased is a case in point. This is *moral certainty*.

It really means that **you simply have no reason to suspect that you are mistaken**, not that you have any solid reason to show that you’re *not* mistaken. It isn’t doubt, because in fact we don’t suspect that we are mistaken; but it’s not at the level even of physical certainty, where we can give reasons.

People do, of course, lie to us without our suspecting it, or pass off ignorant opinions as knowledge or hearsay as if they knew the facts themselves, and often when we are certain at this level we are mistaken. But this does not alter the fact that we have no *reason* to doubt what we are told. So we *are* certain. It is unreasonable to go around cross-examining everything we are told, suspiciously asking, “Are you sure of that? Do you really have evidence of it?” as if we were the Counsel for the Defense. People who behave like this are quickly shunned by others, and made dupes of by those who resent their lack of trust and play upon it.

But to return to the point I was making above, not all certainty is just physical or moral. Absolute certainty is not only possible; we in fact *are* absolutely certain of some things; we are at least absolutely

certain that there is something.

**Absolute certainty only occurs when the denial of something implies its assertion.**<sup>13</sup>

It should be obvious that this sort of thing gives absolute certainty, because (as we saw with “there is something”) to think that it is false can’t be done without admitting that it is true. And so it is simply not possible (supposing one understands the meaning of what one is asserting) to be mistaken.

There are some other statements like this, and we will see them shortly. Needless to say, they are supremely trivial, and all but contentless. Still, there are some.

Practically everything we know, however, is at the level of physical certainty, where we are relying on evidence for something and can’t rule out either that there might be other evidence out there that would refute it, or (especially in complex cases) that there is not some flaw in our reasoning process. There are, of course, various degrees of this physical certainty, depending on how compelling the evidence is and what evidence we might have that there *isn’t* evidence that could refute our assertion.

For instance, in this book, we will prove that there is a God (an infinite being), and show that every other explanation of the evidence we present involves some contradiction. But the evidence *for* the existence of God is very complex and intricate, and it is always possible either to have misread it, or to have made some mistake in reasoning to the conclusion from the evidence. Absent, however, any *facts* that would indicate that I have misread the evidence or

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<sup>13</sup>Note that this is the requirement for self-evidence, not something that everyone takes for granted as true. Jefferson, for example, considered it “self-evident” that “all men are created equal,” but when you analyze this, it turns out in fact to be, far from self-evident, false.

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committed some logical fallacy, then I am certain of the conclusion. I *could* be mistaken, but there is reason to believe I am *not* mistaken and no reason to believe that I am.

## Chapter 6

### Absolute truth

In any case, now that we are sure of at least one fact (that there is something), let us look at it a little; it turns out our certainty of it allows us to see that we are certain of other things as well.

Given that there's no point of view from which it can be false (for you) that there is something, it's also true that there's no point of view from which it can be false *for anyone* that there is something; because there would be that point of view, and *anybody* who tried to deny that there is something would know that there was something: the denial. Hence, we can draw the following conclusion:

**Conclusion 2: it is certainly false that everything depends on your point of view; there is *no* point of view from which it can be true *for anyone* that there is nothing at all.**

Well, that's a comfort. It saves us from asserting either (a) that "Everything depends on your point of view" *doesn't* depend on your point of view (and is true for everyone, whether they realize it or not), in which case *not* everything depends on your point of view (because this statement doesn't); or (b) that "Everything depends on your point of view" *depends* on the point of view you take, and is true *only* from that point of view, in which case, not everything depends on your point of view (because from other points of view

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there are things which don't depend on your point of view).

Yes, Virginia, there is absolute truth; there is at least one fact which is a fact *for everyone*, and which no one can honestly deny (because there is, after all, the "honest denial," and that's something).

But then what do we do with the people who say, "Well that's *your* opinion"?

The first thing you can do is test to see if they simply don't realize what they're saying by pointing out to them that they don't have to take your word for it that there is something; let them figure out for themselves whether they can actually believe (or have the "opinion") that there is nothing at all, not even the opinion or belief; and then whether they can figure out a way in which anyone can actually believe that there is nothing at all.

Of course, they won't be able to; in which case, you say that they share your "opinion" that there is something that's an absolute fact and doesn't depend on your point of view, because there's no point of view from which it isn't a fact (because there would be the point of view).

If they say, "Well, that's *your* opinion that my opinion is that there are absolute facts; but that's not *my* opinion," then you smile politely and walk away. There's really nothing else you can do, because even pointing out that they're saying as an absolute fact that there are no absolute facts won't make any difference, since these people just take opinions they're "comfortable" with, even if the opinions are their own opposites.



## Chapter 7

### The Principle of Contradiction

So let's leave people like that to what they're "comfortable" with, because they don't even make sense. But then where are we? So far, we know with absolute certainty several facts: (1) that there is something; (2) that it is absolutely certain that there is something; (3) that not everything can be doubted; (4) that there are some facts that don't depend on your point of view (at least these four, for example), and can't be denied by anyone without that person's basing the denial on their affirmation. Hence, they are self-evident and absolutely certain for anyone.

But there's another fact—in fact, a whole battery of facts—that has been lurking behind everything we've said so far; and this fact has been traditionally called the "Principle of Contradiction"<sup>14</sup>.

It's this principle which makes it hopeless to try to deal with a person who is "comfortable" with holding both that everything depends on your point of view and that "Everything depends on your point of view" doesn't depend on anyone's point of view.

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<sup>14</sup>Actually, as practically everyone who has stated it has pointed out, it should be called the Principle of Non-Contradiction, because it says that there really aren't any contradictions. It's the "Principle of Contradiction" in that it's the principle that *deals with* contradictions (saying that they can't be facts).

#### 7: The Principle of Contradiction

Basically, the Principle says that **contradictions can be *stated*, but that these “statements” don’t mean anything or refer to anything.**

In reference to statements, then, the Principle says that **any meaningful statement cannot be both true and false** (if the words are taken in exactly the same sense both times). If a “statement” says that X is *not* the case when and in the respect in which X *is* the case, then this “statement” is not false but nonsense; it is not a statement.

Why? Because we’ve made up some rule about what we choose to call “statements”? In one sense yes, and in another no (note that this doesn’t violate the Principle, because there are different senses involved).

In the sense in which we made up the rule to call “statements” only those locutions which can be *either* true *or* false, this is arbitrary; we could have chosen a different word like “proposition” or “hompviquity” instead. It happens, of course, that “statements” in common English usage are the type of sentences (as opposed to, say, commands or exclamations) that are supposed to express facts, (and something-or-other either is a fact or it isn’t); and so it makes sense to use “statement” for this definition.

The sense in which the rule is not arbitrary at all is that, no matter what *word* you use to be defined as “the type of locution that intends to express a fact,” the rule necessarily applies to that word. That is, whatever you want to *call* a locution that intends to express a fact, the locution can’t be both true and false (because that would mean that the fact itself isn’t what it is while it is what it is and in the respect in which it is what it is).

It’s a little difficult to talk about this Principle without sounding like you’re talking nonsense, because what in fact you’re talking about is *the minimum necessary to make sense*.

Furthermore, the rule about statements is not arbitrary, because

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*contradictory statements cannot express factual knowledge.* This is another way to state the Principle, and what it amounts to is that you cannot think, “I am not thinking what I am now thinking,” because if you’re thinking it you can’t avoid knowing that you’re thinking it. You can *say* “I’m not now thinking what I’m now thinking,” but you can’t *think* it.

There are those who would bristle at this, because of various views of linguistics and their relation to facts and thought. I don’t want to try to discuss here why I think they’re wrong (because it involves too great a complexity, and we’re far too primitive for that at the moment). Let me just appeal to your own experience; try to not think what you are thinking, and you will see that you know that you’re thinking it. Further, those who would disagree with what is behind what I am saying would do so on the basis of something that would have to be accepted (and therefore *known or at least thought*) to be *true and not false* in the respect in which it was true—which, of course, assumes the Principle.

The Principle is another one of those self-evident facts, then; because to deny it is to affirm it. That is, if you say, “Well, but I hold that things *can* be both true and false” you’re holding *as true and not false* that things can be both true and false. If it *were* both true and false that things can be both true and false, why would you bother to state it, especially in opposition to someone who disagreed with it? If he disagrees with it, he agrees with it, and so what’s your problem?

So far, we’ve seen the Principle as a principle of statements and a principle of thought. As a principle of facts, it says, **it is never a fact that a fact is not what it is while it is what it is.** Or in reference to reality it is **Something is not what it isn’t while it is what it is,** and in the respect in which it is what it is.

That is, something can be *at one time* one thing and *at another time* another; a page can be blank now and have writing on it ten

## 7: The Principle of Contradiction

minutes later, and this is not a contradiction. Or a page that is half-full of writing can be blank (on the bottom half) and have writing on it (on the top half) without there being a contradiction. But it can't be blank at the time when and in the respect in which it has writing on it (if by "has writing on it," you mean "isn't blank").

A word, I think, must be said about Georg Hegel's view that "reality is self-contradictory," as if he were denying what I have just claimed as self-evident. As can be seen from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he does not deny that the Principle is valid as I have stated it, *if you take the time and the respect into consideration* (what he calls "insofar as").

That is, Hegel says that "in the concrete" when you say John is a man, you also mean John is not a man, because John is not *humanity*, and therefore, there is some "negation of humanity" about him that makes him *a* man and not *man*. But Hegel would not deny that *insofar as* John possesses humanity (i.e. in the respect in which he is a man) it is not also true that John is not a man. It's just that (for Hegel) these "insofar as" statements are necessarily incomplete and refer to but leave something out of the concrete reality (and what is left out means that the negation of the statement is also true).

Actually, Hegel hit upon what is the major *effect* that is going to exercise us in this book. He thought it was a characteristic of *reality* to contain its own negation within it, while I think that this "containing of its own negation" defines *finiteness*, not reality itself; and as "denying itself," I think the finite needs explaining, and you can't simply accept it as if it didn't. But this is proleptic.

To get back again to where we were, I said that the Principle of Contradiction (in any of its forms, by the way) is self-evident, because its denial (as true-and-not-false) implies its affirmation. It's also true, however, that the Principle can't be *proved*, because any

## 7: The Principle of Contradiction

attempt to prove it would have to start from something accepted as a fact (and therefore understood to be true-and-not-false), which presupposes what you would be trying to prove.

*Begging the question* is the logical fallacy of presupposing in a “proof” what you are trying to prove. Any attempt to “prove” the Principle of Contradiction cannot be done without supposing the Principle to be true, and so would necessarily beg the question.

But this does not mean that the Principle can’t be *revealed* in such a way that a person who didn’t explicitly understand that he accepted it would realize that he was doing so.

For instance, if the Principle were not true, it could be *false* that there is something simply because it is *not false* that there is something. The fact that it is absolutely certainly the case that there is something would then mean that there is nothing at all.

But this is nonsense: *because* there is something there isn’t anything at all. Precisely. The Principle is the Principle of Non-Nonsense.

That is, we *know and cannot doubt* that there is something; and this presupposes the Principle; and so along with that knowledge, we know the Principle.

It is a law of our minds, in other words. Our minds will simply not accept as a fact a fact-that-isn’t-the-fact-which-it-is.

But then just because this is a law of our *minds*, how do we know it’s a law about the *facts*? Just because I can’t *accept* something as not being what it is, does this mean it *can’t actually be* what it isn’t?

The way this is formulated, it sounds like a real difficulty. It isn’t *because* you can’t accept a fact as not the fact which it is that it can’t be what it isn’t. You’ve got it backwards. It’s because something *is* what it is and *isn’t what it isn’t* that I can’t *think* of it as being what it is *and* being what it isn’t.

That is, it isn’t because *I know* that there is something that makes

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there *be* something; it's because *there is* something which has forced itself on my consciousness that I know there is something. In other words, my consciousness, at least in some cases (such as my consciousness that there is something) recognizes itself as *not free*; there are *not* two alternatives open to it, but only one: I *cannot* think as a fact that there is nothing at all, simply because I am aware that there is something (at least the awareness), and I cannot escape that awareness.

This refusal to be “tied down” and not be free is another reason for the relativism of the present day. If you admit that there are such things as facts, and that facts don't depend on your knowledge but the other way round, then you aren't free to “believe” what you are “comfortable with.”

But this means something interesting. And we can formulate this as another conclusion:

**Conclusion 3: Truth is not a value.**

—at least in the sense that you're free to take it up if it's “meaningful to you” or abandon it if you're not “comfortable with it.”

For instance, it might be *convenient* to think that what's true could be false in the sense in which it's true, because then you could pick which you wanted at any given moment (because both parts of the contradiction would be true); but this, of course, would rest on its being *true and not false* that *in fact* both of the contradictories are true at the same time; so however convenient it might be to hold it, you *don't in fact* hold it if you *do* hold it. You can't adopt that position without rejecting it. Your mind knows this, even though your will or desire doesn't want it to be the case.

But for those who are still worried about the “move” from the

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“logical order” (I can’t think that what is is not what it is) to the “real order” (what is can’t simultaneously *be* what it isn’t), let me point out this: The principle comes, not from a “rule” or something that we learned or even had built into us; *it comes from our knowledge’s awareness of itself as something*. That is, the thing we are using as making us absolutely certain that there is something is *the very act of knowing* that there is something; you can’t know anything at all without its being *forced* on you that you are conscious, and *this* at the very least is what prevents you from being able to think that there is nothing at all.

In the section on consciousness that ends this chapter, I will try to show that we are immediately aware that our act of consciousness is aware of itself, and that to deny this also would entail its affirmation. What I want to point out here, however, is that it is the *reality* of the act that forces itself upon us making us incapable of entertaining either its non-existence or the possibility of its non-existence while it exists; it is not some “logical property” of either the act or the mind that does this.

In other words, in investigating whether we are absolutely certain of anything and using our own act of consciousness as its evidence that it is absolutely certain of something (at least itself), we are actually dealing with *being* in what is close to the absolutely general sense in the beginning of Hegel’s *Wissenschaft der Logik*. It is not quite Hegel’s “being,” because that is absolutely ineffable, and we have taken the first step and “defined it” for ourselves as “not nothing,” giving it a kind of “characteristic.”

Now I don’t want, really, to be getting into a Hegelian dialectic here (because among other things, I hope to show that the real is both rational and not rational, and—as is more relevant to this particular stage—the rational is both real and not real). What is important, I think, is, first of all, to realize that we have *not* made a

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move from the “logical” to the “ontological” order, because the Principle of Contradiction was *not* a *conclusion* about what *must* be true in the “real world” because the “rules of thought say so,” but it was a *discovery* about what you might call the “reality of reality” using the reality which happens to be immediately present to itself in every sense: the reality of being conscious, no matter what the contents of consciousness.

We are not yet at a point where it makes sense to distinguish between “real being” and “the imaginary,” where the only “reality” the latter has is that identical reality of the awareness “of it,” because there is no “it,” really, to be aware of. (That is, when you imagine a unicorn, you are precisely—as we will see—*not* conscious *of* a unicorn; you are only conscious of *the act of imagining*. But this is proleptic.) At the moment, “something” or “reality” or “being” involves *at least* the reality which is the conscious act itself, and may extend to other things besides just this act; and it may be that by far the most important sense of “being” and what is “real” applies to these objects which are *not* identical with my consciousness.

So I don’t really want to stress the “reality” of consciousness or its “being” at the moment, except to allay the misgivings of those who are afraid that in “the real world” the Principle of Contradiction might not apply, even though it does “in thought.” It is because we recognize thought as either the whole of or part of “the real world” that we know the Principle in the first place; it belongs to thought not *as* thought but *as something* that it can’t simultaneously be nothing.

## 7: The Principle of Contradiction



## Chapter 8

### Identity and the Excluded Middle

But to go back to where we were, there are a couple of variations on the Principle of Contradiction, which have their own names.

The **Principle of Identity** states that **what is is what it is**. You could also say that what is true is true, or that you know what you know. Obviously, if something were not what it was, then the Principle of Contradiction would not be true—not that this “proves” it; it simply reveals that this is another way of looking at the basic law of our minds.

A third way of looking at the Principle is called the **Principle of the Excluded Middle**, which states that **there is no middle ground between being and not being**; or in other words, statements cannot be *neither* true nor false, or you can't be *neither thinking nor not thinking* what you are thinking, or something can't *neither be a fact nor not be a fact*. If it isn't a fact, it ain't, and if it is, it is.

Notice that *sentences* can sometimes be neither true nor false, if they are not statements. For example, “Go shut the door” is not true (because it doesn't express the fact that you're going to shut the door) nor false (because it doesn't express the fact that you're not going to); it expresses what I want done, not a fact.

But if a *statement* were neither true nor false, then either we are doing something strange with language, or the statement would also

#### 8: Identity and the Excluded Middle

be both true and false.

That is, suppose “There is something” is neither true nor false. Since it isn’t true, this would mean that what it expresses is not a fact (unless you are supposing that “not true” means something different from “isn’t a fact,” which is the strange use of language). But since it isn’t false, this would mean that what it expresses *is* a fact (unless “not false” gets you into a linguistic never-never land that doesn’t mean “is true”—in which case, what *could* it mean?). Hence, if it’s neither true nor false, it’s both; or words mean very funny things indeed<sup>15</sup>.

Well, but what about the statement, “This statement is false”? Since the statement *says* it’s false, it’s got to be either *both* true and false (since it’s false if it’s true, because it says it is, and true if its false, because it says it’s false) or *neither* true nor false. Since by the Principle of Contradiction, it can’t be both, then it has to be neither.

No, the answer to this (and it’s complicated) is that this, though it has the *form* of a statement, is not a *statement*. How could it be stating a *fact*, which is what statements do? It would be stating, if it meant anything, what would be known to be a non-factual fact, and you can’t *think* a factual non-fact. It can’t express either a thought or a fact (because, in my view, of its content, not its form); and hence is not a statement.

Books could be written about this; but let this suffice.

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<sup>15</sup>Of course, this is not a proof of the Principle of the Excluded Middle, because the rejection of the strange use of language is *on the basis* of the Principle; it just is a way of showing how we have it presupposed in everything we think.

## 8: Identity and the Excluded Middle

## Chapter 9

### Facts

Let us again recapitulate. We know with absolute certainty (1) that there is something; (2) that it is absolutely certain that there is something; (3) that not everything can be doubted; (4) that there are facts that don't depend on your point of view; (5) that what is true is not false in the respect in which it is true; (6) that what is a fact is the fact which it is; and (7) that it is impossible for anything to be neither a fact nor not a fact.

Now then, instead of trying to refute or even win people who won't accept all this and are "comfortable with" that moral view I spoke of earlier of the autonomy of opinions, I think we should leave them to their "comfort," and press on ourselves with our newfound confidence to look a little at facts and at opinions themselves. What is a fact, and how is it related to knowledge? Is knowledge the same as opinion or belief, or not? We are not at this point going to be able to give any detailed account of what a fact *is*; among other things, there aren't many of them that we've run across as yet.

But based on what we've seen so far, there is at least one thing we know about facts:

**Conclusion 4: Facts don't depend on anyone's knowing them.**

That is, it would still be a fact that there is something, or that

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what is true can't be false in the respect in which it is true, even if no one had ever explicitly thought of this.

To confirm that this is what we are driving at by stressing the "factness" of a fact, consider the statement, "It was a fact in 1000 B. C. that the earth was round, even though everyone then thought it was flat." This is another way of saying "The real, objective situation was that the earth was round, even though ..."

The whole epistemological problem since Descartes has been whether we can know anything like this dealing with what is *different* from our own consciousness. (Note that the facts we are absolutely certain of so far don't necessarily imply anything but our own consciousness—though they don't exclude that there is anything else either, of course.) But what I am getting at here is simply that what it *meant* by "It is a fact that..." is that what is *alleged* as a fact is alleged to be so *independently* of anyone's knowledge of it.

In other words, facts are *what* you know, not something that your knowledge *creates*. When I say, "It is a fact that there is something" I mean that *your knowledge* must adjust itself to *agree* that there is something, *rather than* that this is "true" if you accept it to be true and false if you don't.

At this point, the skeptical relativism of our culture rears its head again. As prevalent as the attitude that "everyone has a right to his own opinion" is the way of speaking of "facts for" someone. People say, "Well, yes, that may be a fact for you, but it's not a fact for me. But I respect your point of view, of course." For instance, "for a Christian of a certain type" the Resurrection is a fact; for a Jew or an atheist, it didn't really happen. But of course, the Jew or atheist isn't going to call the Christian deluded or insane; it would be disrespect for his "belief system" to do so; and on the other side, the Christian must *respect* the religion of the Jew and the convictions of the atheist and not try to convince them that Jesus actually got up out of the

grave; we live in a pluralistic society, after all.

Once again, issues of fact have been translated into issues of morality. You can't even say, "Well, Jesus either actually came back to life and physically walked around after really dying, or he didn't." Even the Principle of Contradiction must not be asserted in cases like this because *at least religious* "facts" are in fact "facts for" the believer and for no one else.

But why must we do this? Why must we repudiate our reason and what we are absolutely certain of to "respect other people's convictions"? Because *it's a fact* that in these matters there is a middle ground between factuality and non-factuality? But who says that *that's* a fact that is more self-evident than the Principle of Contradiction itself (especially since it bases itself on the Principle)?

Obviously, to assert that it's a fact that religious facts are non-factual facts is absurd. What is behind this position is really the conviction (a) that no one really knows what the facts are in these cases; (b) there is no way of finding out; and (c) either people want to "take a stand" on the factuality without evidence, or there are plausible reasons on either side, so that no one can *prove* that the other side is dead wrong. Hence, we should respect the opinions on all sides, and (on the assumption that there *is* no way to prove either one) leave each person to his own opinion.

But this is a far cry from saying that the Resurrection *really is* a fact (for the believer) and *really isn't* (for the non-believer). The position just outlined is compatible with one or the other (and *only* one) actually being the case.

But in our zeal not to call fools the people who hold to the factuality of what we can't see any convincing evidence for, our culture has gone beyond that and made the fact depend on the conviction, not the conviction depend on the fact; and this has spread throughout all knowledge, so that it is now assumed *as a fact*

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that the conviction *creates* the factuality for the person convinced.

That is, the idea is that “factuality” is a characteristic of the *consciousness*, more or less in the way that certainty is. When you are certain, then the *consciousness itself* is called “certain,” the view goes, but the *contents* of the consciousness is called “factual.” The “fact” is the contents of the kind of consciousness called “certainty” or “knowledge” or “belief” or “opinion” (as opposed to “wishing” or “dreaming”), and is not something independent of the consciousness itself.

The trouble is that this view (that factuality is *in fact* simply the contents of this kind of consciousness) has to be taken as a fact even “for” those who disagree with it, or it is simple nonsense. If “for me” it is a fact that factuality is just the contents of my knowledge, while “for you” this isn’t a fact, then *it’s only in my private world* that there aren’t any “real” facts, and we’re back to absolute relativism, in which there *really* isn’t anything “for” a person who hasn’t yet thought about “There is something.”

That is, the locution that “X is a fact for” the person who thinks X is a fact is not only a meaningless way of speaking, it is pernicious. If you talk about something as a “fact for” someone (the one who thinks that it is a fact) with the idea that it isn’t or might not be a “fact for” someone else, you destroy any reason for using the word “fact” at all.

I am laying so much stress on this, because this “fact-for” idea is so ingrained in our consciousness that it’s hard even to entertain the possibility that it might be self-contradictory. But the notion that it is the proper way to speak or even that it makes sense in some circumstances must be resisted tooth and nail by anyone who wants to keep his brains from dissolving into gelatin.

No; we may not *know* whether a given X is a fact or not; but a fact is a fact is a fact, even if no one knows it; and no amount of

“knowing” can make a non-fact a fact. Say, “You *think* (or believe, or whatever) that X is a fact,” and *avoid at all costs saying*, “X is a fact for you.”

## Chapter 10

### Opinions

One other thing we haven't investigated about that tiresome phrase, "Everyone has a right to his own opinion" is what is meant by "opinion." It's significant that "opinion" is used here, because it sounds funny to say, "Everyone has a right to his own knowledge."

Why is that? Because we still have enough linguistic integrity to think that "knowledge" refers to facts (and not "facts for"); and if you have knowledge, you don't have a "right" to it, you just *have* it; you know what the facts are.

But we "have a right" to our *opinions*, because, obviously, they're not that way; they aren't knowledge but something else. They're *like* knowledge, in that they seem to deal with facts; but these "facts" are the ones that are "facts for," and mustn't be tampered with.

And why? Basically, because when we have knowledge, we have evidence of what the facts really are. Thus, we *know* that there is something because the knowledge itself is something, as I said earlier. We don't have an *opinion* about it, because opinions can be wrong, and here it's impossible to be wrong: we have *knowledge*.

We have an **opinion** instead of knowledge, then, in one of two situations: either (1) **we don't have any particular evidence for thinking that X is a fact, but it "stands to reason," and there isn't any evidence we know of against it**, or (2) **we know that**



there is evidence for saying that X is a fact *and* evidence for saying that X is *not* a fact; but the evidence on one side seems to be stronger.

If the evidential situation is weaker than either of these, we would tend (if we have any sense) not to form an opinion at all. For instance, are there human-like beings on the planets surrounding the star Alpha Centauri? Well, there is no evidence whatsoever that there *are* any planets around that star, still less that there is one that would support life, not to mention human-like life. All these *could* be facts (we have no reason for saying that they're impossible) but we have absolutely no reason for saying that they *are* facts. It is only a child who will say, "Well, *I* think there are people there" simply because he would like it to be a fact.

Let me explicitly draw a corollary from Conclusion 3 (which was, you recall, that facts don't depend on our knowing them):

**Corollary: You can't make something a fact by wanting it to be a fact.**

William James has to be wrong if what he means by his criterion of truth is that it makes your life "more meaningful" than its opposite—because that means that you can make something a fact by wanting it to be so. And of course, that definition of "truth" would simply be *true* for the person who "felt more comfortable with it," and anyone who found life "more meaningful" with its opposite would not be mistaken, but correct; so this view is false if it's true. That is, since I, for instance, find life "more meaningful" with knowledge of objective facts, then this is "true for me"; but if you find life "works better" if you think that there is no objective knowledge, then clearly "for you" my position is false. So *objectively* or in itself, the view is both true and false. Of course, supposing that

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there's no hope of arriving at objective truth, then perhaps that might be the best you can do. But we already know that there are at least *some* truths that have to be "true for" everybody, and that we *can*, at least in some cases (albeit trivial) arrive at objective truth which is true for everybody, then let's not give up.

Interestingly, James's criterion is a good rule of thumb for finding out what's *false*; because if something "doesn't fit" with the rest of the facts you know (i.e. if it contradicts them), then something's got to be wrong somewhere—because there are no contradictions. Or, alternatively, it can be used as he has done and as I did a while back; if you can show that two words supposedly referring to two different things have "meanings" that can't *in practice* be distinguished, then there's a "distinction without a difference." If he'd stated his "criterion" negatively, everything would have been all right; but once it's stated affirmatively, then it turns out not to be able to apply to itself without contradiction.

In any case, as we learned when we were very young, wishful thinking of itself doesn't establish facts. Maybe wishful thinking that turns itself into action and establishes goals for doing something has a place in making facts come about; but thinking that something is a fact doesn't make it one.

The other time when we wouldn't form an opinion is if the evidence for and against something seems to us to be just about equal. For instance, will Saddam Hussein be captured or continue hiding successfully (I write this in the summer of 2003)? There seems to be some indication (at the moment) that we are close on his heels; but on the other hand, there seems to be just as good a reason for noting the case of Osama Bin Laden, who has successfully eluded us for years now and Saddam Hussein's cleverness at eluding pursuit. Here again, you don't form an opinion just because you happen to *prefer* one side over the other; it's a question of whether one side is

*more likely* than the other, based on the facts you know.

So opinions, as opposed to knowledge, involve ignorance, but are not the same as ignorance. There is some evidence for an opinion, but either only enough to give you moral certainty (as I mentioned earlier) or actual *facts* indicating the opposite of what your opinion is, though the facts don't *prove* the opposite.

Now then, the kernel of truth in "Everybody has a right to his own opinion" is that if there *is* (inconclusive) evidence on both sides, then the fact that *I* see the preponderance of the evidence on one side and *you* see it on the other side means that I can't *prove* that you're mistaken. Neither of us *knows* what the facts really are; and so we have to *evaluate* the "weight" of the evidence.

But evaluation (as we will see later) is a subjective thing; and to some extent this is true even here. How "important" a given piece of evidence is, *how much* it "outweighs" what is on the opposite side, is not a *fact*; a fact simply *is*; it is not "more or less" of a fact (that's what the Principle of the Excluded Middle means); hence it is a subjective matter, when there is real evidence on both sides, what weight the evidence has. And *for that reason* it makes sense *in matters of opinion* to respect the opinions of others, even when you don't share them.

What! You mean everyone *does* have a right to his own opinion?

Well, in a sense, yes. But there are some cautions and qualifications here.

I'm assuming, first of all, that the phrase is not a rights claim and means that there are opinions that should be "respected," in the sense that disagreement shouldn't take the form, "You're wrong," as if you *knew* what the facts were, when all you have is a counter-opinion.

Nevertheless, secondly, there are opinions and opinions. Some opinions are very close to knowledge, because, while there *is*

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evidence against them, the evidence in their favor is overwhelming; while the evidence in favor of other opinions is practically nil.

There are still people who think the earth is flat, based, presumably, on the “evidence” of their senses. But this opinion deserves no respect; and while we should be polite to people who hold it, we don’t need to listen to them.

On the other hand, there’s evidence against the General Theory of Relativity; but it’s rather weak, and it would be the rare physicist who would hold that the theory was just an opinion, and would “respect” the opinion of, let us say, a follower of Ptolemy’s earth-centered universe. Note, on the other hand, that there is pretty strong evidence against a Darwinian view of evolution, and when biologists scream, “It’s a fact,” they’re confusing knowledge with opinion.

You may, thirdly, have little respect for an *opinion* that someone sincerely holds, though you may understand that the issue is complex, and see the reasons why the person holds it (and so respect the *person*), while at the same time you also know that those reasons are not valid.

This is a trickier situation, perhaps best illustrated by an example. If a person holds that a fetus is not a human being (yet) because, being attached to the mother, “it” is for the time being only a part of her, that person does not realize (a) that a biological part works for the benefit of the whole and the fetus does not, and (b) that logically he would have to hold that a tick becomes a part of the host when it attaches itself. But the evidence dealing with the humanity and the personhood of the fetus is by no means that simple (though, as we will see much later, it all points to the fetus’s being a person), and so a simple, “You’re wrong” and a facile refutation like the above would might very well be an insult to the intelligence of the person who holds the view.

But returning to “Everyone has a right to his own opinion,” the real problem, as I mentioned earlier, is not that we shouldn’t respect the opinions of others, but the hidden assumption that *everything* is a matter of opinion, and no one actually *knows* anything.

Of course in this case, it can’t be a *known fact* that everything is a matter of opinion, and therefore that everything anyone says or “believes” or “holds” or “feels” has to be respected; because if everything is a matter of opinion so is “Everything is a matter of opinion,” and in that case, only those who *hold* this have to respect others’ opinions; because they have no grounds for demanding respect of their opinions from those whose opinion it is that others’ opinions don’t deserve respect.

You see, the problem in our age is not that it’s completely innocent of the truth; it’s hit upon a fact, but then run with it like Wrong Way Corrigan and scored a touchdown in its own end zone.

## Chapter 11

### Consciousness

**B**efore getting into that peculiar application of the Principle of Contradiction where we seem to have evidence on both sides of a contradiction (where reality, at least as it presents itself to us, seems to contradict itself), let me finish up this chapter by pointing out something very mysterious that is implied in everything we have been saying:

#### **Conclusion 5: Our act of consciousness is conscious of itself.**

I do not at this point want to explain how this can be possible, but merely to point out that it is a fact.

Let me first of all try to be clear in what I am saying. When I have the awareness that could be expressed by, “I know that I am reading this sentence,” it is not some “I” *outside* the consciousness that is “looking at” the “reading this sentence” part and aware of it; nor is it *another* act of consciousness that is the one that is aware of the one expressed by “reading this sentence.”

What I mean is that the awareness which can be expressed by “I am reading this sentence” (my consciousness of the words I am reading as being read) *is one and the same act* as the what can be expressed by “I *know* that I am reading this sentence.”

Thus, the act that can be expressed as “I am reading this

sentence” has *at least two* “contents”: (1) the awareness of what the sentence is saying as read by me and (2) the awareness of the whole of (1).

This would have to be the case. Suppose there were an “I” which was not contained within the conscious act, but which was conscious of it. Then I would be aware of what I was reading, *but not aware that I was aware of it*, for the simple reason that, on the supposition, the “I” is itself unconscious. Yet we do know that we are aware of what we are aware of; we know what the contents of our consciousness is, *and* that it is the contents of *this conscious act of ours*.

Well, but doesn’t that just mean that there’s another act which is conscious of “I am reading this sentence”? No, because that’s the same problem by another name. We are *conscious* of being conscious of reading this sentence; that is, this “second act” is *known to be occurring*, and hence either (a) is contained within the act of being aware of the sentence (which was what the “second act” was trying to avoid), (b) is conscious of itself (which is also what the “second act” was an attempt to avoid), or (c) becomes conscious by a “third act” which makes *it* conscious.

But since we not only know that we are conscious of reading the sentence, we *know that* we know that we are conscious of reading this sentence (the “second act” is *known*); this means that the “third act” which makes it conscious is *also* conscious. That is, if this “third act” were not conscious, we could know what the sentence says, and know that we were reading it, but we couldn’t *know that we knew* we were reading it. But then since the “third act” is conscious, then either (a) the “first act” knows itself (and so can say that it “knows that it knows” however many times it wants), or (b) the “third act” now is the one that is conscious of itself (but this alternative doesn’t make sense either if there *is* in fact a “third act”), or (c) *it* becomes

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conscious by a “fourth act” which makes it conscious.

But (to avoid the confusion of repeating the same words over and over) we realize that it makes sense to say, “I know that I am aware of being conscious that I am reading this sentence”—which is just a fancy way of saying that we are *fully aware* of what our consciousness is doing as it reads this sentence. Note that, if all this has confused you, *you are perfectly clearly aware of being confused by what you are reading.*

That is, no matter how many times you say, “I know that I know that I know that I know that X,” you are *aware* (once you unpack the language) that the statement expresses what is *true and not false* about your consciousness.

But if an act of consciousness *becomes conscious* by means of another act not itself, then this leads to an infinite regress, and we have an infinity of acts of consciousness receding backwards, the function of each being nothing but to be conscious of the one in front of it.

But, in addition to how unpromising this might sound, not even it will work, because the “third act,” for instance, doesn’t know just the “second act” (that my consciousness is turned on); it knows *also* what the second act is conscious *of* (i.e., that it is knowing the awareness of what is on the page); that is, we *know* that our consciousness is precisely *this* one and no other; so the “third act” would have to contain within it both the “second act” and the “first act”; and of course the “fourth act” would then have to contain not just the “third act,” but all three of the other “acts.”

Furthermore, each of these “subsequent” or “additional” acts not only knows the others but *knows the relationship between “itself” and the others*: that it is precisely the consciousness of the others, (or actually, as we saw just above, the consciousness of the whole act of consciousness). But this means that the “third act” is not just



*reacting to* the “second act,” but *knows* what the second act is doing (i.e. being conscious of reading the page), and (either by itself or through the “fourth act”) knows that it knows this.

The point of all of this is that there is no way to make sense out of the obvious “explanation” of “I know that I know X” by saying that all this means is that there are two acts involved here.

But there is something much more important involved in this particular issue of consciousness’ being aware of itself:

Our absolute certainty that there is something shows that we *know* that our act of knowing knows its very self, and not a “prior” or “different” act (the one I “just had”).

Why would this *have* to be the case? Because if my knowledge that I know X is a different act from the act by which I know X, then the act “I know X” might have ceased by the time the act “I know that I know” occurred.

But either I would realize this possibility, or I wouldn’t. If I realized it, of course, I would *know* that I couldn’t be *absolutely certain* that there is something, but only that there *was* something when the “first act” was occurring.

If I didn’t realize the possibility, I would be absolutely certain (because I would think that my act knew itself), but this would be *subjective* certainty based on an error (that my present knowledge thinks it knows my present knowledge, when actually what it knows is the act I had just a second ago).

As I said, this is very important.

But let us look for a moment at the first possibility, that there are two acts and I know or at least suspect it. Then, of course, *while the “I know that I know” act is going on* there is obviously something, because it is something; but *it* couldn’t know that, because it can’t know itself. So “There is something” *is objectively true* when I perform the act “I know that a second ago there was something,”

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and *must* be true during that act (because it's something); but it can't be *known* to be true when that act is occurring.

But of course it *can* be known to be true when that act is occurring, because we just proved that it *has* to be true when that act is occurring.

But that means (on this supposition, that there are two acts involved here) that it is *absolutely certain* that when you form the act of knowledge, "I know that there is something," there *is* something (the act of knowing) because, even though (by the supposition) you couldn't know *in* that act that it was happening as you formed it, it would still in fact *be* happening, and would be something. And by reasoning, we know this. But that would be the result of a reasoning process, and so while we could *reason to* the fact that "there is something" is *absolutely certain*, we *wouldn't* be *absolutely* certain of it, because our reasoning could be flawed. But we *know with absolute certainty* that there is something. And why? Because we *don't* reason to it as a conclusion, but since the act of consciousness knows itself as well as its "contents," so to speak, it immediately recognizes itself as real, as something.

In other words, this line of reasoning leads to the interesting conclusion that the act of knowledge "I know that there is something" *ought* to be thought of as false under the supposition that it can't know itself (and everything might have gone out of existence by the time it was made); but it can't *be* false, because while it is happening it is something, and therefore it is true. And since it can be known to be true by this reasoning process, it not only is true, but can't know that it is true and does know that it is true.

Talk about contradictions!

Now then, if we take the second supposition, that the act *thinks* it knows itself, but really doesn't, and only knows the act immediately preceding, then the act of thinking "I know that there

is something” would be *thought* (falsely) to be absolutely certain, because you would *think* the act was aware of itself (making you realize that it itself is something), when in fact it was only aware of the preceding act.

But of course, while this (erroneous) act is happening, it is in fact happening, and is in fact something. But it thinks that it *is* something; which means that it is in fact *true*, not false. That is, by this supposition, it in fact *is*, and it *thinks* that it is; but it has no “right” to think that it is, because it can’t really know itself, and therefore, it *shouldn’t* think that it is happening while it is happening, but it (erroneously) *does*, and so it is falsely true and erroneously correct.

Furthermore, it is absolutely certain (based on this “error”) that there is something; and in fact when it occurs it cannot not be occurring, and so it is impossible for it (in spite of the “error”) to be actually false. So even though it has no right to be certain at all—or even to think it true—it doesn’t realize it doesn’t have this right, and so it *is* certain, and in fact its certainty also is valid, because when the “error” is *in fact* being committed it cannot be the case that there is nothing (there would at least be the “error”). So the certainty which is purely subjective and erroneous certainty turns out to be objective certainty.

The upshot of this is that neither of the two possibilities based on the act’s not being aware of itself does anything except create a mass of contradictions.

Note further that if in fact all that I know is the preceding act, there is no way I can *know* that it is the preceding act, because *I don’t know this one*. The preceding act as “preceding” has to be unconscious, because in order to know it *as such*, you would have to know that it preceded *something*; which by the supposition would be the *present* act—which cannot be known.

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Hence, the *preceding* act would be known *as* the “present” one, because the “present” one (the one that knows it) is precisely *out* of consciousness, or is *unconscious*. But if it’s unconscious, then in what sense is it the present act of *consciousness*, especially since the preceding act of consciousness would necessarily be *known as* the present act of consciousness, and would in fact *be* the *only consciousness we have at present*.

So if the present act of consciousness can’t know itself but only the preceding act of consciousness, the present act of consciousness is not an act of *consciousness* at all, and the preceding act of consciousness *is* the present act of consciousness. And *that act* would be the one known as “the present act of consciousness” and it would be in fact the only act that could meaningfully be called the present act of *consciousness*. So the present act of consciousness would know that it is the present act of consciousness.

So if the present act of consciousness *can’t* know itself, then the present act of consciousness *does* know itself as such. Again the supposition leads to a contradiction.

All this is by way of saying that there is no way you can make sense out of the act of consciousness’ not being able to know itself and still account for how we can make statements like, “I know that I know X.”

There are actually three reasons for engaging in this description of the act of consciousness as conscious of itself. First, its denial, as I just got through showing, would undermine the absolute certainty we have, in spite of the fact (as I tried also to show) that the denial confirms that the certainty is valid. Second, it is an attempt to “soften you up” for the kind of thing that is going to make up the bulk of the first part of this book; and it gets much, much worse than anything we have gone through so far. And finally, we need to be aware that facile “explanations” that seem to resolve mysterious

issues only make matters worse if taken seriously. The hardest thing by far in what follows will be to see that there is a real problem, that the problem we will discover is *not* a trick of language or a misuse of terminology, and that the simple, “Oh, well, all that means is...” type of “solution” only satisfies those who don’t want to be bothered to think.

So to return to sanity, we *know* with *absolute certainty* that there is something (not that there “was” something a minute ago), precisely *because* we know *that we know it*, and that our knowledge is not nothing.

The upshot of all of this is that in practice, our knowledge that there is something *contains within it our knowledge of our knowledge that there is something*, and so when we are conscious, the very act of consciousness is immediately (i.e. without any “intermediary”) conscious of itself.

As I said in introducing this, how this is *possible*, in the sense of *how* an act can contain the whole of itself within itself, is not the issue here, and will be dealt with much, much later. But the fact that we *do* perform such an act is shown both by our spontaneous experience, and by the mess you get into in supposing we can know that we know by means of something other than the act itself.

But that is enough, I think, for this propaedeutic. We have not proved, but shown (1) that there is something; (2) that it is absolutely certain that there is something; (3) that some facts can be known with absolute certainty; (4) that not everything depends on your point of view; (5) that what is true is not false in the respect in which it is true; (6) that what is is what it is; (7) that there is no middle ground between being something and not being; and now (8) that our consciousness is conscious of itself as well as whatever it is “about.”

Not a bad harvest, when all is said and done.

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—Note, by the way, that I haven't really proved anything in this chapter, because to "prove" actually means "to show that X is true when X is not immediately evident and needs something else to establish whether it is the case or not."

All I have done is *show* the truth of what is immediately evident by pointing out what it is we are talking about and indicating that if one denies it, one has asserted it. That's not a proof, because the facts I enumerated just above are self-evident facts (and therefore need no other facts to prove them), and in fact would be *presupposed* in the proof, because you would have to know that the facts you allege to "prove" them are what they are and not what they're not (the Principle of Identity), and so on.

But because in the history of philosophy since Galileo, people have gotten more and more involved in complicated theories that seem eminently reasonable and deny various of these self-evident truths, it turns out that it is necessary in our skeptical age to show what a mess you get into when you deny them—how you are asserting what you are trying to deny.

So I'm not denying that something like the Principle of Contradiction can't be proved (how could you prove it without presupposing it?); but if people do in fact deny it and what they say sounds reasonable, then showing them that they're wrong is essential, it seems to me. Of course, they will counter, "You're not allowing me to have my own opinion!" No, I'm just pointing out to anyone *else* who isn't an idiot or pig-headed that your opinion just doesn't make sense. If that insults you, I'm sorry.



**Section 2**  
**Causality and the Method**





## Chapter 1

### Apparently contradictory situations

**A**t any rate, we now have a starting-place that seems to be more unassailable than Descartes' "I think therefore I am," because instead of using a "clear and distinct idea" as the criterion of certainty, our criterion is that the denial of what we have asserted involves the affirmation of it, so that even those who would disagree with it agree with it.

Unfortunately, Descartes' method was just as flawed as his starting-place; and so even though we have now got something more secure than he started with, we can't proceed to go on from here and "mathematically" deduce the universe; and as a matter of fact, we are going to move rather rapidly from absolute certainty to physical certainty.

Actually, the method in philosophy that I think will work is very close to (and is in fact a generalization of) scientific method; so that what you come up with is philosophical theories which are at least in principle (and often in practice) verifiable or falsifiable in the sense that other scientific theories are. We have already seen a hint of this at the end of the last chapter, where the theory that "knowing that I know" is due to a second act is falsified on the grounds that if you draw out the implications of it, you get into a worse contradiction than the apparent one that an act can know itself.

But it is well to be clear just what we are doing and why it works,

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and so now let us look at an application of the Principle of Contradiction.

Let us suppose that there is a situation where you have (or think you have) evidence on both sides of a contradiction. You know that there is no such thing, really, as a contradiction, and so there has to be something wrong about the evidence as it presents itself to you.

You wouldn't call this situation a contradiction, then, because you know that it really isn't a contradiction; still, it's peculiar, because *as far as you know*, it's a contradiction. "That's funny," you say.

Actually, being confronted with a contradiction is three different types of experiences, depending on the point of view you take toward it:

First of all, the situation is regarded as *comic* if you just notice this fact and it doesn't distress you or motivate you to find out how to make sense out of it. We laugh, basically, because we are *accepting* the world as nonsensical.

That is, for the thoroughgoing rationalist, there is no "funny-ha-ha," but only "funny-peculiar," because the rationalist can't simply *rest* on seeing that the facts of the world as they present themselves to him contradict each other. "I had my keys in my hands just a minute ago. Where could they have got to? They couldn't just have flown away. There has to be an explanation!" he will exclaim. The person who laughs will answer, "Well yes, I suppose there is one somewhere, but meanwhile, you should see the look on your face!"

A second attitude toward at least one type of "apparently real" contradiction is that of *suffering*, when you aren't particularly trying to straighten out the *intellectual* conundrum and find how the situation isn't really contradictory, but you think that things *ought not* to be this way.

The person without the keys, for instance, may very well not be interested in how the keys could have got out of his possession

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without his realizing it, but in the fact that he hasn't got his keys, and he needs his keys to get into his car and house and to keep others out. The solution to the problem that he dropped them twenty feet back and someone picked them up is not going to give him any satisfaction, because he is *evaluating* the situation, not trying to *understand* it.

But it is the third attitude that interests us here: *Curiosity is the attitude you have if you think that the real situation can't be that way and you begin look at the evidence to find out if you misread it somehow or if there's a fact missing which would straighten out the unintelligibility.*

It is in this sense that I take Aristotle's statement that is usually translated, "Philosophy begins in wonder." I would interpret it, "Science begins in curiosity."

That is, the scientist is not simply a person who wants to "know more"; there are all kinds of facts (for example outside their fields) for which scientists give the impatient response of Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson, "Very well, Watson, and now that I have heard it, I shall do my best to forget it," on the grounds that they don't want to clutter up their minds with information that's not relevant.

What focuses their attention? Curiosity. It isn't what they don't know that drives them into the laboratories; it's what they *do* know that doesn't make sense—and the conviction that things *have* to make sense.

Curiosity, then, implies a *problem*. But just to be completely clear about this, I should point out that **there are two kinds of problems: theoretical problems and practical problems.**

Both of these can be formulated as contradictions. The practical problem is of the form, "I intend to do X, but there is evidence indicating that I cannot do X." The theoretical problem is of the form, "There is evidence that X is the case, and also

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**evidence that X is not the case.”**

The most significant difference between the two is that the practical problem is not necessarily solvable; *but it is absolutely certain that the theoretical problem has a solution.* (Not necessarily that you can find it—that’s another practical problem—but that there is one somewhere.)

First of all, the reason why the practical problem might not have a solution is that we know, practically speaking, that we’re limited in our ability to do things. We don’t have a “problem” about whether we can walk to Jupiter, because we know that it’s simply out of the question; but there might be a problem about whether we can *somehow* get there, because with rockets and so on there’s reason to say that we can; but with the expense and the enormous mass of Jupiter to contend with (which would make us weigh much, much more than we weigh on earth), there might be no way it could actually be done.

But the situation is different with theoretical problems, because it is absolutely certain that there really aren’t any contradictions; and so either (a) the “evidence” on at least one side wasn’t actually a fact, or (b) there is some fact missing which, when found, would show that there is no real contradiction between the ones known at the moment.

For instance, the person who suddenly discovers that he doesn’t have his keys, and who treats this as a problem, is interested in the apparent contradiction implied in “I had them in my hand a minute ago” and “They aren’t there now.” The reason this appears as a contradiction to him is implied in the statement, “They couldn’t just have flown away”; and what that amounts to is this: “I had them in my hand a minute ago, and they didn’t get out of my hand (in any way that I know of); and so they are still there. But they aren’t there.”

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The reason the parentheses have to be there is that no one can accept the following: “I had the keys in my hand a minute ago and *in fact* they did not leave my hand; and so in fact they are still in my hand—and in fact they are not in my hand.” The first two statements (in the original formulation, but without the parentheses) *tend to the conclusion* that the keys are still in his hand, but he knows that the conclusion is false, and so he knows that the parentheses have to be there; one of the two premises (or the connection between them) is false.

The dilemma is obviously solvable if (a) he didn’t have the keys in his hand in the first place, and only thinks now that he remembers having them, (b) he inadvertently dropped them, (c) someone stole them from him, or (d) they self-destructed or vanished in some other way that he didn’t notice, or at least doesn’t remember now.

The first alternative isn’t intellectually interesting, because all it means is that there wasn’t really any evidence in favor of a contradiction. But, as can be seen from the example, it is perfectly possible (by asking others, for instance) to know that you had the keys; and by searching and so on you can also know that you don’t have them now; and once that happens, *it is certain that there is a fact that you do not know*. Furthermore, there may be ways to discover what that fact is.

Now I don’t want at this point to go into how this forms the basis of scientific method (which is precisely a way of finding such facts), because the way we are going to be using it is slightly different from the way the empirical sciences use it; and much later, in discussing the modes of thought, I will try to show how this little fact of being presented with evidence on both sides of a contradiction accounts neatly for all that scientists do.

For the moment, let me remark that when there *is* evidence on both sides of a contradiction, it is usually the case that one of the

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sides consists in a *logical conclusion* from facts already known (“They couldn’t have just flown away.”) This is why Thomas Kuhn has said that scientific advances come about from difficulties with “paradigms.” The scientist who is about to make a “breakthrough” is confronted with some fact that “doesn’t fit” what the scientific knowledge of the moment (based, of course, on the accepted theories) says *must* be the case. And the result, when “refinements” of the theory cannot be made to make sense out of the fact, is that the previous theory is scrapped and something devised that accounts for both (a) what it accounted for, and (b) the new fact.

Thus, the fact that light did not alter its apparent speed through the “aether” whether you were moving toward the light source or away from it did not “fit” with light’s being something traveling through a fixed medium; and what Einstein did with this was basically throw out the idea of there being any meaning to “the space” that light was traveling “through” as some kind of entity that was statically just there, and to see what happened if you just took the objects in question as the only real reference-points.

I would grant that most new theories in science come about because facts are discovered that don’t fit what the current theory says must be the case; but I don’t think that this would have to be true in all cases. It is quite possible that the scientist could find a set of facts that just don’t fit *together*, and either neither of them comes from a previous “mind-set” or both of them do, but they contradict each other. That is, I think that Kuhn was describing one (and perhaps the most common) way we get presented with evidence on both sides of a contradiction. But I think that what is relevant is that it is the *fact* that there is an apparent contradiction here, not how it arises; because even if it didn’t arise in Kuhn’s way, it would still generate scientific investigation.

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## Chapter 2

### Effects

In any case, let us take our theoretical problem and look at it carefully.

**An *effect* is the set of all information—and only that information—*directly relevant* to an apparently contradictory situation.**

This is rather carefully defined for reasons we will go into shortly. For now, simply note that we have just changed the terminology; what we were calling a “theoretical problem” we are now calling an “effect.”

The reason, of course, why it is legitimate to call a theoretical problem an “effect” is that effects are what have causes, and the cause “accounts for” or “explains” or is “the reason for” the effect. This ordinary way of thinking clearly implies that an effect doesn’t make sense by itself and needs the cause to make sense out of it—which, of course, means that the effect, taken by itself (without the cause) would be nonsense, or a contradiction. And this is just exactly what our “theoretical problem is”: a “contradiction-*unless...*”

In fact, you might say that this was the original notion of effect, in Plato and Aristotle, since what is translated “cause” is in Greek *aitia*, which means “what is demanded,” and, as Aristotle mentions, is the answer to the question “Why?”



He also points out that not every question that sounds like a “why-question” is a real “why-question.” When the “reason” is a definition, the question was really a “what-question” in disguise. For instance (to put it in modern terms), if you ask, “Why is blue blue and not green?” and you answer, “Because it is electromagnetic radiation of this particular wave length and not that one,” you are not really giving the *reason* blue is blue, you are simply saying *what blue is* as opposed to green.

In fact, there is *no* reason why blue is blue, because it is simply a fact; and facts as such are intelligible (and therefore don’t need reasons for them, or explanations).

So the first thing we can note about an effect is this:

**Conclusion 1: A single fact of itself cannot be an effect: there must be at least two facts in conflict in order for there to be an effect.**

That is, there must be something to make the mind say, “This cannot be the case, because it contradicts itself,” and which motivates a search for the missing information. You don’t have a problem unless you have facts that fight each other, each indicating that the other is not a fact.

Thus, we must be careful in asking “why-questions” or thinking in terms of effects and causes. “*Why* is there something rather than nothing?” is supposedly a question that has bothered philosophers for centuries; but what is it about “There is something” that would lead one to say “There *ought* to be nothing,” or “I have evidence to say there *is* nothing.”

To put it another way, you can retort to the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” by simply asking, “Why shouldn’t there be?” and the original poser of the question has no

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reply. There is *no* reason, perhaps, why there *shouldn't* be nothing at all; but there is no reason why there *should*, either; there is precisely no *reason* for this fact either way. Hence, the question is an idle one.

Note that (as we will show) it is *not* idle to ask, "Why is it that there is *more than one* something?" This is legitimate, because it can be shown that if there are two realities, each of them is reality, and yet they are different from each other (implying either that they contain "non-reality" which makes each different, or that the "reality" in one case both is and is not the same as the other). Here there is a *conflict* in what is known. Whether the conflict is due simply to misreading the evidence or there is real evidence is something we will spend a good deal of time on; but the point is that, though there being something-or-other makes sense by itself and needs no cause, there being more than one something at least seems not to make sense, and hence is a problem and needs a solution.

So to demand reasons or causes for *everything* is to misunderstand what is going on when we demand a reason for *anything*; and if we are going to do philosophy and not just wander off in an apparently profound intellectual fog, we had better get this straight from now on.

To those of a religious turn of mind, who think of God as "the cause of everything," and who are afraid that what I have just said is just a way of introducing atheism by poisoning the wells of any rational investigation into God, then I simply retort, "If you say that God is the cause of everything because 'everything has to have a cause,' then what is the cause of God?" Not even those who *say* they think that "everything has to have a cause" really think so; because if it were true, then every cause would have to have a cause, and there could be no causeless cause. And since, as Kant pointed out in one of his antinomies, the effect is not explained unless *all* the causes are given, then no effect is explained, and hence nothing has an

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explanation; which means that if everything has to have a cause, nothing at all in fact has a cause.

There are things people do to circumvent this inconvenient conclusion; but my point is that even if it could be circumvented, you have *no reason* for saying, “Everything has to have a cause.” The fact that it “stands to reason” because everything *we directly experience* is unintelligible by itself does not allow us to make the leap and say that absolutely everything is unintelligible by itself. And, of course, as I said, those who use this as a “premise” contradict it in fact once they get to what they call “God,” because they don’t demand a cause for *that* something.

Therefore, in order to be able to talk about an effect, you have to be able to show that there are facts that are in conflict.

But in order for something to be an effect, it must also be the case that the conflict is *not* due to misreading of one or both of the facts. That is, that kind of “problem” we saw dealing with the keys, where the person didn’t in fact have them and only thought he had them, is not an *effect*, it is a *mistake*. There isn’t any *cause* for his problem as such because there wasn’t any problem to begin with; he only thought he had one. If you will, the *problem* in his quandary is that it *seemed to him* that he had conflicting evidence when in fact he didn’t; and the cause of *this* problem was his faulty memory; but the problem *as he formulated it* didn’t exist, and so was not an effect needing a cause.

We will see, beginning in the next section, that one of the practical difficulties in metaphysics is in making sure that the problem confronting us is an effect and is not a pseudo-problem analogous to the keys. We have to show that there is *real evidence* on both sides of the contradiction

Of course, having said this, I have to add that the evidence, while it must be real, cannot be *conclusive* on both sides, or there would be a real contradiction, and this is impossible. There has to be a way out

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of the dilemma somehow, and so there has to be room for a missing piece of information which can straighten out the conflict in what is (at the moment) known.

This leads to another fact worth observing about effects:

**Conclusion 2: A situation is an effect because not all the information is known.**

Obviously, if the facts known were all the facts there were, there would be a contradiction; and this is precisely what cannot be accepted. That is, the man who says, "I had these keys in my hand a minute ago, and they didn't just fly away, and they're not there now" is aware that there's some fact that accounts for how the keys got out of his hand without his realizing it, which fact he does not now know. Otherwise the keys would be in his hand while they are not in his hand.

Hence, you could say that we experience an effect *only due to our ignorance of the whole situation*. If we were omniscient, nothing would be an effect and nothing would need explaining, because we would see the "missing fact" which made sense out of the effect, and there would be no problem. For instance, if the man *noticed* the thief lifting the keys from his hand, then he wouldn't consider the missing keys an *effect*, because he would understand how the keys got out of his hand.

There aren't, then, any effects (in our sense of the term) in reality, because of course the real situation is complete and contains the cause, and so the real situation makes sense.

Nevertheless, there are things that *really depend* on other things, and so there is a sense in which we can talk about "real effects." For instance, if the thief took the keys, his action explains why the keys are not in the man's hand now, even if the man knows he took them.

That is, the man *would have* the keys in his hand if the thief had not taken them, and, given this plus the fact that he doesn't have them, this can be called an effect whose cause is the thief's action.

What is being done here? In fact, in talking about such "real dependence," a person is *making an abstraction* from some aspect of (what he knows to be) the real situation, and saying "*Without this aspect, the remaining part of the situation would be a contradiction.*" This "remaining" part (the effect) is then treated *as if* the cause were non-existent or unknown in order to show the "dependence."

To put this another way, the only way "X depends on Y" makes any sense is to say "Without Y, X is impossible" in one respect or another; and of course the precise respect in which X would be impossible is the respect in which it is an effect of Y. But "to be impossible" means that it can't exist in the way it exists, and the only way we can *know* that something *can't* exist is that there's a contradiction of *some sort* involved in saying that it does exist. The upshot of this is that you can't show that X depends on Y without showing *the respects in which X would be a contradiction without Y*, which, of course, is saying the same thing as "Suppose Y were not there; X would then contradict itself<sup>16</sup>."

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<sup>16</sup>Of course, the usual notion of "effect" is this "dependence" notion, in the sense that the effect is what is somehow "produced by" its cause. What I was trying to show here is that, looking at the effect *itself*, we know that it is "produced by" something when we know that it couldn't be what it is without the cause. Ordinary knowledge, then, looks at the situation from cause (the "producer") to effect (the "product"), which is legitimate in most cases.

But first of all, my way of looking at effects is more general, because a given situation might be impossible-in-itself without there being a real agent that *does* something to it. For instance, the conclusion of a syllogism is "caused by" the arrangement of the premises; but they don't actually *generate* the conclusion (they merely *imply* it); but it *is* the case that the conclusion would not be known to be true if the premises were false or not arranged in the proper way. So my view of "effect"

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You have mentally removed Y from the situation, and left yourself with evidence for a contradiction.

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applies to *all* cases where something “needs” something else in order to be what it is and not just those cases in which it is known to *have been acted on* by something.

Secondly, note that I am “deriving” the notion of effect (and cause, as we will see shortly) from the Principle of Contradiction, only in this sense: It is not a logical *conclusion* of the Principle, but a recognition that our incomplete view of reality can sometimes make it *appear* that the Principle does not hold in this case, while we know with absolute certainty that it does.

Ayn Rand tries to derive causality from the Principle of Identity, making the leap from saying “A is A” to saying that “A being acts according to its nature,” (since its “nature” is defined as “the source of its activity”). But this has several difficulties. First of all, if it is *in fact* a logical implication of the way “nature” is defined here, then it is just trivially tautologous, and all it says is “When this being acts in this way, it acts in this way,” and there is *no possibility* that anything could be “unnatural,” whether in the world of matter or human conduct. When a person chooses to violate his humanity, for instance, he does what he does, and this is not (by her definition) an “unnatural” act; it is just as “natural” as any other, because A is A. Similarly, the baby born with four legs recently was just as “natural” as any other birth by this definition, since what it is is what it is. In other words, the words “natural” and “unnatural” now have no meaning. Also, you can’t get to “a being *acts according* to its nature” from A is A, because all “A is A” says is that a being *is what it is*, and says nothing about what it *does*. As Kant would say, the proposition “X acts according to its nature” is *synthetic*, not analytic (tautologous), because information is *added* when you move from “X is what it is” to “X does what it does,” and you presuppose still more information when you add “What it does is according to its nature” (you at least add “the source *consistently* results in its actions,” which of course is one way of looking at the Principle of Causality, and is something *additional* to and *different* from merely saying “A is A.”

My view is, as I said, not an *analysis* of the Principle of Contradiction, but supposes the *additional* fact beyond the Principle that our lack of knowledge of the whole situation can *seem* to violate the Principle—but since the Principle is absolutely and universally true, we know that it has not *in fact* been violated, and the “cause” of this is that our knowledge is incomplete. That is, the fact that we have evidence that there is a contradiction here, (while we know from the self-evidence of the Principle that there is *not* a contradiction here) is an *effect*, whose cause in this case is that we don’t know all the facts. Since this is so, as I will say shortly, we know that there *has* to be an additional fact which resolves the contradiction.

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Hence, even when we *in fact know* both the effect and its cause, we think of the situation as a cause-effect situation because we are pretending to view the effect without the cause and showing how the cause is necessary to the intelligibility of the effect.

All this is by way of saying that the effect is *not* something concrete; it occurs because of *our way of thinking about things*, where we either don't know or ignore certain aspects of the concrete situation.

Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that there is not real dependence, and things just “are, side by side.” It is certainly true, supposing that the keys were taken by a thief, that their non-presence depends on his taking them. But the “dependence” is not a “something” in the sense of an object; it is a *fact about* the two objects, and is not itself an object known—a reality in its own right. That way would lead to Plato's Forms. We will learn considerably later that facts, which are the way we know objects, are not themselves objects or realities; we know about realities in a *way* that is not itself a reality.

This is very mysterious, and the reason for it will be apparent later. But for now, what it says can be illustrated by a simple example or two: If it is a fact that the unicorn I am imagining is not real, then is the *unreality* of the unicorn the *reality* which I know? If it is a fact that you are not me, is the *reality* the “not-me-ness” in you, or the “not-you-ness” in me, or the “real relation” of not being each other “between” us—or are the only realities involved you and me, and your not being me is just a *fact* about these realities and is not a reality itself?

That is, if you make facts some kind of “reality,” then you make it impossible to say what you mean by reality, because you've got unreal or semi-real realities, and then the Principle of the Excluded Middle goes out the window.

So basically, when you say that one object really depends on

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another, what you mean is not that the “dependence” is a something-or-other “out there” on a par with the objects, but that *it is true* (or is a fact) that the objects depend on each other. In this case, you are considering the objects *in the way in which you know them*, and saying that there is something about at least one of them which would be self-contradictory without the other, or which would not exist as it exists without the other.

David Hume noticed this fact, I think, that the “dependence” of the effect on the cause was not a “something” which you actually observed, but had to do with your way of *thinking* about the two objects; but he drew the wrong conclusion from it. That it is obvious that he drew the wrong conclusion was that he *felt compelled to explain why* we still persist in thinking about “dependence” and “cause and effect” even though we observe no dependence as such. He said we just get into the habit of noticing the first event (the one on which the other “depends”) and then the second; and so the first leads us to expect the second, and so we think there is some “real relation” between the two when in fact there isn’t.

The problem with this explanation is that it is an attempt to show how *our notion of real dependence really* depends on *habit*, not some “real dependence.” That is, Hume is trying to show the relation between noticing sequences and expecting the second, and our thinking in terms of cause and effect and supposing that there is real dependence. But of course if there is not a *real* dependence of our notion of cause-and-effect thinking on this habit we get into of noticing sequences, his “explanation” is just so much palaver, and accounts for nothing. So Hume is begging the question. If his theory is valid, then it gives the *real* cause for cause-and-effect thinking; but what it purports to establish is that there are *no* real causes. So if it is valid, it is false.

Of course, it is also true that if his theory were valid, then every



invariable sequence in our experience would set up an “X is the cause of Y” idea. And since day always follows night, then we would necessarily think that night causes day<sup>17</sup>, or roads cause automobiles, or that robins cause the spring to come.

But what Hume *did* notice is that in the real world “by itself” there aren’t causes and effects; in the real world *as we know it*, however, there are; but the effects are effects because we *abstract from* some aspect of the real world to consider them as such. Effects are abstractions, not objects. Not that they are *false*; they are just *incomplete ways of knowing* or looking at the real, concrete situation. An incomplete view of something is only *false* if you take it to be the complete view; and anyone who is considering an effect knows precisely that it is *not* all there is to the concrete situation.

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<sup>17</sup>I was at a meeting of a philosophical society once where I pointed this out, and a Humean in the audience said, “Well it does; the passing of the night causes the day.” I countered, “Nonsense; the sun (which appears *after* the dawn) causes the day.” He held to his position, however. I suppose he was “comfortable” with it; but I pity his students.

## 2: Effects

### Chapter 3

#### Effects and what is affected

**B**ut this fact of an effect's being an incomplete way of knowing or considering the actual, concrete reality leads me now to make a distinction which will turn out to be helpful in a careful investigation:

**An *effect* (as I said above) is the set of all information—and only that information—*directly relevant* to an apparently contradictory situation.**

***What is affected* is the concrete object or set of objects that contain the effect, but which have additional properties *not relevant* to the effect as such.**

This distinction will serve to point up the abstract nature of the effect, and also show one of the first things you have to do in noticing a peculiar situation you want to find the cause of: *separate out* (at least mentally) *the effect from what is affected*. Failure to do this can result in all kinds of confusion.

Let me first try to be clear about what the distinction is: What is affected is *not* the cause of the effect; it is just *the way the effect*

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*concretely appears*, in all of the irrelevant trappings. It's what *has* the problem, in other words, not precisely what the problem *is*.

In the case of the keys, the person who finds the keys missing, when he made this discovery, the look on his face, how many keys there were, what they looked like, even the fact that they are keys, etc., etc., are part of *what is affected*, but they have nothing to do with the *effect*, which is that something was known to be somewhere, didn't leave by itself, and is known afterwards not to be there. That is, the problem is how an object can remove itself without being noticed. The point is that all of the properties of what is affected listed above could be different and the effect would be the same; for example, if the keys had been a wallet, the problem of its getting away without being noticed would not be any different.

That's one way to formulate the effect. Notice, however, that you could formulate it in such a way that what is (under the previous formulation) part of what is affected comes into the effect itself. For instance, the problem is slightly different if one asks how something *in a person's hand* can apparently vanish without being noticed, then obviously the fact that the keys are in the person's hand is relevant to the effect as such. You might also be curious as to how *John* could have missed the keys, in which case the characteristic of John as being particularly careful about things like keys in his hand would be relevant to the effect now, and not simply part of what is affected.

But how is it the effect can be "formulated" in all these different ways? Simply because you are not really looking at *the same effect*. We will see the implications of this shortly, but what I want to point up here is that the effect is *abstract* and is *created as such* by noticing certain facts, which are in conflict. Any given concrete situation can generate a great number of conflicting facts, simply by picking them out.

Yes, but what is the *real* effect in the case of the missing keys? There is no answer to this question, because the effect is an

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abstraction from the concrete situation, and of course an abstraction (which means noticing this and not paying attention to that) depends on who is doing the abstracting, not on the concrete reality. One person might not even see an effect, because he knows the keys were there and that they are not there, and he is not interested in the fact that John didn't realize how they got away from him. "So the keys are somewhere else. So what?" he says. Another is interested in the problem in physics of how keys, which are not alive, can move from one place to another. Someone else finds it interesting to consider how something can get out of a hand that had hold of it; while John, doubtless, wonders how, with all his care, he could have let the keys get away from him.

*All* of these are real effects, because none of them depend on misreading the evidence; but they are all *different* effects, because the conflicts in question are between different aspects of what is affected. They are *not* different formulations of "the same effect"; they are precisely *different problems*, and hence different effects. The effect is just exactly the problem you find in the existing situation (what is affected).

And notice that these different problems have different solutions. I am going to show this now in the examples, and then prove below that it must necessarily be the case. In the case of the effect of a non-living being's moving from one place to another, the effect is that non-living beings can't initiate their own movement, and this non-living being moved. Hence, the solution (the missing fact) is that *something moved it*. In the case of the fact that the keys were in the hand, the effect is that a hand grasping something keeps that something and the keys got out; and here the solution is that *something released the grasp*. Note that this solution is compatible with John's letting go or with someone or something's prying apart his fingers. Either of these would fit within the general solution. In the case of John's not noticing even though he is careful of such

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things, the solution is that *something distracted his attention*.

Before we move on, let us note that it is sometimes helpful to redefine the effect into a different (and more refined) one so that the solution can be more refined. For example in the case of the keys getting out of the grasping hand, it may be that one would reexamine the situation to find out if there was a time when *John himself* opened his hand; and if it can be established that he didn't, then something or somebody must have pulled the keys out from his still grasping fingers. Or you could combine this with the effect of John's being careful and reexamine all the times when he was explicitly noticing his keys and when something else important was happening to find when the removal could have taken place—and so on.

Actually, what I have been describing is the first step in scientific method: *observation*. What “observation” in this scientific sense means is **noticing all the aspects of what is affected that are relevant to the effect in question, and removing from consideration all aspects that are not part of the effect**. It is being precise about just exactly what the effect is, and separating it out from what is affected.

This is by no means easy to do; and in fact there are almost bound to be aspects of the effect that elude one's notice. In fact, scientific “prediction” is based precisely on this. When a scientist formulates a theory that solves a given problem, he then “predicts” from his solution what *other* hitherto unnoticed aspects of the situation have to be really there, because they logically follow from his solution.

For instance, when Einstein solved the problem of the non-variation of the speed of light, he did so by means of a “warping” of the space (the path of motion) around massive objects. But if the path of motion (i.e. motion as such) around a massive object is really warped, then light (which travels in straight lines) would travel in a

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curved path when it passed near a massive object, even though it has no “mass” in the ordinary sense of physics—simply because it is the path itself (the “straight line”) which is curved. So his theory predicted this as a fact, and it was later observed to be a fact.

All this really meant was that there was part of the effect (which was how things moved in relation to each other) which nobody had noticed, and of which the warping of space-time by massive objects was the solution.

The point here is that it does not follow that you will notice *all* the relevant aspects of the effect you are concentrating on at the time you notice the effect; but it is obviously to your advantage to find out as many as you can, because slight differences in formulating “the effect” turn out to be formulations of different effects, and the different problems can lead to different (even if interrelated) solutions.

For instance, if you notice that bodies fall down and not sideways, you would be inclined to think (with Aristotle) that it is because they are heavy, and this attracts them to the earth. This is true, by the way. If you notice (with Galileo) that bodies of very different weights fall equally quickly, you might conclude (falsely) that their weight has nothing to do with it<sup>18</sup>. If you combine Aristotle and Galileo (with Newton), you find that in fact falling bodies *do* fall at different speeds if the bodies they are falling *to* are different in weight (i.e. mass, so that the product of the two masses differs) or the distances away from

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<sup>18</sup>Actually, according to Newton, their weight (mass) *does* have something to do with it. But by his equation, the acceleration depends on the force (of gravity), and *that* depends directly on the masses of *both* the object and the earth. But the equation works out in such a way that the acceleration remains constant no matter what the mass of the falling body. But, as we now know (from relativity theory), Newton’s solution to the problem was in fact wrong.

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these objects are different. And so on.

Note that Galileo's effect is solved by Newton in that the bodies of different masses were all dropped or rolled from (practically) the same height toward the same object (the earth). The three effects are interrelated, or nested inside each other, so to speak; and so the solutions to the problems are also interrelated. I am not going to bring Einstein into this, because what Newton failed to notice is complicated enough so that the technicalities of describing it would mask what I am trying to say.

Science can advance and not simply repudiate what went before because more refined formulations of the effects lead to different solutions (theories of what the cause actually is), in which one can see the solution to the previous effect embedded as a kind of special case which occurs when certain aspects of the more refined effect are ignored.

It's not as simple as all this, of course; but the general lines of scientific advance do come from noticing different aspects relevant to what is affected and bringing them in to the formulation of a new (and generally more complex) effect; and this new formulation demands a new solution.

I stress here, however, that even though these different formulations are different effects, they are *real effects* and really different. Their abstractness and the arbitrariness of which one you pick out does *not* mean that they are *false*. What is incomplete is only false if you take it as complete. As long as there *are* facts in conflict, there really is an effect, irrespective of the fact that which facts you pick out of what is affected will determine which effect you are talking about.

The **first step** in our method of metaphysics, then, will be this:  
**Give an exact formulation of the effect to be investigated.**

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In one sense, this will be no different from the first step in scientific method; but in another sense, it is the polar opposite. What is meant by “exact” in science is “detailed,” and the more specifically the effect is formulated, the better. But since we will be dealing with reality as such (even whether there *is* a “reality as such”), then the effects we formulate will be *in the most general terms*.

For instance, if you take the falling body example above, the physicist would be interested in the fall with its direction and speed, and so on; and so his effect would be, “How is it that a non-living body begins to move toward the center of the earth and changes its rate of motion at the rate of 32 feet per second every second?”

The metaphysician would be interested in the question, “How is it that the same thing can be still the same thing and yet different in some respect?” (How can a given thing change *in any way* if it is *this* thing which changes?)

Obviously, the falling of the body (if it is a real change and not simply an apparent one) would be a special case of the metaphysical question; and so the solution would be a special case of the solution of the metaphysical question.

To the scientist who says, “But your question is completely silly and uninteresting; everybody knows that things change,” I answer, “And *your* question to a non-physicist is also completely uninteresting; everybody knows that things fall down<sup>19</sup>.”

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<sup>19</sup>In this connection, I remember something that happened to me when I was an editorial assistant on *Sky and Telescope*, and had received a fellowship to continue studying for my doctorate in philosophy. One of the other editors asked me, “What will you be studying?” and I answered “Being as such.” “What use is that?” they said, looking at me as if I had two heads. Shortly afterward, an amateur astronomer wrote in to the magazine (while everybody but I was off in California at a convention) saying that he thought he had detected a supernova on some distant galaxy. I reported it to the editor-in-chief, who became all excited and had the Lick observatory turn its

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It is not whether a person is *interested* in a given effect that determines whether it is a “real” effect or not; it is whether there are facts really in conflict. What defines the various sciences, in fact, is which set of effects interests people enough so that they are motivated to find the solutions.

The person who finds a given effect “uninteresting” because “everybody knows that...” is simply considering the effect as a *fact*, not a set of facts in conflict. That is, it is a fact that things change; but this fact *contains* the unintelligibility that (a) the thing which changes is in some sense the same thing (or it was replaced by something else and did not change) and it is in some sense not the same thing (or it stayed the same). Or it is a fact that things fall down, and at the speed the physicists so carefully measure. But this fact contains the unintelligibility that (a) their mass makes them fall, and (b) their mass makes no difference to how fast they fall.

If you notice the fact, then as a fact it makes sense somehow, and you don’t have to bother with how it makes sense; it is only if you notice it *as* an effect that it bothers you and you want an explanation of it.

Thus, scientists can never hope to motivate people to become scientists unless they can disturb their complacency by making the world appear not just as a set of facts, but as a set of conundrums, and disturbing them and bothering them to try to make sense out of what does not appear to make sense.

And scientists are doing themselves a disservice when they

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100-inch telescope on the galaxy immediately, because it was possible that several hundred million years ago, a star in that bunch had blown up (it turned out that it was a false alarm). The whole astronomical world was turned inside out for some hours on this possibility of an event that was all over millions of years before anyone on earth was born—and they were asking *me* what use *my* subject was!

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pooh-pooh the effects noticed by others, saying that they are “uninteresting, because everybody knows that...” They are undermining their own discipline by sharing the obscurantist attitude of stifling curiosity by simply noticing the *fact* and ignoring the peculiar nature hiding within the fact noticed.

The point of effects is that if we can find one—*any* one—then we know that our knowledge is incomplete; there is some fact we do not (at the moment) know which will solve the problem; and so our knowledge can advance.

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## Chapter 4

### Explanations

We have been talking in passing about causes, but have mainly been referring to “the solution” of an effect. It is time to make some more definitions:

**To *explain* is to state as a possible fact something which makes some other set of facts not a real contradiction.** Another verb that means the same thing as “to explain” is “to account for.”

That is, explanations deal with effects, and “make sense” out of them. The set of facts which is the effect-plus-its-explanation is now not a contradictory set of facts—*provided* the explanation actually *is* a fact.

Before getting into the implications of this “possibleness,” let me refute the silliness that has come from people like Auguste Comte, who wanted to distinguish science from “metaphysics” and “speculation” by saying that the “metaphysical” way of thinking looks for “causes” behind things, whereas science is only looking for “laws,” or invariant ways in which things act. Science, in this view, is not interested in *why* things happen, but in *how* they happen; it simply describes and does not explain.

In spite of the fact that this view is still held by the vast majority of scientists, it is complete rubbish. Science, among other things, is *predictive*, and *the fact* that things have happened this way so far *gives you no grounds for expecting* that they will happen this way ever again.

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This was one of Hume's points about his view of "cause," in fact.

That is, does *the mere fact* that the sun has always risen in the morning allow you to say that it *will* keep rising in future mornings? Does the fact that so far you have waked up every morning allow you to say that you will keep waking up every morning forever?

Obviously, the two are different. But if "laws" are simple *descriptions* of what has always happened up to now (or even what has usually happened up to now), then the two "laws" above are on an equal footing, and we could formulate all sorts of "laws" that we know have no predictive value. No human being has blown up the planet in all the millennia of our existence; therefore, we have nothing to worry about from nuclear war. And here's one that has nothing to do with human beings: The earth has never yet been hit by an asteroid big enough to destroy it; and so it never will be.

Now then, what gives laws of the scientific type their predictive value, and makes events that have always happened in a certain way so far have no or little predictive value? Obviously, it is because in the first case, you know something *about* what has "always happened this way so far" that allows you to say, "Well, it hasn't just always happened this way so far, it always *happens* this way, because it *has* to happen this way; and so it will *keep* happening this way."

But the only possible way you could say this is on the grounds that if it *doesn't* "keep happening this way," whatever it is you know about the thing in question is *contradicted*. Or in other words, the prediction is on the basis of the fact that the occurrence of the event in the future is the *effect* whose *explanation* lies somewhere in the thing that's acting.

That is, we can predict that the sun will rise in the future, because we know that the explanation of its rising in the past is the rotation of the earth, and there aren't any brakes out there that would stop the earth from rotating. We can't predict that we will keep waking up forever because we know that our body is such that eventually it will

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run down.

So “laws” are “laws” only if, lurking somewhere in the “description” is an explanation showing why this is a law and not an accident: why it *makes sense* to say that what’s always happened this way will continue to happen this way in this case (given that not everything that has “always happened this way” will continue to happen in this way).

Besides, in point of fact, science is always talking about unobservable “entities” of one sort of another, like electrons, photons, gravity, the libido, the gene, and so on; and as Carl Hempel showed in the 1950s in *The Theoretician’s Dilemma*, attempts to replace them with “sets of observations” got you into impossibilities.

So yes, science deals with explanations, not with “descriptions.” It has to. If it’s solving problems (as every scientist says he is doing) then by definition it’s giving explanations, not simply “describing the way things are.”

Having got that out of the way, we can formulate the **First Rule of Explanation**:

**An explanation cannot leave any aspect of the effect unaccounted for.**

The reason for this, of course, is that if it does, it is not the explanation of *that* effect, because some of the effect remains a contradiction (and therefore by definition doesn’t make sense); and the explanation is supposed (also by definition) to make sense of the effect.

That sounds trivial, but if you add to it that you might not have noticed all the aspects of the effect you are trying to explain, it is quite possible that your explanation might “fit” all the aspects that you were aware of and still not explain the effect you thought you were explaining.

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For instance, Newton's Theory of Universal Gravitation explains not only falling bodies but why things like planets *don't* fall and move in orbits. Since it is mathematical, it also predicts what those orbits have to look like. Unfortunately, at the beginning of this century, very accurate observations of the planet Mercury showed that the orbit of Mercury was not what Newton's explanation of planetary motion said it was (another way of saying this is, as I mentioned, that Newton's "prediction" of what Mercury's orbit would be was off)<sup>20</sup>. That is, there was a tiny aspect of Mercury's orbit that *didn't make sense* on Newton's explanation of orbital motion; and so *his explanation of orbital motion was false*. Relativity theory, which explains all that Newton's gravitation theory explained *plus* this aspect of Mercury's orbit, has since supplanted Newton's theory.

Let me now define another term: ***Speculation is thinking of an explanation for an effect.***

The "step" that scientific method calls "hypothesis" is actually speculation. Science likes to think of this step as "finding" a possible "hypothesis" that implies the "set of events" in question (i.e. a statement of the form "If <hypothesis> then <effect>.")

But you can't "find" explanations as if they were "there" someplace waiting for you. If you could, then obviously the

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<sup>20</sup>If you want to know what it is, it is the "advance in the perihelion of the planet's orbit." That is, as Mercury goes around in its elliptical orbit, there is one point in that orbit that is closest to the sun (the perihelion). The orbit, however, itself "precesses," or turns around the sun, as when a spinning top as it tips not only spins but begins to move in a circle. The amount of this precession was predicted by Newton's equations, and it turns out that observations proved that the perihelion was not advancing at the rate predicted—even though the error was so small as not be observed until the twentieth century.

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explanations you found would *have* to be facts. But to take Newton's Gravitation Theory as an example, if he had "found" the force of gravity as an explanation of falling bodies and orbits, it would not be the case (as we now know) that there *is* no force of gravity, but a warping of space-time. That is, his explanation wasn't something he *discovered*; he *made it up*.

Scientific method is actually a way of checking to see whether this explanation you have dreamed up is actually a fact or not; you have to "experiment" to see if it "fits the facts observed" and then "predict new facts" from it and check to see if *they* are facts; and so on.

It is not our purpose here to follow this checking process, because our method is going to be rather different. I simply want to point out that science in practice recognizes that "forming a hypothesis" is speculation, whatever it chooses to call it.

The problem with speculation is that, since it just expresses what is *possibly* a fact, which logically would imply the effect in question, then (because of the logic involved, which I don't want to go into in any detail here) *there are an infinity of explanations for any effect*.<sup>21</sup>

*Pure* speculation satisfies itself when it has a possible fact that does account for the effect in question. But science, though it uses speculation, is not satisfied with pure speculation. The reason is obvious: The effect in question by itself is a contradiction; but there are no real contradictions; therefore, *there is a fact* which explains it.

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<sup>21</sup>For those who simply need to know, then briefly, statements of the form "If X then Y" can argue validly from X to Y, or from not Y to not X, but it is a logical fallacy to argue from Y to X. That is, it logically follows that if Chicago is in Illinois, and I am in Chicago, then I am in Illinois; or alternatively if I am not in Illinois, then I am not in Chicago either. But it obviously does not follow that if I am in Illinois, then I am (or am not) in Chicago. The attempt to "argue" to the cause, then, from the effect is a case of arguing from being in Illinois to being in Chicago, and is logically invalid.

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That is, *one* of the infinity of explanations is the *true* one, and there *has* to be a true explanation (one that is actually the case) or the effect is a real contradiction which only *could have* but doesn't actually *have* anything that makes sense out of it.

So science is not interested in speculation as what *could* account for the effect in question, but in speculation as a means of getting at whatever *in fact does* account for the effect. And this is why it uses all these devices like experiments and verifying predictions to check to see how likely it is that the hypothesis speculated about is the fact that actually does do the job of making sense out of the effect that was noticed.

In ordinary life, we are not satisfied with pure speculation either. To go back to the example of the keys, John would not be satisfied with, "You probably dropped them somewhere," and might answer, "Well, I might have, but were they stolen?" Either of these explains how the keys got to be missing; but which of them actually occurred can make a big difference. For one thing, if John dropped them, he can retrace his steps with a hope of finding them; if they were stolen, his house might be in danger of burglary.

So now let me formulate the **Second Rule of Explanation:**

**Any serious explanation must devise some way of ruling out alternative explanations as not actually facts.**

How successfully you can do this, of course, lifts what you say down from the ivory tower of speculation into the real world of facts.

Note that it does not follow that the only way to go about this ruling-out process is that of the empirical sciences, however sound that process might be (and remember, it fooled people for over a century with Newton's Theory of Gravitation). But now that we know what scientific method is trying to do by its checking process, we need not treat it as Sacred Dogma. What we need (if we are going

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to be sensible) is *some* way of assuring ourselves that the explanation we come up with is the fact, and not one of the infinity of possible facts that might be the fact but isn't.

#### 4: Explanations

## Chapter 5

### Cause, causer, and the Principle of Causality

Now then:

The *cause* of a given effect is *the true explanation*: the one that is the fact. That's what it is, of course; and just defining it this way doesn't get you any closer to finding it.

But it is what science is looking for, obviously; and so Aristotle was right: science is the knowledge of things through causes<sup>22</sup>.

But I am now going to define two terms parallel to our "effect" and "what is affected" which will lead allow us to develop a method that is actually more secure than scientific method (because it is more trivial; but it will do nicely for our very general type of effect):

The *cause of a given effect is all and only what is necessary to explain the effect*. That is, the cause is another abstraction; it is *everything* without which the effect would still be a contradiction; but it contains *nothing but* this. So without a given property or characteristic of the cause, it wouldn't be able to do the job of explaining the effect in question, because in the "cause" as defined

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<sup>22</sup>Actually, what he meant by this phrase isn't exactly that, because the Greek word translated "science" really just means "factual knowledge," and what he meant by "cause" is close to but not the same as what I have defined above. However, when all is said and done, I think Aristotle would agree with what I have said and not regard this quotation as a travesty.

abstractly here, all the properties are necessary. And if there is something about the cause that isn't *necessary* for it to do its job, then this doesn't belong to this abstract sense of "cause" as we are defining it here.

If you consider the effect of the missing keys, then, depending on how you define the effect, the cause will be different—and you won't be able to say in the concrete what it is, though you might be able to know something about it.

If you define the effect as a non-living body's moving from one place to another when it can't move itself, then the cause would be just exactly those properties of *anything* that would be *necessary* to account for a non-living body's moving; but it would be *just* those properties, and anything else about what we would normally call the "cause" are left out (just as the concrete properties of what we normally call the "effect" belong to what is affected, not the effect). That is, suppose a thief stole the keys; the thief as *cause* of the keys as moving though not living is whatever about him can impart motion to something (the momentum in his hand) and the fact that this got into contact with the keys; everything else about him is not part of the cause of this particular effect, because nothing else is necessary to account for this particular problem.

Obviously, the thief has a lot more characteristics that just these two; but not one of them is relevant to the effect in question. But since the thief would ordinarily be called the "cause" of the motion in question, I want to give the "cause" in *this* sense a special name to distinguish it from the very precise, technical sense in which I am talking about the cause.

**The *causer* is the concrete object that is "doing the causing"; it is the concrete thing that contains the cause as an abstract aspect of itself.**

In other words, I am defining the "causer" as what most people

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would call the “cause.” I am doing so because what we are after is the true explanation of things that don’t make sense by themselves and irrelevant facts about the “cause” in the ordinary sense just get in the way: whether the thief had a moustache, whether he had malice aforethought or was brought up badly, whether he had indigestion when he did the thieving, and so on and so on. If you say that the *thief* is the “cause” of the removal of the keys, then you have all of this excess baggage that has nothing to do with the effect in question, and you cloud up your investigation with a whole lot of irrelevant details that if you aren’t careful are going to mislead you.

Furthermore, notice that *some aspects of the cause might not be in the causer*. The keys couldn’t have been moved by the momentum of the thief’s hand if they had been made of Jell-O, and just deformed as he grabbed them; so one of the facts *necessary* for the keys to be moved is whatever it is about *them* that makes them respond by movement and not being deformed or blowing up when acted on by the momentum. But this particular aspect of the cause is in what is affected, not the causer.

In what follows, it is going to be absolutely vital to understand this abstract sense of “effect” and “cause,” since we will be using it in this sense all the time, and not in the ordinary sense; and there are very important differences between the two.

One thing to note here is the relation between this abstract way of considering “cause” and “cause” in the sense of “the true explanation.” Very often, in explaining an effect, we are really interested in more than just the abstract cause; we want to know the causer, perhaps, and perhaps circumstances surrounding what is affected and its causer. For instance, John would want to know that he dropped the keys and where, rather than simply that something about the relaxation of his hands plus the gravitation of the earth explains how the keys got away. The fact that he dropped the keys five minutes ago and twenty feet behind where he now is isn’t

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actually *necessary* to explain their being missing, but concretely it is where and when this “relaxation plus gravity” occurred; and it is of interest to John, because he wants to find the keys again and not *simply* solve the theoretical problem.

Why, then, would anyone ever bother with “cause” in this very abstract sense? Simply because *in many cases, the causer is not observable*, either in practice or even in principle. What is the “true explanation” of the interference patterns of light, when there are also photoelectric emissions of electrons? That is, why does light “behave” like a particle and yet a wave? The answer cannot be discovered by finding the *causer* (the light) and examining it, because “photons” (units of light) are too small to be even in principle observable. Hence, *all* we can know about light in its relation to this effect is light as cause (in our sense) of the effect: that whatever it is, (a) it has all that is necessary to account for both “behaviors,” and (b) that, since we cannot see it “as it is in itself,” we can’t say anything *more* about it in relation to this effect without going beyond the only evidence available.

The point is that light, in relation to this and similar effects, is not like the dropping of the keys, where you could in principle see the whole situation, and if you saw it there would be no effect. That is, if John saw the keys drop, he would not *wonder* what happened to them, but would simply pick them up; there would be no problem. The only way there would be a “problem” (an effect) would be for him to mentally ignore the relaxation of his hands and gravity and consider that without this, the keys would have stayed in his hands. But with the particulate-wavelike behavior of light, there is no possibility of getting into a situation analogous to John’s; and so we have to content ourselves with what we know *must* be the case or the effect would be a contradiction; and we must be careful not to say any *more* than this, or we are merely saying something that *might* be true but could never be known to *be* true (because it couldn’t be

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checked) and we are in the realm of pure speculation, and aren't talking about the *cause* even in the sense of the "true explanation."

The point, of course, is that this abstract sense of "cause" is not always the most useful in actual investigations, depending on whether or not we can get at the causer and examine it. But (a) it is always, of course, *contained in* the "true explanation," since the true explanation will obviously have all that is *necessary* to do the explaining (though it will have more than that), and (b) there are times when nothing but "cause" in this sense will allow us to say anything at all about the true explanation.

Well, but *can* we say anything at all about the cause in this abstract sense, if we can't actually observe it? Certainly. If it can be shown that without some property or some fact about whatever accounts for the effect, the effect remains a contradiction, then this fact must be true of *any* causer (or belongs to the cause in our sense). For instance, light cannot simply be a small particle, or it couldn't interfere with itself; so whatever it is, at least this is true of it. That's not much, but it's something; and it may be that more facts like this can be found out by thinking carefully about these "conditions *sine qua non*" (which is what we are talking about is usually called).

One of the interesting—and perhaps historically rather important—things this abstract way of defining the terms allows us to do is to formulate the *Principle of Causality* in such a way that it is as obviously true as the Principle of Contradiction:

**Every effect has a cause.**

This is, as I say, self-evident once the terms are defined as above. An effect without its cause is a contradiction, and there are no such things as contradictions; the effect + its cause is not a contradiction; and so for every effect there is a cause.

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Note that this principle does not actually claim that there are such things as effects (that is, that anyone would ever actually get into a situation where the evidence available to him would form a contradiction); but *if* such a situation happens, then *there is a fact* which “resolves” the contradictoriness of the situation—either that, or the Principle of Contradiction is false.

So all this really is is an application of the Principle of Contradiction to the special case of finding what on the face of it *looks like* a contradiction in reality; and all it says is that it isn’t really one, and the evidence that it is is misleading you.

This is something else I don’t think I need to belabor.

Where the problem has come with the certainty of this Principle is in its various inexact formulations, where “effect” is taken in the kind of rough-and-ready sense that, “Well, everybody knows what an effect is,” and various aspects of what is affected get mixed up with it; and where “cause” is understood as what I defined “causer” to be above, and people made great leaps of logic beyond their evidence in attributing to the “cause” all sorts of properties that had no necessary connection to the effect that “it” was accounting for.

For instance, if you formulate the Principle as Kant did, “Every *event* has a cause,” you then have to show what it is about an event as an event that means that it can’t stand on its own. Kant said, basically, that since an event *begins* at a certain time, there must be something “before” it which allows you to experience it as “beginning” when there wasn’t any such thing before.

It sounds reasonable; except that he himself noticed that the heat of the fire’s “beginning” is really noticed simultaneously with the fire; and so he says the cause has to be “logically” before. Logically before *in time*? But then what do you do with the “event” of the dawn, which is the light of the sun—which will only appear quite a few minutes *later*. On the grounds of this notion of “event,” the “event” of the sunrise is caused by the dawn preceding it—which is

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obviously false. It is the (as yet unobserved) sun which is the causer of the light which we call “dawn.”<sup>23</sup>

And surreptitiously, Kant was actually using the Principle as I formulated it, because in describing an event as “beginning” and therefore as “beginning-after” which necessitates a “before,” he was actually trying to show *just what the contradiction is in thinking of an event without a cause*. Unfortunately, he hit upon the wrong thing about it.

Of course, this prevents Kant from using causality to explain things that are not temporal sequences, in spite of the fact that he is doing this all the time. What he called the “conditions for the possibility” of something is in fact what I defined as the “cause”; and he is constantly showing that without (for example) the *a priori* forms of space and time experience is impossible—which is another way of saying, isn’t it, that experience is an effect of the structure of our receptivity?

Hume’s “refutation” of causality that I mentioned a while back (that we don’t *observe* the “dependence”) was intended to *explain*, as I also mentioned, why we nevertheless tended to think in terms of cause and effect; and what this amounted to is that the *apparent contradiction* involved in not observing dependence and asserting a necessary connection nonetheless could be resolved by his notion of “customary sequence.” It doesn’t work, as I pointed out, any more than Kant’s refinement of it does. But the point I am making here is that he was *using* the Principle of Causality as I have stated it to *refute* the Principle as he misunderstood it because the terms had not

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<sup>23</sup>Of course, Kant’s formulation would also make “the first event” logically impossible, because by definition, as an *event* it has to have something *before* it. But why can’t you say that something is an event because it has something *after* it? That is, supposing there to be a first moment in time (the “big bang”), then it has meaning, not because it follows something, but because events follow *it*.

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been accurately defined.

Every philosopher has actually used the Principle of Causality as stated above, because every philosopher has argued that if his theory is not the case, then something-or-other couldn't be the way it is; or in other words, the something-or-other is "impossible-unless."

The fact that those who try to refute the Principle use the Principle as I have stated it is an indication that the formulation I gave it is the one which is the absolutely certain one. That is, once again we have our criterion for absolute certainty: You can tell that something is absolutely certain, not on the grounds that *you* have no doubt about it, or even on the grounds that *nobody around you* has any doubt of it, but on the grounds that *any denial of it surreptitiously affirms it*.

Hence, without further meandering through the landscape of the historical versions of effect and cause, let this suffice for a reason for holding the formulation of the Principle that I gave above, together with the definitions that make it tautologically evident.

## 5: Cause, causer, and the Principle of Causality

## Chapter 6

### Theorems about effects and causes

There are several conclusions we may draw that follow from the nature of effects and causes as we have so abstractly defined them; and since they are tautologically true because of the way the terms are defined, we might as well state them as theorems:

**Theorem I: The cause is outside the effect.**

Proof: The effect, by definition, is that which does not make sense, or is contradictory, taken by itself. The cause, by definition, is that which makes sense out of it. Since the effect is an abstraction (just a pair or set of facts), then if the cause is “contained within it,” it must be one of the facts that make up the effect. But if the cause is one of the facts that make up the effect, then what resolves the contradiction would be part of this “effect,” and the “effect” would then make sense, and so not be an effect. Q. E. D<sup>24</sup>.

When you put the proof like that, it is obvious; but still it is counter-intuitive, as when, for instance, I remember something I have forgotten. The fact was not conscious and is now conscious.

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<sup>24</sup> *Quod Erat Demonstrandum*: “[Which is] what had to be proved,” the traditional ending for the proof of a theorem in Euclidean geometry.

Nothing external reminded me of it. So my mind is the cause of its becoming conscious. But my mind is also what was not conscious of it and what is now conscious of it.

But my mind is *what is affected*, not *the effect*. The effect is *the emergence of something into consciousness without any external stimulus*. Whatever it is *about* the mind that is *capable* of reawakening past experiences without any external stimulus is the cause of the effect in question, and that, clearly is not part of the *problem*. The mind and the problem are both within *what is affected* (me), but the solution is not part of the problem.

So perhaps the theorem can be best understood if you think of the effect as just exactly the problem and nothing else, and the cause as just exactly the *fact* which solves it, and nothing else. So Spinoza's "cause of itself" which he applies to God is simple nonsense if "cause" is taken in the sense I have defined it. Anything which is self-intelligible ("self-explanatory") is not the *cause* of itself, but simply *not an effect at all*.

"Self-explanatory" actually has two senses. In the first, it means that there is nothing to explain; whatever it is makes sense without demanding something else for its intelligibility. Hence, it is neither effect nor cause, but *existing* as just a fact. Remember, I said that in order to have an effect (or need a cause) there had to be facts in conflict.

In a second sense, a complex object can be "self-explanatory" in that one aspect of the object can be the cause and another aspect be the effect. In this case, the causer contains the effect within it, as was the case in my remembering a fact which I knew but had forgotten. In the sense that I needed nothing else besides myself (in its complexity) to remember, *my* remembering was self-explanatory; even though using the previous and more accurate sense of the term, *my remembering* was not (as an effect) self-explanatory, because it needed a power or act of my mind which could bring about the

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remembering (and which, for example, sometimes is disabled, not allowing the recall).

So something can be the *causer* of some effect in itself; but nothing can be the *cause* of itself.

**Theorem II: The cause is not altered or different in any way by its having an effect.**

Proof: The effect is a set of facts which contradict each other. The cause is simply the *fact* which, when *understood* along with the effect, makes the whole intelligible. That is, the effect is an *effect* because this fact (the cause) is either *unknown or ignored*; the accident of its not being known (or being deliberately left out of consideration) does not alter *what it is* in the least. Hence, the cause (as a fact) is what it is, whether or not it is *considered as* cause of a given effect. Q. E. D.

This again is counter-intuitive, and in fact seems to be disproved by physics. One of the basic laws of motion is Newton's Third Law: "Every action produces an equal and opposite reaction." This seems to say that if A is acting on B, then *ipso facto* B is acting on A; and hence *the fact that* A causes something in B *necessarily entails* A's being affected by B. And this seems to refute the theorem.

But again there is the confusion between effect and what is affected and cause and causer. Let us say that one billiard ball strikes another making it move; the second billiard ball reacts on the first, altering its movement, such that it is impossible in fact for the motion of the first billiard ball to be totally unaffected if it makes something else move.

Let us straighten this out. The *effect* in question is *the fact that the second ball began to move*, or if you want to put it in terms of physics, its momentum (and total energy) is greater than before, and

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obviously it can't give itself more energy than it has.

Now the *cause* of this is the *momentum* which is added to it, or if you will, the *amount of energy received from outside the ball*, which accounts for the excess. You could even say, depending on how you formulated the effect (which is abstract, remember) the amount of energy received from the first ball. But this *amount* is simply what it is; it will not be altered by the fact that it is making the first ball move, or is making the second ball move, or is heating the second ball, or is dissipated into space or whatever; an amount of energy is just an amount of energy. Add this amount of energy and the problem is solved.

The first ball, then, is the *causer*, not the cause. It *contained* the cause (which is why it would be called the "cause" in the ordinary sense); but it contains all sorts of other properties. One of the properties it contains is, of course, the fact that, if it is going to *impart* this energy to the second ball, it is going to *lose* it; and if there is to be a transfer of energy, the elastic collision will now make the *second ball a causer of a different effect on the first*, which will impart an impulse also to it, changing its direction, for instance.

But all that means is that the two billiard balls are complex objects, and are both what is affected and causers of (at least) two *different* effects. Each of these effects has its own cause, and that cause is simply a fact and is not altered in the least by its being the cause of some effect. In each case, the cause of the action or the reaction was a certain impulse in a certain direction; and that impulse is all that is needed in each case to explain the motions, and is what it is, irrespective of the motions which it explains.

I cannot stress too much that it is absolutely vital to everything that follows that this be clearly understood. If you think "concretely" here, so that it seems to you that the cause is affected by its being a cause, then you must go over what was said and realize that effect and cause are simply *ways of talking or thinking about* abstract aspects

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of a concrete situation—valid ways of talking about them, but ways of talking about them nonetheless—and the concrete situation is what it is, irrespective of whether we consider part of it as incomplete and therefore “dependent” on the other part as “completing” it.

It sounds as if I am playing games, and there is no reality to what I am saying at all. Not so. If you consider the billiard balls again, *the fact is* that the second billiard ball *cannot* add to its own energy, *and* it increased its own energy—obviously *because of* something-or-other the first ball did to it. This “something-or-other,” however you want to name it (impulse, energy-transfer, momentum), is the cause. The point I am making is that the “getting up and moving” of the second billiard ball is not *divorced* from the concrete situation, which is the collision of the two balls. *That’s* what happened, and it makes sense, of course. But it’s true that *the abstract aspect* of that situation, the beginning-to-move of the second ball, *wouldn’t have* made sense without the collision.

To put this another way, the “dependence” of the effect is a *hypothetical*, not a fact. The effect wouldn’t make sense *if* the cause weren’t there. But of course, the cause is always there, or the effect would really be a contradiction; hence, the effect as such *prescinds from the whole* situation and considers only one aspect of it. It is a *real* aspect, but it is only a *real aspect*, and the actual concrete situation contains the cause, without which the particular aspect called the “effect” would be impossible.

The only reason for bothering with distinguishing aspects of a situation in this way is that *not all aspects of the situation may be known*, and so if you find a situation in which *all the aspects you know at the moment* are impossible, then you know that the real, concrete situation contains this other aspect (the cause) which makes sense out of the aspect that you happen to have in your grasp.

Thus, even though effect and cause are simply points of view from which to look at a real, concrete situation (which always, as such,

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makes sense or of course it couldn't exist), it does not follow that considering effects and causes is a silly game, except for anyone who is omniscient. We *do* get confronted with effects, and have to go outside them to get at their causes; and in this way we increase our knowledge. We don't increase "reality"; we simply know more of it by the fact that the effect tells us precisely that we have (at the moment) got hold of no more than an incomplete view of it.

**Theorem III: Identical effects have identical causes.**

Proof: An effect is defined as an incomplete view of a situation, such that a missing element makes this incomplete view appear as a contradiction. The fact that one fact (the cause) is removed from the concrete situation (or is unknown), therefore, is what makes the remainder to be an effect.

It follows from this that what makes an effect a *given* effect (as distinguished from any other *effect*) is not the language you would use to couch the contradiction, but in *what it is* that is removed from the concrete situation, which makes the remainder unintelligible. This is another way of saying that what the cause is makes the effect the effect which it is.

And it follows from this that if two effects are identical, then the causes have to be identical. Q. E. D.

There is actually another way to prove this which, for those of a mathematical turn of mind, might be clearer:

Suppose that there are two identical effects, called  $B_1$  and  $B_2$ . Now the cause of  $B_1$  has all (and only) the properties necessary to explain  $B_1$ . But since the two effects are only abstractions (pairs or sets of facts, not objects), then  $B_1$  can be replaced by  $B_2$  *without altering the effect in any way at all*, since the two effects as effects are identical. It follows from the fact that no alteration has occurred in the effect

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that the cause of  $B_1$  has all (and only) the properties necessary to cause the “new” effect. Therefore, the cause of  $B_1$  is *also* the cause of  $B_2$ . Q. E. D.

Once again, the counter-intuitiveness of this is explained by the abstractness of effect and cause as we have defined them, and the fact that we tend to think, when we use these terms, of what is affected and the causer.

For instance, if you see a branch moving outside your window, you might very well notice a squirrel jumping on it, and realize that the “cause” of the movement is the squirrel. Another time, however, you might look out and see the branch moving in just the same way, but without a squirrel making it move; and you go outside and feel the breeze and realize that it’s the wind that made the branch move. Now if the theorem above is correct, this sounds as if we are saying that the squirrel is identical with the wind.

But of course, the squirrel and the wind are *causers*, and *contain* the causes in question; they are not really the causes. Let us look at the situation more closely. The effect is the movement of an object which has no internal source of movement. Now what is *necessary* to account for this effect is (a) whatever it is *about* something that can impart motion to an object that has no internal source of movement (what in physics is called “energy”), and (b) external to the object. Obviously, both the squirrel and the breeze are external to the branch, and both *have* energy that can be applied to the branch (or they couldn’t move it). So *in the respect in which they solve the problem*, (i.e. as the cause of it) they are identical.

Even if you define the effect you are interested in more precisely, by noticing the amplitude and direction of the movement of the branch—supposing that the two effects so defined are still identical—then you find that the causes in the squirrel and the breeze are still identical: they now are known to have the same

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*amount* of energy applied to the same *place* on the branch (or the movements would be greater or lesser or in different directions).

Well yes, but what *is* this “energy” that they have? This is one of the interesting things about science, which is actually using our notion of effect and cause very often. *You don’t know* what it is “in itself,” so to speak; the *name* “energy” is simply a term which means something like “*Whatever it is* about an object that allows it to alter the motion-state of another object.” We know that any object that accounts for another object’s movement has to have “what it takes” to do this; and (by the theorem above, actually) we know that *all* of the objects that do this job have the *same* “whatever it takes”; and so we then *give a name* to this identical “whatever it is” that’s in all the objects that are causers of this particular effect.

So the result is that we don’t know what it is that is in all these “energetic” objects; but whatever it is, it has to *be* there every time; and so, even though we can’t point it out directly, we can know that it’s there by its effect.

Hence, this theorem, which seems so trivial, turns out in practice to be extremely useful. Most of physics, in fact, is talking about causes in just this abstract way and describing what they are in terms of their being “whatever it is that accounts for” this or that aspect of some effect. And physics has come a long way following Newton’s “I make no guesses” as to what the cause actually *is* “in itself” and being very careful to say no more than what can be said on its being just exactly what is necessary to account for some effect.

**Theorem IV: Different effects have different causes.**

Proof: Since, as we saw in the theorem on identical effects, a given effect is defined as *this* one and no other by what is *removed* (or missing) from its intelligibility (and this missing fact is the cause), it immediately follows that if Effect A is different from Effect B, the

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facts missing from the intelligibility of A are different from those which are missing from B; which is to say that Effect A has a different cause from the cause of Effect B. Q. E. D.

The second proof goes this way: If different effects were to have the same cause, then the difference between them is irrelevant to their unintelligibility (since they are made intelligible in exactly the same way—which is what “having the same cause” means). But what is “irrelevant to their unintelligibility” means “not part of them *as effects*,” since the effect is nothing *but* the unintelligibility of the objects in question.

Therefore, in this case, the *difference* between the effects is irrelevant to their unintelligibility, which means that the effects are *not different* as effects, but only as affected objects. So if different effects have identical causes, they are not different as effects, which means that they aren’t different effects. Therefore, *different* effects have to have different causes. Q. E. D.

Once again this theorem has widespread application in the sciences, and in that most precise of the sciences, physics. If the branch you saw moving because of the squirrel and because of the breeze were moving *differently* each time—say with different amplitude of its swing—then the energy applied to it *must* be different. An application of the same energy to the same part of the same object *cannot* result in different movements (unless, of course, there is something different about the object’s mass the second time to account for the difference—but then this would be part of the cause, making the second cause different). How does physics know this? Because then “the same effect” doesn’t make any sense, when you are at this abstract level of thinking.

This abstract level of thinking, by the way, is the cause of many people’s difficulties with physics. People want to *see* what they’re referring to, and all of these mysterious things like “energy” and

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“entropy” which can be “seen” only as derivatives and triple integrals and so on and aren’t actually some part of the situation that you can look at and “see what it’s like” give them the heebie-jeebies. If you happen to be that kind of person, I pity you if for some reason you are required to read this book; because the level we’re going to be operating on is even more abstract than physics.

As long as we are engaged at the moment, however, in the quasi-mathematical procedure of proving theorems, let me now state two corollaries of the theorems we have just proved:

**Corollary I: Identical causes have identical effects.**

Proof: Suppose there were two identical causes that had different effects. That would mean that in this case there would be different effects that had identical causes, and we just proved that different effects always have different causes. Q. E. D.

**Corollary II: Different causes have different effects.**

Proof: Suppose there were two different causes that had identical effects. That would mean that in this case there would be identical effects that had different causes, and we proved in Theorem III that identical effects always have identical causes. Q. E. D.

So once both theorems above have been established, you find that you can go both ways with respect to identity and difference; and if you know that a given cause is operating, *you can predict what its effect will be*, based on what the effect of this cause was in other cases.

But you must be very, very careful here, because it is so easy to confuse the cause and the causer. It does *not* follow that if you have the same *causer*, it will produce an identical effect, because different

6: Theorems about effects and causes

aspects of it may be operating, or there may be a difference in what is affected which actually enters into the causality. For instance, identically the same force (energy-*as*-applied; I want to use Newton's equation and need this more technical term) applied to different masses will produce different movements, because the *movement* as an effect has as its cause not only the energy-*as*-applied but the mass of the affected object. And this can be seen from Newton's equation:

$$F = m a$$

(Force equals mass times acceleration.) The movement itself, however, is the acceleration; and if we want to isolate that as an effect, the equation becomes:

$$a = F/m,$$

which clearly shows that the acceleration "depends on" (is the effect of) *both* the force in the causer and the mass of what is affected.

So reasoning from causes to effects is very tricky, because the causes in this abstract sense are in general unobservable, and a given *causer* can produce all sorts of different effects. Nevertheless, it can be done if you are careful enough; and, in fact, it is what allows sciences to predict.

## 6: Theorems about effects and causes

## Chapter 7

### Analogy

But there is another corollary that leads to something interesting: Suppose two effects (as effects, now, as problems, not as concrete situations) are not absolutely identical and not absolutely different from one another, but are *similar*: they have some respects in common, but others in which they differ.

For instance, suppose the branch outside your window *moves* on two different occasions, but the *amplitude* of the movement is different each time. These are not exactly different effects, because the movement itself of a non-animal is an effect, and in both cases there *was* movement; but the movement is *greater* in one case than the other (and hence as an effect it is different from the other one). So here we have an example of similar but not identical effects or problems.

Obviously, each of the two effects will have two aspects or “parts”: one aspect (set of facts) which is identical with the other effect, and another aspect which is different. In the case above, the mere fact of the movement of a non-initiator of movement is identical in both cases; in the other case, the total energy of the moving branch over what it has at rest (and which it can’t give itself) is different each time.

Once, then, you have separated the two into two different pairs of effects, you can say (a) that in the respect in which the effects are

### 7: Analogy

identical, their causes are identical; and (b) in the respect in which the effects are different, the causes are different.

Hence, the causes of the two similar effects are also partly identical with each other and partly different from each other; or they too are similar.

In the case of the movements of the branch, the cause is *force* (assuming the mass of the branch the same both times), and the *fact* that there is a force applied is identical, while the *magnitude* of the force is what is different. The two forces are similar, not identical.

Before stating this as a corollary and giving a formal proof, let me make a definition, and after I give the proof I will explain why I want a term defined in this way:

**Two things are *analogous* if it is (a) known *that* they are identical or similar, but (b) *the respects in which* they are identical or similar cannot be directly pointed out.** That is, if you know the fact that two things are the same (either totally or partially), but you can't point out where the sameness lies in them (obviously, because you can't observe them directly), then they are *analogous*.

Analogy, then, is a type of similarity, and it would pass over into similarity if you could actually see the points of similarity. But when all you know is *that* the two things in question are *somehow* similar, then this weakly known kind of similarity is not called "similarity" but "analogy."

With that said, then, let me state the following as a corollary to what we have so far seen, and give a formal proof of it:

**Corollary III: Similar effects have analogous causes.**

Two effects can only be known as similar *effects* if they are in some respect identical as effects and in some other respect different as effects. But this always allows them to be split into two pairs of effects, one pair of which is identical (having identical causes) and the other

different (having different causes).

But since the causes as known from the effects are not observed in themselves, then all that is known from this corollary is *the fact that* the causes are *somehow* similar to each other, but not what it is about them that is partly identical and partly different.

Therefore, similar effects have similar causes, but all that can be known about the causes as similar is the fact that they *are* (somehow) similar. Therefore, the causes are analogous. Q. E. D.

It would seem that we can know more than this; in the case of the movements of the branch, we said that the respect in which the two causes were identical was the energy, and the respect in which they were different was the magnitude. But if you consider this carefully, you don't know what exactly you *mean* by "greater or lesser magnitude" except "whatever it is about some energy that causes a greater or lesser movement." But what *is* it that is its "magnitudeness"? Who knows?

In fact, we don't even know what the "energeticness" of the energy is either, as can be shown from the fact that if you light a firecracker in the branch, you can also make it move; but here we have energy that is a chemical reaction, while the energy in the squirrel's paw is different in kind. There are different *kinds* of energies (electrical, mechanical, chemical, thermal, etc.), in other words, and what do they all have in common? They "have what it takes" to cause movement—and sometimes these different kinds not only have "energeticness" in common, but the same magnitude of "energeticness," when they cause the same degree of movement. But what *is* that "common element"? Who knows?

So once again, in order to follow what is being said here, you must learn to think abstractly, and not try to "put your finger on" what you are talking about, and be content with the fact that you know it exists. If not, you will be totally lost in what follows.

## 7: Analogy

But now, to redeem my promise of saying why I call that similarity-when-only-the-fact-of-being-similar-is-known “analogy,” it turns out that historically, “analogy” was used to refer to this kind of similarity, but all kinds of explanations were given of why we could say “A is a sort of B” when it was clear that we didn’t know what we were talking about.

Aristotle talked about two kinds of analogy: what was later called the “analogy of attribution,” where something was given an attribute that it didn’t actually have as such, but which it was connected with in some way: as we say that a complexion is “healthy,” not because the *complexion* isn’t sick (color can’t be sick), but because it is a *sign* that the person who has it is healthy.

Of course, what this amounts to is that this particular skin color is an *effect* whose cause is the health of the person; and hence, while it doesn’t exactly fit the meaning I gave above, it still deals with effect and cause.

Similarly, going the other way, you can call a fire “comfortable,” not because it feels good, but because it is the *causer* of your comfort (and its “comfortableness,” of course, would be the cause).

In any case, the “analogy of attribution” uses a term belonging to a cause and applies it to its effect or vice versa.

But the more interesting use of analogy is what Aristotle thought of as resulting from a *proportion*, which he thought explained metaphor; as, for example, the “evening of life” which is old age. He looked at these things this way:

evening : the day :: old age : life

What you do to form the analogy is replace one term with the corresponding one on the other side of the proportion, and you get “old age is the evening of life,” or alternatively, “evening is the old age of the day.” The idea is that neither *term itself* (old age or



evening) is really *like* the other one; but the *relation* between evening and the day is like the relation between old age and life (they're both the ending of the period); and so the terms can be connected now with each other through this relationship.

People like Thomas Aquinas used this to account for how we could use terms like “good” and “intelligent” and so on of God, when we knew (a) that God was totally different from us, and so goodness as it existed in God was utterly different from goodness as it exists in anything we can observe, and (b) Sacred Scripture shows that these terms actually do apply to God.

What his solution was was to set up the proportion

God's essence : God's existence :: creature's essence : creature's existence

and assert that the *relation* between God's essence (anything that could be said about him; his “whatness”) and his existence (which relation in God's case is one of absolute identity) was *similar* to the relation between our essence and our existence (unification); and hence, God could be called “good” (because anything that exists is good insofar as it exists), but that, because the relation between essence and existence in the two cases was only *similar*, you couldn't specify *how* God was good, but only that (somehow) he must be.

I always found difficulty with this because in Thomism, creaturely essences were supposed to be really distinct from their existence while in God “essence” and “existence” are just two words that refer to absolutely the same aspect. I never could quite figure out how you could hold that the uniting of two really distinct “principles” was even *similar* to the absolute unity of what was in no sense distinct from itself—and of course, if you don't know how the relationship is similar, then how can you use the proportion Aristotle was talking about?

But after all, what Aquinas and the Christians who dealt with

## 7: Analogy

analogy seriously (for Aristotle it was more of a poetic or rhetorical device, though he did use it occasionally in a scientific context) wanted was the explanation of *how it can be true* that certain terms, derived from finite creatures, apply to God, who is not at all like his creatures. We know (from revelation) that it *is* true; but what we don't know is *in what sense it is meaningful* to call God "good," since "goodness" as we know it is shot through with the finiteness of the creatures we derived the concept from.

And I think it is precisely this sort of thing that my definition of "analogy" accounts for. For example, we call a finite causer a "good" one when what is affected is benefited rather than harmed by what it does. For instance, if you are starving and someone feeds you, you would call him a good man; and so his goodness is the cause of the benefit to you.

But God, in creating, makes something exist where there was nothing before (let us assume this for the sake of argument, taking the usual notion). But it is better to exist rather than be nothing; and so this is a sort of a benefit. Hence, God as Creator is somehow or other good. The "benefit" of coming into existence, however, is not identical with the benefit of *improved* existence; and so the effects are merely similar; and therefore, God's goodness is only *analogous* to human goodness.

Of course, what I have just said in this is to say (with Aquinas) that the relations are similar, and so we have a proportion and can do what Aristotle did with the terms. But what I have done that I think is an improvement is show how it is that the relation between the effects is one of similarity, and just why it can be said that from them the two unobserved causes must be similar. So I think this approach puts analogy on a rather more secure footing.

Let me make a brief remark here on the relation between analogy and metaphor, since we won't get to discussing metaphor for a long, long time, when we talk of aesthetics. In spite of what Aristotle

thought, a metaphor is not really an analogy; it is a concept, but derived in a different way from what we might call “scientific” or “perception-based” concepts. A concept, as we will see, comes from comparing the sensations as *effects* of the reality outside us, and knowing that the *relation* between the sensations is the same relation as the relation between the realities (we just saw above, for instance, that identical effects have causes that are identical to each other). Thus, if I have the same sensation when looking at a traffic light as I do when looking at grass, then the traffic light must in some way be the same as grass (i.e. green). We don’t call this “analogy,” because the analogy does this at a further remove: if the *realities* have a relation, then the causes of *these* relations are related.

But metaphor is not at this extra remove; it is on the same level as other kinds of concepts. What metaphor does is compare *emotional reactions* to the world outside us, and on the basis of *this* relation we talk about “esthetic properties” of things. Thus, we feel happy when someone smiles at us, and we feel *the same happiness* when we go outside on a sunny day; and so the day “smiles” at us—meaning that it has in it “what it takes” to produce this emotional reaction.

Let this suffice for now. As I say, metaphor is not the same as analogy for two reasons: (a) metaphor is based on emotions, and analogy is based indirectly on perceptions; (b) metaphor uses the comparison of the conscious reaction as the basis of the knowledge of reality, and analogy uses the comparison of the *causes* of the conscious reactions (the realities) as the basis of its knowledge of this cause-of-the-cause.

Since we have been talking about identities and similarities and causes and effects, there is one thing that might cause confusion if it is not made explicit and emphasized. This is worth stating as another numbered conclusion:

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**Conclusion 3: The cause is not similar to its effect.**

That is, the similarity *between* effects means that the causes of the effects have to be *similar to each other*, but it implies nothing at all about any similarity of the cause to its effect. And, if you think about it at all, you can see that the cause, as simply a fact missing from the effect, will in general have *no* similarity to the effect at all.

It was thought historically that the cause had to be similar to its effect (or actually, that the effect would be similar to the cause), since the “cause” (what I called the causer) was supposed to do its job by “giving something of its ‘perfection’” (what would correspond, I suppose, to the “cause”) to the effect (more or less the way we would think of an energetic object’s giving up some of its energy to what is affected by it); and it would follow from this that the effect (the “perfection received”) in what is affected would of course be like the cause (the “perfection imparted”) in the causer. Further confusion came from the failure to distinguish clearly cause from causer and effect from what is affected.

The problem in this can be seen from the fact that logically you would now have to say that the beaver’s dam was somehow *like* the beaver, because the beaver “gave something of itself” to the dam; and so once again we have the beaver with a little picture of the dam in its head, because the “damness” of the dam (its “perfection”) had to be *in* the beaver in order to for the dam to “receive it” from the beaver. And of course, since the beaver doesn’t really *understand* what it is doing, this plan for the dam would have to have been put into *its* head by somebody who could understand; and therefore, beavers’ dams imply indirectly God the Engineer.

Now I’m not saying that things like dams can’t have effects in them (such as the particular configuration) whose cause is the plan of the engineer, in which case the effect is, in a certain sense, like its

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cause. But this likeness doesn't have anything to do with the effect's *being an effect*, but is part of the *particular* effect which it happens to be. There is absolutely nothing about a cause's being an ignored or unknown fact that says that it has to be at all like the "remainder" that is known and forms a problem because of the missing information; and so at least on this view of effect and cause, even though *if* the effects are similar *among themselves*, then the causes of these effects have to be somehow similar among *themselves*, this does *not* imply in the least that the cause is similar *to its effect*.

## 7: Analogy

## Chapter 8

### Causality

We are not through yet, unfortunately; there are a couple more terms dealing with effects and causes that will figure into what follows and which have to be clarified on the basis of the abstract definitions we have given.

First of all, the **causality** of a cause is **the cause's relation to its effect**, or, if you will, it is “what the cause is doing to” the effect to “remove” the contradictoriness of it.

That is, the cause is *what* resolves the contradiction (the effect); its causality is *how* it does it. If we take the missing keys, the cause (let us assume) is the relaxation of the hand + the attraction of gravity; the causality is *how* these two aspects of the situation actually managed to get the keys out of John's hand without his noticing.

Actually, in this example, the cause in the strict sense is more abstract, as *whatever it is* that is *necessary* to account for the removal of the keys; and so it would be some *aspect* of the relaxation and the gravity (whatever this would have in common with *any other* explanation). You can see that it wouldn't have been necessary for gravity to have been at work, if there had been a strong magnet nearby that could have pulled the keys—meaning that the force in question didn't have to be *gravitational* to do the job, and its “gravityness” was part of the causer.

But even in the example as it stands, the causality of the cause is

not really known (and this unknownness of the causality is actually what made Hume throw out the whole notion of cause). *Somehow or other*, the cause got the job done; and so even if we don't know how it did it, we can *point to the fact that it somehow did it* without having direct knowledge of it. That is, we know that there *is* a causality of the cause, because the effect would be a contradiction unless the cause somehow made it not one; but though we can use a term to refer to this in-itself-unknown relationship, we don't in general know what exactly we are referring to. Once again, we are in the very abstract realm of knowing that we can say certain things without knowing directly what we are talking about.<sup>25</sup>

There is one interesting fact about causality as a relationship, which we can state as a conclusion:

**Conclusion 4: The causality of the cause is not a real relation to its effect.**

This is because (by Theorem II) the cause is not altered at all by its having an effect; hence, the relationship of cause to effect (the causality) is not a *real* relation, even though it has a foundation in reality (the fact that the *effect* depends on (is made different by) the

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<sup>25</sup>In the case of the cause of our knowledge of the truth of the conclusion of a syllogism, we know that the cause is the known truth of the premises and their known proper logical arrangement. But, as I said, the propositions themselves do not really "produce" the conclusion, because propositions aren't actually active. The real cause, it might be said, is my knowledge of logic (that certain arrangements are valid and others not), plus my knowledge that the rules are followed in this case. So what is the causality here? Probably something like *how* I know that in this case everything is fine and the logic valid, and so the conclusion is true.

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cause).<sup>26</sup>

That is, a “real relationship” or connection is some aspect of an object such that it wouldn’t be what it is without the other thing it is connected to—this “dependence” of the one on the other is (looked at from a certain point of view) the reality of the “connection.” Thus, the shape of my nose is (among other things) part of my “sonship” to my father, because I got this shape from him, and if he hadn’t been my father, my nose wouldn’t be this shape. My “sonship” consists of all the aspects of myself which wouldn’t be this way if that man weren’t my father; and this is a *real* relation to that man. Note, however, that my father would be what he is without me—except, of course, insofar as he is a causer that is acted on by me as affected object. What I am getting at is that the shape of *my* nose makes no difference to the shape of *his* nose. It is the other way round.

Therefore,

**Conclusion 5: Being-affected is a real relation.**

That is, an *effect* involves a *real relation* to its cause, precisely because it wouldn’t be what it is (this effect) without the cause. But the cause would be what it is without the effect; and so, even though there is a real *basis* for *thinking of* a relationship (because the effect is really related to *this* cause), still the relation *itself* is not a reality. If it were, the cause would be the effect of its effect, since it couldn’t be what it is without its effect. But this is nonsense; *calling* it a cause, as I said, makes it no different from what it is.

However, since the “connection” between the cause and effect is

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<sup>26</sup>Remember, even in cases where there is only something like “logical dependence,” rather than cases where something actively alters another thing, the dependence is *real* when the effect *really wouldn’t be what it is* without the cause.



a *real* “connection” when looked at from effect to cause, we need another term to refer to the same relation as causality looked at from this opposite point of view:

**Being affected is the relation the effect has to its cause.** It is what is “being done to” what is affected by the cause; or it is the effect *as* “dependent” on the cause—or perhaps more accurately, it is the “dependence” itself of the effect on its cause. This dependence is real, as I said, because the effect would be a contradiction (and so wouldn’t exist) if the cause weren’t there.

Any relation can, of course, be looked at from two points of view. If it is a relation *between* A and B, then it can be considered as the relation from A to B or the relation from B to A. As Aristotle said, the road from Athens to Thebes is the same road as the road from Thebes to Athens. So causality and being affected are one and the same thing: the relation between cause and effect; but causality is what the cause is “doing” to the effect, and being affected is what is “being done” to the effect by the cause. The point is that the latter is the only one of these two points of view which itself is “out there,” so to speak; the former is just a way of considering the situation<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup>Of course, even the effect itself (and so its “dependence” on the missing cause) is a way of considering the situation, as I have mentioned so often; the point here is that when you consider the situation *that* way, the cause has to be somewhere in the real situation; but when you consider the fact which is the cause, this doesn’t say anything about anything else. So the effect itself is an abstraction, and its being looked on as being affected by its cause is even more of an abstraction; but the causality of the cause on the effect is far more of an abstraction even than that; it’s only “there” because any relationship can be *looked at* both ways. If this is confusing, all I can say is that I’m not surprised that you find it so.

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## Chapter 9

### Condition

Just one more term, and I'll give an example that will try to tie all this together.

**A condition is the cause of a cause.**

That is, if the cause of a given effect can't do its job of removing the contradictoriness *unless some other fact is true*, then this other fact (which explains how the cause can be a cause in this case) is a *condition for the effect*.

The condition, as so defined, isn't really a *cause* of the effect; because, *given* the cause, then all that is necessary for the effect to make sense is there—and the cause is all (and only) what is *necessary* for the effect to make sense. And of course, the cause as a fact makes sense somehow, either by itself or by some other fact which makes sense out of *it*. And all you need to explain the effect is the *fact* which is the cause; you don't need the *explanations* of how the cause *got to be* this fact; it is enough (for the effect) that it's there.

Nevertheless, if the cause is not self-sufficient ("self-explanatory"), you may wonder how it can be there, since there's something about it that says it couldn't be there. In that case, you're treating (what is in fact) the cause as itself an effect of some cause. And of course this "cause-of-the-cause" also in fact has to "be there" for the original effect to make sense, because if it isn't there, then the cause isn't there, and if the cause isn't there, the effect (as a real contradiction)

isn't there either.

So having once seen the cause as the effect of its own cause, you can now see *an indirect dependence* of the effect on this “cause-of-its-cause”; but this is not the same *kind* of dependence as that of the effect on its cause, because you can't intellectually “stop” with the effect and ignore its cause (because then you are accepting a contradiction as real), whereas you can stop with the cause if you want to, because it, as a *fact*, is all that is needed to make sense out of the effect, and your mind then can accept the situation as making sense.

Hence, this “cause-of-the-cause” is not really a *cause* of the effect (something without which it is unintelligible), even though indirectly the effect couldn't be what it is without it (because the cause couldn't exist without it). Hence, this fact which is indirectly “necessary” to the effect has the special term “condition” attached to it. In relation to the *cause*, the condition for the effect is, of course, a *cause*; in relation to the original effect, it is not a cause but a *condition*.

Traditionally, conditions were thought of as “removing what prevents” the cause from “operating”; but that means that without the condition, the cause would not be able to “operate,” and so the effect could not occur; and *that* means that the cause *as* cause would be impossible without the condition. Or, in other words, the condition is what is *necessary* for the cause to be what it is, or that without which the cause as cause would be a contradiction—which is another way of saying that the cause is an *effect* of the condition.

For instance, the color slide in the projector was said to be the “condition” for the picture on the screen, because the “cause” was the light hitting the screen, and the slide got in the way of the light, blocking out certain colors and so on; it allowed the light to do its job of putting the picture there; but the light was what “did” the job.

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Translating this into my terminology is not perfectly straightforward, because what the cause is and what the conditions are depend on how you define the effect (i.e. what aspects of the concrete situation there in the darkened room you choose to pick out as unintelligible-by-themselves). If you are interested in *the particular pattern of colors of light* on the screen (when a moment ago there was a different one, say, and you've got the same apparatus), then the cause *is* the pattern on the slide in position in front of the light. If, however, you are interested in how the screen isn't black like the rest of the room, then obviously the cause is the light of the projector as it reaches the screen. But since in fact not all the light from the bulb *gets* to the screen because of the slide in the way, then the slide is *now* the condition for the light's actually striking the screen (as can be seen from the fact that if there were a totally black slide in there, the screen would be black).

Anyhow, that is the relation between "condition" in my sense of the term and the traditional sense of "condition" as "*removens prohibens*" ("removing what is preventing"). The point that is interesting for the purposes of philosophical (and for that matter, scientific) method is that *you don't need to go back to conditions to explain an effect*. The effect is explained once its cause is known to be a *fact*; any *explanations* of how this fact can *be* a fact may be interesting and worth exploring, but are not *needed* in order to explain the effect.

Of course, there are proximate and remote conditions for a given effect. The "proximate" condition would be the *cause* of the effect's cause; a remote condition for this effect would be a *condition* for the effect's cause. That is, there is no law that says the condition (the cause-of-the-cause) can't *itself* be the effect of some more remote cause, nor that *that* can't also be the effect of a still more remote cause of *it*, and so on and so on.

And it is true that if any of these more remote conditions were

not there, then the condition on the next lower level would not be there (because, lacking its cause, it would be a contradiction, and so wouldn't exist)—which would mean that none of the conditions below *it* would exist, which would mean that the cause wouldn't exist, which would mean that the effect wouldn't exist. So the non-presence of *any* of the conditions means that the effect is a contradiction (since it indirectly depends on each of them). This is what Kant was saying in the introduction to the antinomies of pure reason when he said that *all* the conditions for any “event” (effect) have to be given if the effect is given.

But the point here is that you don't have to go back to “the first cause” or “the ultimate condition” in order to explain any given effect. Depending on how curious you are, you can stop at the cause, or you can go back to the first-level condition, or you can go back a step or two further and stop at the fourth-level condition, or whatever. Wherever you stop, you stop at what *is* a fact, however it got to be that way, and so what is *below* it (i.e. explained by it) makes sense.

Let me stress this point as another conclusion:

**Conclusion 6: An effect is explained by its cause; it is not necessary to have recourse to conditions to explain the effect.** On the assumption that the cause is a fact, the effect makes sense.

*Is there, by the way, a “first cause” or an “ultimate condition,” or can there be an infinite sequence of causes needing causes? The answer is not perfectly straightforward, and it turns out that in some cases (those where the cause doesn't have to *be in existence while* the effect exists, but merely has to *have existed* at some time) there could be an infinite sequence, but in others there couldn't; but we will leave this for later, when we actually start applying all this apparatus*

## 9: Condition

we have developed about effects and causes.

Let me now give an example to tie all these terms together. Let us say that you notice that the earth is warmer on the day side than it is on the night side. Since the earth is a single whole, by itself this difference in temperature does not make sense. Therefore, the *cause* of this effect is *whatever it is that accounts for the bright side of the earth's being hotter than the dark side*.

Now we know that the sun is emitting radiation of many wave lengths, heat as well as light, and it is not at all surprising to find that the side that the light is hitting is also the side that the heat of the sun is hitting; and so our *cause* is *the fact that the light of the sun at the earth's surface also contains heat*. Add this fact to the effect and it makes sense to say that the bright side is hotter than the dark side.

Now then, the earth (with its dark and light sides) is *what is affected*. The effect, as I said, is the fact that the bright side is warmer than the dark one. The *being affected* of the earth is the *warming* of it by the heat that accompanies the light of the sun (i.e., perhaps more accurately, its *being warmed by* the sun's heat). The *causality* of the cause is the *heating* of the earth by this heat that accompanies the light. And, of course, the cause is just the *heat itself*, which is just heat and is not altered by the fact that the earth is being warmed by it (as can be seen from the fact that *this much* heat is also at any point this same distance from the sun, but there's no planet there getting warmed by it).

The *causer* in this case is the "thing" you would point to in answer to the question, "What is doing this?" And in this case, we would in all probability say "The sun." That is, in ordinary language, the sun is the "cause" of the warming of the earth. If you happen to have a more scientific bent, and think of the photons of heat and light as "somethings" in their own right which "escaped" from the sun, then they (the electromagnetic radiation itself) would be the causer, because these photons in fact have properties beyond what is

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merely necessary to account for the warming of the earth (they exert pressure on it, and there are X-rays and so on which are neither light nor heat).

If you consider the photons as the causer, then the sun would be the *condition* for the warming of the earth; because without the sun, the light-and-heat wouldn't be there, and the effect wouldn't occur. The sun is actually a condition for the effect even if you consider it the causer, because the causer, as concrete, can include all sorts of aspects within it; and in fact it would include the cause of the light's being at the point where it can act on the earth. Whatever it was that got the sun into a state where it emits light would, of course, be a more remote condition for the warming of the earth; and so on.

## Chapter 10

### The method

Well, there we are, finally. Now what are we going to do with all this?

We already have a starting-point, if we can find some use for it: our absolutely certain knowledge that there is something.

We also have a criterion for the security of our starting-point that is better than Descartes' "clear and distinct idea" (which was so clear as to be incapable of being doubted *by him*, but not others), or Spinoza's "adequate idea" (which was adequate *for him* but not others), and so on. Our criterion, if you remember, was that something is absolutely certain if to deny it is to assert it (i.e. if the denial only "works" if what is denied is true).

But that still leaves us at the starting-point, because the *absolute* certainty that there is something is self-awareness of the *consciousness* as something; the "refutation" of the universal skeptic was that he *knew* that his doubt was not *nothing*.

But can we go beyond this? We are, true, physically certain that we are not now dreaming and that we are confronted with a "real world out there." But to deny this is not, on the face of it at least, based on the assertion of it; it is not easy to see how it is *impossible* for there to be nothing but my consciousness and for me still to be conscious in the way I am. In other words, "How do we know that not everything is a dream?" is not a captious question like, "How do



you know that there is something?” How *do* we know, when we dream sometimes and think we’re not dreaming?<sup>28</sup>

It sounds as if we have an effect.

And, of course, the philosophical method we are going to be using is based on noticing effects about our starting-point, our self-conscious consciousness. *If* it can be shown that something about our consciousness is “impossible-unless” then the “unless” *must* be the case. And this “unless” may very well be a real world “out there.”

What, then, do we do?

**First**, be very clear what exactly the effect *is*; and that involves two things: (1) Be sure that there is *real* evidence on both sides of a contradiction, and the “contradiction” is not based on misreading what is there; and (2) be as precise as possible in picking out just *how* the facts known contradict each other.

There is the possibility of error here. It is frightfully easy to misread the evidence and find a “contradiction” because you have formulated the problem wrongly. And because, no matter how careful you are, it is still conceivable that you could be misled, we have at this point left the world of absolute certainty.

I might point out, however, that it is if anything easier to *dismiss* a real effect as simply a “bad formulation” because *you* don’t see any difficulty about what is happening. Anyone who wants to circumvent

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<sup>28</sup>It’s not enough here to say, “We just know,” because in dreams we *don’t* know and don’t know we are dreaming; and in waking life, there are hallucinations, where we seem to see or hear what is “out there” and real when in fact it isn’t. *Generally speaking*, we can distinguish perceptions of what is real from dreams and hallucinations; but (a) this is not enough for *absolute* certainty, and (b) the question here is not *whether* we can usually do this but *how we manage*. So I’m not trying here to cast doubt on your conviction that you are awake and reading these lines; all I’m saying is that it involves an effect, which we will explore.

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an effect with the “bad formulation” approach will have to show just exactly *where* the bad formulation occurs, and how his view of its being “bad” doesn’t entail the denial of things that he wants to hold onto.

If anything, there has been as much of this error in the history of philosophy as there has been of the preceding one. And interestingly, the people who dismiss certain recurrent problems in philosophy as “bad formulation” have themselves done so on the basis of a bad formulation of the grounds for dismissal, as the history of the “verifiability” criterion of meaningfulness so abundantly testifies. The various formulations of the criterion neatly showed how the inconvenient problems were non-problems; but at the same time they made “meaningless” a whole series of things that the formulators wanted to keep as not only meaningful but true.<sup>29</sup>

All this says is that at this stage, you have to be very careful, both to make sure that you’ve *got* a real effect, and that you don’t *ignore* a real effect because it doesn’t strike you as peculiar. And either way, you *can* be mistaken.

Well, so be it. The Cartesian ideal of an absolutely certain view of the universe, deduced mathematically from an absolutely certain premise, is gone, if you’re going to proceed by way of effects and their causes—because there’s no way *I* at least know of to show that the denial of a given effect as an effect is the affirmation of it.

Then is it all “just a theory” and we’re back to “Well, that’s your opinion”? Not at all. I just got through saying that if you’re going to

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<sup>29</sup>For instance, if you say that the only thing that is real is what is observable, then how (now) do you *observe* what happened yesterday? Yet you know that it really happened. But there is no way now to verify this by observation. And are photons and electrons *merely* “mental constructs” that don’t have a real “component” (i.e. are they the equivalent of saying that little men carrying lanterns is what makes the light bulb light when you plug the lamp in)?

*deny* that such-and-such is a real effect, you had better be ready to show (a) which of the facts alleged to be in conflict isn't a fact, or (b) just how the conflict isn't really a conflict, though it would seem so to an intelligent person. In other words, you have to take the *deception* of the philosopher (who presumably is sincere and not a fool) as an effect and give a cause for *it*, or you are simply "disagreeing" with no rational grounds for disagreeing. And in that case, since his position is rational and yours isn't, you lose.

What I am saying is that to say, "I don't agree, and after all, you *could* be wrong" is an irrational position to take; and what reason could you have for taking an irrational position? So a position that doesn't immediately "grab" you or which you aren't "comfortable with" is nevertheless *to be accepted* under penalty of sticking with what is irrational *in preference* to what is rational. Sorry, but there it is.

**Second**, we will use the abstractness of "cause" here. It is known that the true explanation for the effect discovered will have all of the properties necessary to remove the contradictoriness of the effect. But since we presumably can't get "outside" our consciousness to observe the causer "as it is in itself," then there is no hope, really, to be able to know any *other* properties of the true explanation than the ones that are necessary. Hence, all we can know is the *cause* of the effect (what all explanations would have to have as a common minimum).

At this point, we will make what P. W. Bridgman called an "operational definition": we will take a term and define it as "The cause of this particular effect," meaning "Whatever it is that actually accounts for this effect." We know that there is such a thing, and so we use this definition to refer to it.

Bridgman's "operational definitions" are valid, not because (as he thought) the supposed "unobserved entity" (such as an electron)

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didn't really exist but was a mask to cover a set of actual observations, but because the electron *does and must* exist or the observations are contradictory; and therefore, it can be known as "Whatever makes these observations not contradictory." Let's face it: blank photographic plates don't get marks on them by theoretical constructs. So his "operational definition" much more properly should be called a "*causal definition*," where *the cause is defined in terms of its effect, precisely as "whatever accounts for the effect."*

Note that this step is absolutely certain. Given an effect, it is absolutely certain that there is a cause; and since all we have done by our causal definition is *point to* whatever is the cause (without alleging any more about it than that we know there is one), our "definition" cannot be mistaken, because whatever in fact turns out to be the explanation of the effect, it is *ex hypothesi* what we meant by our term.

This causal definition is just a gimmick, in other words. You don't know any more after you have picked out your term and defined it than you did when you spotted your effect. The difficulty comes in spelling out exactly *what fact* the cause *is*, or what properties it actually *has*. Still, this step is useful because it avoids the clutter of constantly saying, "Whatever it is that accounts for this particular effect" as you try to find out what has to be the case no matter what it is that accounts for the effect. It is like what mathematicians do when they have a long expression that keeps cropping up in the course of their proof; in order to avoid writing it over and over again, they say, "Let  $Q$  (or whatever) stand for this expression," and from then on write  $Q$  wherever it would appear, until the end, when they "substitute back."

Similarly here. Our causal definition gives us no insight into the meaning of the term we have defined in this causal way; but it does leave us a handy word instead of a cumbersome expression to use in our investigation, *provided* we keep in mind that *as we use it* it means

exactly—nothing more and nothing less than—“Whatever it is that is the cause of the effect in question,” and we remember that the fact that we can use it doesn’t mean we know *what* it is that we are talking about, but merely that there is *something* referred to by this term.

**Third**, knowing that there is a cause, and having a term now to refer precisely to it, we are now aware that the cause contains all that is necessary to account for the effect.

Two things can occur at this point: First, if it can be shown that the effect remains a contradiction unless something about the cause is true, we know that this is a fact about the cause.

This is a very dangerous procedure, and most philosophical theories come a cropper on it. In order for it to work, it must not simply *seem to you* that without the truth of X about the cause, then the effect is still self-contradictory; *you must be able to give a positive reason for excluding anything else but X as another explanation*. For example, it is quite easy to say that the finiteness of the world makes sense on the supposition that there is an infinite being (God); and it is “obvious” to many that it makes sense on no other supposition. But how do you show that anything *but* God (e.g. an infinite set of finite causes) leaves the world self-contradictory?

Once again, then, we are confronted with the possibility of error; because we may think that a given fact explains a given effect when it might not, or (far more likely) we may think that we have ruled out all other explanations, and there may be one lurking there so bizarre that it never occurred to us to consider it—and lo and behold, it is the right one.<sup>30</sup>

Secondly, if the effect in question is similar to some other effect

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<sup>30</sup>For instance, who would have thought that falling bodies were not accounted for by some force pulling them down, but by a warping of space-time?

we have already studied, then the cause in question necessarily is analogous to the cause of the other effect. We may not know what the cause *is* in either case, but we know that they are similar. And if we can point to the *respects* in which the effects are identical, we can then “separate” the causes into aspects and make up a term referring to the (unknown-in-itself) identical aspect of each cause by which it is identical with the other cause.

Once again, picking out these points of identity will not (as we will see) be absolutely straightforward; and so the specter of possible error sticks in its ugly head once again. I don’t want to give the impression by pointing out all these difficulties that things are hopeless; but after all, the most brilliant people in the world have been at this enterprise for thousands of years now, and while we *have* made progress (we really have), we have made plenty of mistakes along the way; and it’s as well to know where the weak points are in the various world-views that explain our experience.

Unfortunately, checking procedures by analogy with the experiment and verification stages of scientific method is very difficult to do here, because you can’t get at the causer and manipulate it to see what happens. But we are not exactly stuck, and at least sometimes we can pass on to the following:

**Fourth**, we take the properties we have found belong to the cause and examine what *else* must be true if they are indeed “there.” If these “predictions” turn out not to be facts, then obviously the properties of the cause can’t be what we thought they were, since the “predictions” are logically entailed by the property.

This means that the philosophical method I am proposing is actually *empirically falsifiable*, in the same sense as scientific theories are falsifiable. You can’t prove a theory *true* from its predictions, because the logic of the situation (if Theory, then Prediction) cannot prove the “if” part true by knowing the truth of the “then” part; but

the *falseness* of the “then” necessarily means the falseness of the “if.”

We already saw this at least twice. First, when we were looking at Hume’s “explanation” of why we think in terms of cause-and-effect, where he said that the juxtaposition of two events led us to expect the second on seeing the first, and so we called the first the “cause” of the second. What I did was make a prediction from this that therefore *any* constant juxtaposition would induce us to call the prior event the “cause” of the subsequent one, and so we would necessarily (if his theory is true) call the dawn the cause of the sunrise. But we don’t. Therefore, his view of why we think in terms of cause is false.

Secondly, we established that the conscious act is conscious of itself by making a prediction from the opposite hypothesis, showing that if it were the case, then we should be uncertain that there is something even though it is still absolutely certain that there is something and we could know that fact.

Well that’s some progress, isn’t it? We know one view of causal thinking that doesn’t work, and we know that it makes sense to say that we know what we know when we know what we know.

One final remark before we actually begin using this method; and this deserves to be stated as another conclusion:

**Conclusion 7: we cannot know all about the world using effects and causes.**

It is exceedingly unlikely (to say the least) that absolutely every fact would be *necessary* to explain some other set of facts; and causes are only what is necessary. In all probability there are other aspects of things which are *there*, but not necessary to explain some otherwise inexplicable set of facts.

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Those of a rationalist turn of mind say, “Well of *course* they have to be connected to other facts; things don’t “just happen.” True, *effects* don’t “just happen”; but in order to show that every fact is somehow knowable, you would have to show how it is *contradictory* that there could be a fact which is (a) not directly known, and is (b) not *necessary* for the knowledge of some other pair of facts. It may be that there are a lot of facts that are parts of *causers*, for instance, and so are “involved” in the cause-effect relationship; but if they are non-*necessary* properties of the causer, we can’t know what they are unless we directly observe them. What the thief is thinking as he steals your keys may be something that is integrated into his whole being; but there may be no set of observable facts that would allow you to say, “He *couldn’t* have been thinking anything else but this.”

So I think we have to give up at least one half of Hegel’s premise that “the real is rational and the rational is real.” The real is not *irrational*, which is another way of saying that effects *do* have causes; but effect and cause do not exhaust the facts of the universe—or at least I don’t think that it can be proved that they do. In that case,

**Conclusion 8: The real is both rational and non-rational.**

I think that by far the more likely view is that, there are facts that are gratuitous: “just there,” so to speak. There’s no reason for there *not* being what they are; but there’s no reason why they *can’t* not be what they are. They just are; they’re facts, not effects. Why was it that the particular two children I have got born rather than the ones who miscarried or the millions of others who could have been formed from the genes of me and my wife? “Because,” you say, “these particular genes got together.” But that’s the point. There’s no reason why *these* genes *had* to be the ones that got together; they just did. And I rejoice in my children and accept them; they were not



“necessary” to fit into some “scheme of things.” *Aspects* of each of them are necessary, and causes of certain effects; but these aspects do not exhaust *them*; and if we think they do, then we have a very impoverished view of them.

But this is compatible, of course, with *some* facts being necessarily related to others as being the causes of effects we can observe; and it’s time now to take all this apparatus and apply it to our consciousness of our consciousness.

**Section 3**  
**Finite Consciousness**



## Chapter 1

### An overview

Let me map out where we are headed at this point. First of all, I want to explore the effect in consciousness connected with our realization that we sometimes lose consciousness. This will lead to the first encounter we have with consciousness as finite, here in the sense that consciousness is discovered to be both one limited period of consciousness and yet in some way “the whole” of the many periods of consciousness; and the cause of this particular effect will be defined as the “mind.”

Further exploration of the period of consciousness yields a second effect connected with it: the isolation of all the periods of my consciousness from any of anyone else’s, and the non-isolation of any period of my consciousness from any other one; and the cause of this effect will be the fact that each of us has his own mind, which therefore accounts for the subjectivity of our consciousness.

We will then consider another sense of consciousness as finite: the particular form the consciousness happens to be taking at any given moment, and show that this is both “all there is to my consciousness” and “not all there is to my consciousness”; and the cause of consciousness as so restricted will be existence.

In exploring further the form of consciousness as a case of consciousness as finite, we will discover a similarity in all forms of consciousness (as opposed to periods) which makes them similar to

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each other as effects and distinct from the finiteness of periods as effect; and this will allow us to say that all existences are analogous.

We will then attempt to show that the two aspects of existence, its “existenceness” (by which all existences are identical with each other) and “essenceness” (by which each is distinctively itself) cannot be separated or finite consciousness is rendered unintelligible; and therefore, the cause of a given case of finite consciousness is a finite case of existence.

But then if existence is itself finite, it is also an effect; and if it is an effect, its cause cannot also be a finite existence, and yet must be analogously an existence; and therefore, there must be a non-finite existence.

What we will do after this is find various senses in which existence is finite based on characteristics of the finiteness of the form of consciousness, and learn some facts about finite existence, and while we are at it some facts about its non-finite cause.

But this is enough of an indication of where we are going. Before beginning, however, let me stress that, though I happen to be a Christian and therefore a believer in God, I am not doing this even surreptitiously *to prove* that there is a God; so to say that because my research into consciousness leads to this conclusion (which I on other grounds happen to think is true) it is therefore suspect—or that I am doing what Descartes is sometimes accused of doing, making up the whole thing to get the “right people” on my side—is to accuse me of letting my bias blind me to the facts or of intellectual dishonesty.

So let me make a couple of personal remarks here. I am a Christian, not particularly because the values of Christianity, or even the truth of Christianity, makes my life “meaningful” and happier than the alternative, but because I can’t get around the evidence in its favor. From my experience so far, life is torment. If Christianity is true, then this, for certain people at least, is to be expected, and it means that I am to hang on until I am “called,” after which,

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somehow or other, every tear will be wiped away and I will be able to do all the things for this world which I have been blocked from doing by circumstances and my own ineptitude. The happiness in the future I can consider in the abstract, but cannot imagine; but I certainly can foresee the frustration and pain involved in hanging on to the bitter end. So the “meaningfulness” is not so “meaningful” to me that it actually makes it worth while to “make sure” that Christianity is not false.

Because there is an alternative. If I believed that Christianity was false, and basically that if you die you go to sleep and don’t wake up, then I could get out of this hell right now. To me, this is an extremely attractive alternative. Yes, it means that life is absurd; but I don’t consider that life’s making sense is a *value* that overrides the practical value of escaping perhaps years and years of agony. (If you think “Oh, come on! Stop feeling sorry for yourself; it’s not that bad,” then my answer is that suffering is a subjective feeling and if you wouldn’t feel bad in my shoes, that’s because you’re you, not me.)

My point here is not which one is more attractive; my point is that *I want to know what the facts are, and I don’t care which way they point*. I am not “committed” to Christianity in the sense of the subjective certainty I talked about in the first chapter, where it “has” to be true and be damned to the facts, and I will grasp at any straw of fact to make what I believe seem rational. Nor am I “committed” to its falseness in the sense that because it is fantastic to believe that Jesus got up out of the grave and walked around that therefore, this “has” to be a legend.

As I said, however, at the end of the preceding chapter, from now on, absolute certainty is gone; either way we *can* be mistaken, and I will never know without the *possibility* of doubt which view is true. What then do I do? Take the view which is most attractive to the “life style” which would maximize fulfillment and minimize

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frustration?

Not I, at least.

Nevertheless, to this I am “committed”: While life may not “make sense” in the sense of being “rational” so that things fit into neat categories and live up to *a priori* expectations, still *nothing is positively and unsolvably self-contradictory*.

There may be many effects we can find of which we can’t know the true explanation (though of course we can point there by that tricky definition of “cause” I gave); but we will never find a contradiction that is *not* an effect: that just is a contradiction (i.e. a not only unresolved but unresolvable contradiction). In *this* sense, life and everything else *has* to make sense. It can be non-rational in the sense that things “just happen” that aren’t necessary; but it can’t be *irrational*, where things happen that *can’t* happen. And it may also be that some of these non-rational things don’t “fit together” into a meaningful pattern and that this can lead to enormous distress.

What this means to me, to finish this *apologia*, is that the position which makes sense is the one to accept as true, unless *evidence* in the form of facts comes along which falsifies it; in which case, an honest investigator takes up the new situation and then tries to see what makes sense out of *it*.

But let that be enough. I said it really because the effects we will meet are going to be strange and esoteric-sounding enough that the automatic reaction is bound to be, “But this is word-games; he’s just fooling around!” I am deadly serious. I have no “bone to pick,” as they say, and as they also say, I am trying my best to “tell it like it is.” It is your job (if you are reading this) to do me the favor of hearing what I say and not dismissing it as silliness, craziness, or tendentiousness.

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## Chapter 2

### Evidence

Let me introduce this section, then, by discussing something that couldn't be brought up until we had discussed effect and cause. We are now in a position to define what *evidence* is:

**The *evidence* for some fact is a known effect whose cause is that fact.**<sup>31</sup>

This applies in all cases except, of course, self-evident facts. They really have no evidence, because you can't really wonder whether they are true or not; if you do, it's because you don't understand what they mean, as we saw when we were discussing the self-evident facts that there is something and that what is true cannot be false in the respect in which it is true. Just as nothing can be the cause of itself in the strict sense (because then it is not an effect), so nothing can be its own evidence (because then its truth was not in question in the first place).

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<sup>31</sup>I learned that evidence is "the clarity of the thing manifested to the mind," a singularly unhelpful definition, it seems to me. What is the "clarity," and how does it get "manifested to the mind"? The definitions in scholastic philosophy are sometimes less clear than what they are defining. Of course, there's the possibility that you think that *this* definition is somewhat less than pellucid.



Hence, *evidence* is the “reason” why we know something that is not self-evident. If the fact is not self-evident (known to be true simply by understanding what it means), then it is “evident through something else,” which has to mean that you know that Fact A (the one you have evidence for) is true because Fact B (the evidence) *is* a fact and *couldn't be* this fact *unless* Fact A is a fact.

This, of course, is another way of saying that Fact B is an effect of Fact A. Hence, evidence is necessarily an effect of the fact it gives evidence of.

That's obvious. But it says something interesting: *Evidence is the cause of our knowledge of the fact it is evidence for.* That is, if you take the question, “How do you *know* that X is true, when you are not directly aware of it (it is not self-evident)?” then the cause of *this* effect (i.e. our *knowledge* of what is not self-evident) is *the fact that the evidence is an effect* whose cause is the fact we know through it.

Say that again? *The fact that* the evidence is an effect (the evidence as demanding Fact X as its cause) is the fact the *cause* of the effect which is our knowledge-without-direct-access-to. That is, we have two different effects here: first, the effect which is our knowledge-without-direct-access. *This* effect is explained by the second effect: the impossibility of the evidence without the fact that it is evidence for.

Thus, let us say that you have never been to Rome, but you know that Rome is a real city, not like Atlantis. How do you know? You never saw the place. That's the effect. The reason you know is *the fact that* so many people have talked to you about Rome that it's (for practical purposes) impossible for them all to have been lying; and so *if* Rome didn't exist, then they couldn't have said what they said. That's how you know, because of that impossibility-unless (that effect).

So evidence is a cause *precisely because* it is an effect of some fact. It is an effect of a *fact* and a cause of our *knowledge* of the fact.

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I am perhaps spending too much time on this; but I think it is apt to be confusing unless one does spend some time. It shows, however, that effects *as* effects can be causes (i.e. *the fact that* something or other is an *effect* can be the solution to a given problem). *As* a cause, of course, it's a fact, not an effect.

### Chapter 3

#### Consciousness of unconsciousness

**W**ith that out of the way, then, here we go. The first effect I want to observe in our consciousness is perhaps the easiest on a superficial level; but it is already quite mysterious:

**We are aware that we are not always conscious.**

Let me state this explicitly as an effect, and show the pair of facts that contradict each other: (1) We do know that we have lost consciousness (e.g., we know we fall asleep sometimes). (2) It is impossible to be conscious-of-being-unconscious, and therefore, we have no direct way of knowing that we are unconscious.

Obviously, the way out is going to be that we are somehow *indirectly* aware of *having been* unconscious.

But the first thing to do is to establish whether we are simply misreading the evidence. Obviously, what I am talking about is the fact that when we fall asleep, not all of our sleep is taken up with things like dreams. There are times when we are just plain not

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conscious. Is this the case, or do we just *think*, when we are awake, that we weren't conscious during sleep?

This alternative would amount to saying either that (a) when we're asleep, we're *conscious*, but just not *aware* of being conscious or (b) we *were* conscious during sleep, but just forget it when we wake up. In either case, the idea that we've lost consciousness would be an illusion.

Let us test hypothesis (a): we are conscious during sleep, but not conscious of being so. This would mean that there is an act that deserves the name "consciousness" which is not aware of itself. And in fact, psychology uses the term "consciousness" in a sense like this: reactions to the environment involving the nervous system, whether you are "aware" of what is going on or not.

This means, then, that there are two entirely different *kinds* of acts that are called "consciousness:" one in which you are "aware of being conscious," and the other in which you are not, though something is "going on."

Now if we take this second sense of "consciousness," essentially what is happening is that the organism is *reacting* to something acting on it, and nothing more. There is nothing special about the fact that it is the *nerves* that are doing this reacting, except that presumably they are also what does the other kind of reacting where you know what's going on. For instance, in sleep, you react to being in the same position for a while by turning over; but generally speaking, people who are waked up at this point don't give any indication that they *felt* the discomfort, even though the nervous system is obviously what is responsible for the turning. The point that I am making, however, is that what the nerves are *doing* at this subconscious level is just *reacting*.

That is, at this "subliminal" level (which can also happen during waking, when you are conscious of other things, but react to something you "didn't see"), your nerves are doing the same thing

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the liver does when it reacts to food in the stomach, secreting bile, or what the skin does when it reacts to ultraviolet light, producing melanin and a tan, what the mass of the body does when it reacts to the earth's mass, pulling us toward it, and so on. There is no way to single out what the nerves in subliminal "perceptions" do that makes them any different from any of these other reactions.

But if there is no difference in "subliminal conscious" reactions from the reactions of the liver, the melanin-producing layers of the skin, and the mass of the body itself, it follows that these reactions can also be said to "know" what they are reacting to, except that they just don't know that they know it. And in fact, *all* acts of the body would then be "subliminal consciousness"; and indeed, all acts of *any* body would be "subliminal consciousness."

So this definition of "consciousness" as "knowing something but not knowing that you know it" *makes it impossible for anything to be unconscious*. In that case, why call it "consciousness" rather than "Divine inspiration" or anything else you want to name?

That is, if alternative (a) is true, what we have concluded is that you have just decided to redefine "being active" as "being conscious" (as some philosophers, Leibniz and Whitehead among them, have done); but then you have made "consciousness" into a useless term, which makes its contradictory meaningless. In other words, you "solved the problem" of our being conscious of being unconscious by making a cute little word-play that simply defines "unconscious" out of meaningfulness.

But it still leaves the problem, because how can we be "conscious" in the "knowing that you know" sense that we are ever "conscious" in the "knowing but not knowing that you know" sense? How could, in this terminology, what is "conscious" in this second sense ever get to be "conscious" in the first sense if by definition we can't be conscious in the second sense of being conscious in the first sense? (That is, how could a simple reaction be

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known *to be* a reaction—unless it is “conscious” in our sense of the term?) So this “solution” not only makes the use of the word “conscious” otiose, it leaves the problem intact.

This investigation, then, confirms that strange analysis we made in the first chapter where we established that the conscious act was conscious of itself, or we couldn’t know for certain that there is something—and yet we could.

If we take one more step here, we can, I think, lay the issue to rest. Suppose the conscious act (i.e. the one that knows it’s knowing) is like this “subliminal consciousness,” *except* that there’s a “second act” that somehow knows *it*, making the complex of the two “the so-called self-knowing conscious act.”

The first one by itself is just a reaction, like any other reaction, then; it is because it is *known* by the second one that it becomes (part of) consciousness in the meaningful sense.

The prediction from *this* hypothesis is that, since the “first act” is no different from *any* reaction at all, then it follows that *any* reaction which is *known* now deserves to be called “a conscious act” if you take the two (the reaction and the knowledge of the reaction) together.

If we now test this prediction, it means that, for example, your stomach’s act of digesting food is *consciousness of the food* when you are aware of the digesting process; or your *lungs’* act of breathing is *knowledge of the air* when you can feel your lungs; or your skin becomes conscious of defending itself against the sun when you feel the prickles that indicate a sunburn is on the way; or the rock you see fall and hit the ground becomes conscious of what it is doing because that act is known by you.

But in point of fact, when you feel your stomach’s action, it is not felt as “knowledge of the food being digested,” but is a kind of pain, which your education and experience *interprets* as “I must be digesting.” Similarly, the sensation of conscious breathing is not

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“knowing the air,” as if it were analogous to seeing, but “knowing that something is going on in my lungs”; the act of knowing doesn’t *include* the lungs’ act inside it the way the act of “knowing that you are seeing this page” includes within it the “seeing of this page,” rather than that “something is happening with my eyes.” And so on. The two experiences are completely different.

And of course, since there is no *real* difference between the last example and the others except that the act (which supposedly becomes an act of “knowledge” by being known) is *outside* my body, and no reason why the act would *have* to be inside my body for knowledge *of* it to effect this transformation *in* it, then it really follows from this hypothesis that *any* act which becomes known by another is *ipso facto* an act of consciousness. And this in turn means that if we want to *talk* about anything as unconscious, it has become an act of consciousness by our mere talking about it—or that we have once again destroyed any practical distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness.

Let us take it then from this investigation that what we said earlier about the conscious act’s being conscious of itself is true, only let us now define it and say that from now on, this is the sense in which “consciousness” is used in this book:

**Conclusion 1: An act cannot be a conscious act if it is not aware of itself.**

Whether the converse is true (that any act which “contains itself within itself”—which seems to be what “aware” is getting at) is by that very fact an act of consciousness or not we have not established. All we have done is *exclude* anything that is *not* immediately aware of itself from being able to be called “consciousness”; and this is enough for our purposes here.

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That is, the above may not be a *definition* of “consciousness,” but simply a *property* all conscious acts have. If something doesn’t have this property, it can’t be called “consciousness” in any meaningful sense. What I was saying above is whether having *only* this property means that it has to be consciousness is not clear; and both would be necessary for a definition.

Anyhow, if you’re just reacting, then that’s unconscious; and so “subliminal consciousness” from now on is *not* consciousness; it is precisely an *unconscious* reaction (whether it involves the nervous system or not).

Now then, what about the second sense in which the problem can be “solved” as “bad formulation”? This sense assumes that “conscious” is what we mean it to be, that while you’re asleep, you actually know that you know what is going on, but that you *forget* this upon waking, so that afterwards, you *think* that you were unconscious, but you were actually conscious.

Well, we do forget things, so that this also sounds plausible. But if we test this hypothesis, we find that our “forgetting” upon waking up is quite different from ordinary forgetting. First of all, we *do* remember, sometimes, dreams we had during sleep; and if people are waked up during “rapid-eye-movement” sleep, they report the dream as something they were conscious of. Yet when they are waked up at other times, they do not report having been conscious at all.

So this hypothesis now must distinguish between the “forgetting” we do of certain facts, and forgetting the dreams we had during sleep, and the *immediate and total* forgetting we have when waked up out of non-REM sleep. Ordinary forgetting deals with the inability to reawaken some particular *form* of consciousness, not total non-awareness.

Furthermore, when people are waked out of sleep, and indeed every time we wake up, what occurred *before* the “forgotten” period is easily recalled, and in fact is very often recalled in such a way that

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the person denies that there was any “gap.” “I wasn’t asleep, I was just resting my eyes; I heard what you were saying,” he says, and reports it; you answer, “I said that twenty minutes ago; and we’ve been listening to you snore ever since.” and he says, “What time is it? My God, I must have dozed off!”

This is a fairly common scenario, and is even more common for those who haven’t simply fallen asleep, but been knocked out. The consciousness after waking seems to attach itself right to the consciousness before waking.

Now if there was actually consciousness during this gap, why is it so thoroughly forgotten that what went before it is remembered as flowing right through the gap, why is what went before it remembered so clearly, why is this kind of forgetting so different from waking-type forgetting, and why is it that *this* kind of forgetting seems to happen (a) always during sleep and on being “knocked out” chemically or physically, and (b) only during these times? Further, why is it that what is ordinarily forgotten can be remembered, but *this* kind of “forgetting” can’t be brought back into consciousness?

It sounds like the only way you can sustain this hypothesis is to say that the *kind* of consciousness you have when you are asleep (and not dreaming) is a *different sort* of consciousness from the one you have while awake; such that afterwards it is indistinguishable from not having been conscious at all, while other kinds of “forgettings” can at least in principle be remembered.

But then this “other kind of consciousness which is indistinguishable in practice from being unconscious” is just another word-game that defines away the problem by defining consciousness in such a way that practically speaking it means the same (in the case of dreamless-sleep-“consciousness”) as being unconscious.

Hence, this attempt to “solve” the problem by calling it a “badly formed problem” either leaves the problem intact or raises more problems than it solves.

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A tedious journey to establish a fact what is so obviously a fact: we do in fact know that sometimes we are unconscious.

So we are left with the effect: We *are* conscious of having been unconscious, but how can we be so without being conscious-of-being-unconscious?

The cause is obvious, and was seen in the example of the man who dozed off. It is not that he was conscious *of his unconsciousness* as if he “perceived” it somehow as it was happening; but that *there is an effect in his conscious state after he wakes up whose true explanation is his loss of consciousness.*

And this would have to be the case. It is, in fact, what I spoke of in discussing evidence; if we know something but it is impossible to have direct awareness of it, then it has to be known *indirectly*. Hence, the cause of our knowledge-but-not-direct-knowledge is, as I said, that the fact we know indirectly is the cause of some *effect* in what we know directly.

Here, when the man says, “What time is it? I must have dozed off,” he has done two things: (1) He has found the effect and accepted as a cause that he has lost consciousness, and (2) he has made a prediction from the factuality of the cause that his watch will show that it is twenty minutes later than it should be if he didn’t lose consciousness.

Actually, the reasoning process is fairly complex, so let us pull it apart. The effect is his *subjective* experience (based on the fact that you can’t directly be conscious of being unconscious, which necessarily entails that the unconscious time will *seem* not to have existed) of not having lost consciousness and the testimony of the people he is talking to who claim that he has.

There are two possibilities: either they are lying, or he lost consciousness. There is no reason for believing that they are lying; but still, people do play jokes on others, and so there’s a real possibility that they might be lying.

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But if they *are* lying, then it follows from this that no time went by, and his watch will say that it is 8:05, as he thinks it should be. If they are lying, then he was awake all the time (though with his eyes closed), and they couldn't have got over to his wrist and changed the time without his being aware of it. Yet the watch says 8:25; which contradicts the hypothesis that his companions are lying, and is perfectly consistent with his having dozed off. Hence, he accepts as a fact that he dozed off.

Note that it is *conceivable* that they could have staged an elaborate trick of misdirection of attention and changed the time on the watch; and so the man *could* be mistaken. But no one in his right mind accepts this sort of thing unless he has reason to suspect it *a priori* (from knowledge of their character or special circumstances).

Let me, while I am on this topic, mention a certain type of psychological experiment which I contend is immoral: The experimenter is trying to find out how much "social pressure" will affect what a person says (or thinks) is the case. He then sets up an experiment such that a whole roomful of people—who as far as the "subject" knows have no reason to be in collusion—are coached to tell the same blatant lie about something that is patently false; for example to call a green object "yellow." They are coached to respond truthfully to all other questions.

During the "examination of the acuity of perception," then, each of the people in the room is asked to state what he thinks the experimenter is pointing to; for example, what color card he is holding up. Everything goes fine until the green card is held up, and the other people say it is yellow, while the "subject" (the victim) says it is "green," of course. The others look at him oddly.

Things continue without incident through other colors, until the green appears again, whereupon the process is repeated; and it has been shown that it doesn't take many instances of this before the "subject" claims that the green card is in fact yellow.

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This is supposed to show how intimidated we are by others; but there is a much simpler hypothesis. The man seeing what *looks to him* like a green object is confronted with the others' claims that it is actually yellow (i.e. it looks to everyone else as if it's yellow). There are then the same two explanations of this effect as the falling asleep: either there is something wrong with my eyes, or all these people are in a conspiracy to fool me and they're all lying. Absent any *reason* for the second, then it would be insane for anyone to hold it; and so the "subject" takes the (false) explanation that "These people aren't lying and there's something wrong with my eyes at the moment."

The reason I think that this is immoral is that *we use others to confirm whether our senses are reacting properly, since we know that they can "play tricks on us,"* even though they are basically consistent. To tamper with this "checking" process, *especially* in the name of science, which is an attempt to find out what the *facts* are, deprives people of their best tool for checking whether they have found out the facts, and violates their rights as well as contradicting the act of "scientific investigation" in the very exercise of it.

So much for my sermon.

Something rather important, however, is lurking in what we said above. The man was told by his companions that he was asleep for twenty minutes, and he corroborated this by the independent evidence of the watch. But this says that there are *two* pieces of evidence for the *same* fact; which seems to be saying that there are two different *effects* which have the *identical cause* that he lost consciousness for these twenty minutes.

So have we got a disproof for the theorem that different effects have different causes, or do we have an effect? (i.e. that these two pieces of evidence seem to be different effects, but really aren't). Let us look. What is the *effect* in what the people said? Basically, it is the statement, "Twenty minutes went by; but you were not conscious of it." That is, the man wouldn't have prompted them to make it if he

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were conscious of the lapse of time; but their statement makes no sense unless the twenty minutes actually went by.

But let us say that the man says when he checks his watch, “The *watch* won’t lie.” And then he sees the time. But then what is the effect, precisely, *here*? The (non-lying) statement the watch makes about the unobserved time. That is, it is the fact that the man didn’t notice any time elapsing, but *the number on the watch makes no sense unless time actually elapsed*. There would have been no point in consulting the watch unless he knew what the time “should” be if he stayed awake; and so—as effect—the time on the watch is *identical with the statement, “Twenty minutes went by unnoticed by you.”*

In other words, even though these are two different *concrete* situations, the *precise contradiction* they are without the lapse of time is *identical*.

So we can say that the two different pieces of evidence are just two different “what is affecteds” that contain the same effect. Identical effects have identical causes, and different effects have different causes.

Another way of saying this is that predictions from theories actually are saying that there are different (and previously unsuspected) sets of objects that contain the same effect you think you have found the cause of. But to return to the main point, we can say this about our knowledge of loss of consciousness: While we may be fooled in *a few* instances by pseudo-effects in our “waking” consciousness, to claim that they *always* fool us and we never really do lose consciousness is insane.

That is, to hold that you never really do lose consciousness, you would have to hold that clocks and watches do funny things when you close your eyes; people who claim to have seen you asleep are lying; the earth slips on its axis when you close your eyes and it’s dark out and an instant later open them and the sun is up—and the earth does this in time to the faulty clocks; radio announcers who report

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events in Japan as happening “while we slept” are lying, because there was no time for them to happen. And so on and so on. The whole physical and human world is engaged in a vast conspiracy just to fool you into thinking that you actually lose consciousness sometimes when you close your eyes.

As I said in the case of the “experiment” above, this *conceivably could* happen; and in fact there is no way to prove to someone who accepts it that it *didn't* happen, because what you would do would always be explained by him as “part of the conspiracy.”

But that, as I say, is madness: the particular kind of madness which accepts as true something that merely *can't be disproved* when the weight of the evidence against it is overwhelming; and it is madness because in order to hold it you would have to believe that you are of such overwhelming importance that the world literally turns to accommodate itself to you (in this case, just to fool you). It is *possible* to think this way; but it is supremely irrational to do so.

So we must hold onto our sanity in philosophy, which means that one of the steps of Descartes' “method” is crazy: we must not throw out any hypothesis whose contradictory simply cannot be *proved* false.

But before we get into the interesting effect this new fact we have learned gives us, let me point out something important:

**Conclusion 2: No sane person believes that only what he directly experiences is true.**

Any person, that is, who says, “I will accept nothing as true unless I have direct experience of it” is going to have to say, “I never fall asleep.” And he is not a rational person but a madman.

So right at the very beginning, we find that our *direct* experience is, at least in one respect, *false*. It is *impossible* for us directly to ex-

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perience being unconscious; but it is impossible for us, really, never to lose consciousness, which means that we know something as true that we have no direct experience of.

This gives some hope that this method will allow us to “admit” that there is a real world.

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## Chapter 4

### Interrupted consciousness

This new fact that we know, however, means that our consciousness is interrupted by more or less extended periods of unconsciousness; and this generates a rather interesting effect.

**Conclusion 3: One and the same consciousness is actually many separated consciousnesses.**

That is, at least it seems that when you wake up (or regain consciousness from being unconscious) it is *the same* consciousness that resumes—to such an extent that, as I mentioned, it usually seems that there was no period of unconsciousness at all. But how can it be the same one if there were hours when this consciousness didn't exist?

Now there are two ways to “resolve” this effect into a non-problem: Either (a) the consciousness *didn't cease* during the unconscious periods, but simply “became dormant” somehow, or (b) it isn't actually *one and the same* consciousness that comes *back* into existence, but a *similar* consciousness that comes *into* existence.

We have actually already eliminated alternative (a); because what it amounts to is saying that the period of unconsciousness is not absence of consciousness, but a different “sort” or “level” of

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consciousness—and this is exactly what the discussion on whether we ever lose consciousness proved is meaningless. So our consciousness *does* go out of existence, in the sense that when we are unconscious, *there isn't any* of that consciousness any more.

But does that *same* consciousness come back into existence? Alternative (b) says it doesn't; what begins to exist is a new consciousness that's just intimately related to the old one.

If this is the case, then it is not in fact *connected* to the old one, because there is a gap of some minutes or hours when there wasn't any consciousness at all. That is, if it is really connected somehow to the old one (and to no one else's, say), there is good reason for saying that because of whatever it is that connects the two, it *is* the same consciousness that comes back again (as in fact we are going to argue).

That is, we no one really denies that while we are awake, our consciousness at the end of this waking period is “connected” in an unbroken stream to the consciousness at the beginning of that period,<sup>32</sup> even though the *way* we are conscious at the end is not the same as the way we were conscious at the beginning. And *this* difference does not induce anyone to say that these are two different consciousnesses. So differences *in* consciousness (during waking, at least) do not imply multiple consciousnesses, because they are all “connected” into one stream.

Hence, alternative (b) really implies that what begins on

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<sup>32</sup>Well, actually, people like Derek Parfit do deny this, and say that at every subsequent moment a new self takes over, which just happens to be connected to the old one. But this is in the last analysis a silly theory, because there has to be something connecting all these selves into a single set, and what would that be except that “they” are in fact the same one which undergoes changes? Granted, there's a problem in something's changing, because it is both the same and not the same; but it isn't solved by saying that it's just a collection.

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awakening is a different *stream of consciousness*, which is *similar to but not identical with* the stream which stopped several hours before.

But in that case, then my consciousness today is simply similar to my consciousness yesterday, as my consciousness today is similar to *your* consciousness (because after all, both are human consciousness). Perhaps it is “more intimate” than other similarities—because there *are* different levels of similarity in consciousnesses, like similarities of the consciousnesses of relatives and even of identical twins.

But then why, on this hypothesis, do I remember *in exactly the same way* what went on in yesterday’s consciousness as I do what went on in this morning’s consciousness, and yet I can’t remember *at all* what went on in somebody else’s consciousness, no matter how “intimate”?

That is, when even one of a pair of identical twins wakes up, he remembers that he is Robert, not John, and he remembers what he was thinking (as Robert) just before he dropped off to sleep; and he can’t remember what John was thinking or even is thinking now; and even though he and John often “think the same thing at the same time,” they don’t think *each other’s* thoughts, so that the memories are mixed up; Robert would never confuse himself with John.

If, then, essentially what begins to exist is a new but *similar* consciousness, this hypothesis has to explain why it is that (a) it is simple to remember the consciousness that “answers to the name Robert,” to such an extent that the consciousness seems subjectively to be one unbroken stream in spite of the (objectively known) gaps, while at the same time (b) there is an impassible gulf between this “set” of consciousnesses and a “set” or “stream” which “answers to some other name” such that *no amount of effort* can make us “recall” *anything* in any of those other streams (and we must rely on words heard to know what they’re thinking); and finally (c) *each* of these other “streams” of consciousness also experiences itself as connected to a privileged “set” of “streams” all “answering to the same name”

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and no other.

Now if we add to this a non-phenomenological observation, that these other “streams of consciousness” seem to be connected with a given body that’s there, with its brain intact but doing different things during non-conscious sleep, and it’s that body which also “answers to the name” that the consciousness it reports “answers to,” I think we can say that the “new consciousness” hypothesis is ridiculous.

In fact, what the “new consciousness” hypothesis is really doing is defining as “different but more intimately similar” in such a way that for practical purposes there is no difference between it and the “one and the same” we are talking about in our varying stream of consciousness during any waking period. And for all these reasons, we can rule out the “bad formulation” solution of the effect.

**Conclusion 4:** But if there is a real effect, then there must be something that connects these separated periods of consciousness into one single consciousness. Let us therefore make the following causal definition:

**The *mind* is the cause which explains how multiplicity in consciousness can be one single consciousness.**

I have widened the effect a bit to make it more general than just the “connecting” of periods of consciousness, because in all probability if we looked we would find (as indeed we will) other types of “manyness” in our consciousness which nevertheless are a manifold (as Kant would say) of one and the same “stream of consciousness”; and it is well to anticipate this.

In other words, the mind is the *unifier* of one consciousness; whatever it is that accounts for its being *just this one single*

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*consciousness* in spite of any respect in which this “one consciousness” is also “many.”

Yes, but what *is* it? Is it the “spirit”? Is it the brain? Is it the “self”? This is the question to be asked by those who are looking for “cause” in the sense of the “true explanation”; and in fact, we will be able to approach this much later in more or less this way. When, in looking at the modes of *life*, we discuss the effect connected with consciousness’s being aware of itself (something we are not interested in here as an effect, but just as a fact), having seen that forms of energy and bodies can’t do this, we will see that (a) consciousness has to be spiritual, and (b) what is spiritual can’t of itself change or cease; and so (c) whatever accounts for interruptions and differences of the same consciousness (and is involved in their unification) has to be bodily—and we will form a fairly secure hypothesis that the mind turns out actually to be the brain’s nerves, with their property of also having consciousness if the energy is above a certain level and not if there is no energy in them or energy below this level. But that is far in the future.

For now, all we know about the mind is (all of and only) what is *necessary* to explain the effect which we have observed: that the same consciousness is interrupted by periods of unconsciousness.

Let me, however, make another definition which will help to clarify matters a little:

**The *self* is the causer of a unified multiplicity of consciousnesses.**

That is, the self is the causer of which the mind is an abstract aspect; or the self is the concrete thing one of whose “functions” is called the “mind.”

First of all, why use these two terms? The “mind” is used, because

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in ordinary languages, our minds are what we use to “think” or “be conscious” in general. That is, in present-day English, we do not really distinguish (as an ancient Greek would, say) between our “minds” and our “senses” as if they were two different powers or somethings; for us, sensation and imagining and feeling are acts of the mind. So if we want to keep our technical vocabulary fairly close to the common meanings of terms, this is the term to pick for this technical meaning.

**Note, however, that once we have preempted a term for a technical usage, it no longer has its ordinary meaning in our investigation.**

This would have to be the case. If we started using “mind” in the rest of this book in that loose sense *as well as* the technical sense, then an already confusing subject would become impossible to follow. But one is human, and language has only so many words, and we will be needing more and more technical terms as time goes on in this investigation into the whole range of human experience; and so forgive me if I sometimes lapse into using an ordinary word in its ordinary sense, and not maintaining absolutely strict control over the technical senses of my terms. I will do the best I can, and try to keep any confusion to a minimum<sup>33</sup>.

The reason for calling the causer of this effect the “self” is that the “self” is what “answers to the name” that both the mind and what most obviously has the mind (the human being, the body) “answer to.” A given body is, in our ordinary way of thinking a “self”

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<sup>33</sup>I realize I could avoid this difficulty by doing what Kant did, and using esoteric words for my technical terms. But anyone who has read Kant knows that this creates, if anything, even more confusion, as you read page after page full of odd locutions. I can’t write that way, anyhow; and so if you prefer that jargon-filled type of investigation, I’m sorry.

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deserving a name when it can think and respond to our thoughts.

Actually, we will have to redefine this term “self” more precisely much later, toward the end of the investigation into modes of life, when we discover that only some bodies with minds actually know *what* they are (and control what they are); and also spiritual acts like God that don’t have minds (because they can’t “turn on and off”) possess and control their being also, and so deserve the term “self.” But since the causer is by its nature a loose sort of thing, and since “self” later will be a *cause* of a particular effect; but since what is meant by “self” later as a cause and what is meant now by this loose usage are almost the same, I think the term is justified.

In any case, the mind is what gives the self its “selfness,” or is the “selfness” of the self, in our sense of the terms; because the mind is the abstract aspect of the concrete something that “has” an interrupted stream of consciousness “within it” or “belonging to it” somehow. All we know about the self is that it has a mind as an abstract aspect of it—and there may be many more aspects to it as it actually exists besides just the mind.

That is, at this early stage we can see one of the traps that Descartes fell into with this “mathematical method.” He wanted to be sure that once he found something absolutely certain, anything he deduced from it would be absolutely certain, and therefore he *denied* anything that *could* be true but didn’t *have* to be.

But this forced him to *define* the mind as *identical* with the “self,” and say that “All I am is a mind,” and if I *have* a body, it is “another substance,” as he put it.

But we can see that *what is necessarily true is not necessarily the whole truth*, and so you can’t rule out *as even possibly false* things that could be true but don’t have to be. Is, for example, the self really a body which “has” a mind? We are going to show that in fact it is, in our case; and there’s nothing about the mind that says it *can’t* be bodily—that nothing material could unite “streams of consciousness”

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into a single stream. It sounds odd to say that the mind is bodily; but until you can prove otherwise, you can't rule it out—and as I said above, a mind in this sense *has* to be bodily, in fact. So the fact that we are talking about our “minds” and “selves” should by no means lead anyone to think that we are involved in any “ghost in the machine” theory of humanity.

In any case, in our way of looking at things, *the mind and the self are one*; they are the same “thing,” one considered abstractly as *just* what is necessary to unify multiple consciousness, and the other concretely as *what actually does* the unifying.

Now what can be said about the mind as the cause of the unification of interrupted consciousness? What properties must be present for *any* explanation to explain the effect in question?

First of all,

**Conclusion 5: the mind exists during the unconscious periods between periods of consciousness.**

If the mind connects these periods into one stream, then it couldn't do this if it itself ceased at any time when we were unconscious and a “new mind” subsequently arose or the “old mind” came back again.

That's obvious, I should think. But it can be *proved* in this way. Suppose the mind went out of existence and came back again. Then this “new mind” would make the mind both multiple and a unit, needing something-or-other to unite the “old” and the “new” into a single mind (so that the united mind could unite the “old” and the “new” consciousness into a single consciousness).

But really what that means is that *as an effect* (a multiplicity that is one and the same) this “mind” would be *identical* with interrupted consciousness as an effect. But since identical effects have identical

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causes, whatever causes the interrupted consciousness to be a “one and the same” *would also be the cause of the unification of one and the same mind*. But the mind is *defined as* the “whatever it is” that unifies interrupted consciousness, and so the mind would be the cause of *itself*. That is, if it could explain how consciousness is unified, it would *also* have all that is necessary to explain how the “minds” could be unified, because this is identically the same problem. But in that case, it would *have* everything necessary to account for itself as an effect and would not be an effect, or a problem. But that means that (since it is identical as effect with interrupted consciousness) there would *also* be no problem in interrupted consciousness, needing a mind as its cause. But there *is* an effect; interrupted consciousness is unintelligible by itself.

Hence, there is a contradiction in supposing that the mind is not *one* something-or-other that exists all during each period of unconsciousness between periods of consciousness.

Secondly,

**Conclusion 6: it is the same mind that exists between *all* the periods of the same interrupted consciousness.**

This also would obviously have to be true; if there was one mind for one period of unconsciousness and another mind for another period of unconsciousness, then nothing would account for why the *consciousnesses* before the first and after the second would be *one and the same consciousness*. But the whole stream of our consciousness is one single stream of consciousness, in spite of the many periods of unconsciousness.

Note that we *cannot* establish whether the mind existed before the “first” period of consciousness (if we have one), or will exist after the last period of unconsciousness (if there is one). As a matter of

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fact, the likelihood, as we will see is that (a) the mind began to exist either with or shortly before the first conscious experience we had (when our brains were formed enough to be conscious), and (b) though *consciousness* will survive death, the *mind* won't, and once we die, we will no longer be able to be unconscious or to be a differentiated stream of consciousness. At this point, however, based on the evidence we have, we can't say anything one way or the other; because the effect deals with how a *previously existing* consciousness can *exist again* after not existing; and so all this cause can talk about is what goes on between periods.

Thirdly, we can say that

**Conclusion 7: the mind is not the same as consciousness.**

This again seems too obvious even to bother stating; but if it were identical with the consciousness, then, since the consciousness ceases during unconscious periods, so would the mind—and it doesn't. So the mind is *not* consciousness, but is somehow that by which I am conscious (i.e. by which the consciousness is "mine"); it is something "behind" consciousness which is not itself part of the consciousness.

Having established this rather prosaic fact, we can say some interesting things with respect to historical positions in philosophy. First of all, Descartes' statement "I think, therefore I am" was correct in a sense, even if not in the sense he meant it. There *is* an "I" (a self, and a mind) which "has" consciousness but is not itself the consciousness which it "has."

If you take Locke's notion that this mind "behind" consciousness can't be known because we have no experience of it, then you have to accept that one and the same consciousness can cease to be and begin to be hours later, or can "resurrect" itself even when it doesn't exist to do the "resurrecting." That's more than I can swallow, at

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least.

So all the philosophers (like Locke and Hume and Dewey) who hold that there isn't any "mind" that is something other than consciousness and "is conscious," but all there is is a stream of consciousness don't know what they are talking about. They never noticed, evidently, that they go to sleep at night and wake up in the morning.

It just goes to show how not noticing something which is so perfectly obvious that it doesn't seem to deserve noticing can get brilliant people (because they were brilliant) into really silly positions (because the position that there's no mind behind consciousness is really silly if we go to sleep and wake up).

Fourthly, we can say that

**Conclusion 8: there are different minds, a different mind for each individual stream of consciousness.**

If this were not the case, and we were all "parts" or "aspects" of some greater mind (or greater consciousness), then this would mean that all these consciousnesses would be united into one consciousness; and *as* consciousness, it would be aware of its consciousness, and so *each of us would know what was going on in these other consciousnesses.*

That is, if you are going to assert that we are all "parts" or "aspects" of one great consciousness, then you have to say that *this* part is conscious only of *this part* in all its multiplicity *and is unconscious* either of the whole or of any other part. But how can consciousness be unconscious while it is conscious? This "greater consciousness" of which we are a "part" is not (in the part at least) conscious of itself—in which case, we are back to "unconscious consciousness" and have destroyed any reason for using the term

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“consciousness.”

So Georg Hegel, who was arguably the most brilliant person who ever lived, was simply wrong. We are *not* “moments” of Absolute Spirit as it “comes to know itself” in us, its otherness. Each of us is a mind uniting *just this finite* stream of consciousness; and the mind precisely *cuts us off from* anyone else’s consciousness, including God’s.

Another way of saying this is that

**Conclusion 9: something about the mind limits the consciousness of any one of us to being just this stream of consciousness and no other.**

In other words, something about the way the mind “operates” (accounts for its effect) *includes* all the periods of *my* consciousness and integrates them into the one stream called “my consciousness,” but by the same token it *excludes* all other streams from this one.

That is, the mind itself, which is the *cause* of the unity of any single stream of consciousness is the *causer* of the *separation* of this (unified) stream from any other consciousness. The mind itself, of course, can’t be both the cause of the unity of my multiple consciousness and the cause of the fact that consciousness is not one stream but many, because different effects have different causes, and these are two different effects. Note also that in order to connect periods of consciousness into one stream, it would not be necessary to exclude other streams of consciousness; if my consciousness were the only one there was, and it were separated into periods, it would still be necessary for them to be united, but there would be no question of their being “private” or “exclusive.”

Nevertheless, the exclusion of other streams of consciousness from this “set” which is my consciousness has got to be connected

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somehow with the mind as it unifies, it would seem. It would be difficult to see how the mind could “pick out” the right set of consciousnesses to unify if there weren’t *something* about its doing this which made it impossible for other consciousnesses to become part of the stream.

Now I do not want to imply that there are a bunch of periods of consciousness sitting around in a waiting-room somewhere until they can get assembled into “Robert’s” or “John’s” streams of consciousness. The consciousness you are going to have tomorrow after you wake up certainly doesn’t exist yet—though we can’t say this based on the evidence we have *from this effect*. One possible explanation of the unification of periods of consciousness *could* be that there are disjoint periods that get unified by being “picked up” by this or that mind; but that isn’t, by any means, the only explanation that would work; and far more likely is the one that the mind is some kind of apparatus like a radio receiver that can react to various acts, and since it’s the same receiver, then all the reactions are like the sounds coming out of the same radio’s speaker (which “unifies” all of the “streams of sounds” into “this radio’s sounds” as opposed to “that radio’s sounds”).

But the point here is that all that we said above about the properties of the mind have to be true, whatever the mind as “the true explanation” of our stream of consciousness is. At the very abstract level we are working, we can’t say much, and must be careful not to invest what is being said with a meaning that goes beyond that tiny bit that is demanded by the unintelligibility of the effect. If we are careful, we won’t be getting trapped into making statements we can’t justify because they “stand to reason” or are “obvious.” We have already seen a lot of cases where things that seemed perfectly obvious admitted of a completely different explanation. What we are doing with our notion of “cause” is simply picking out the common core of *every* explanation that could even possibly explain the effect

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in question.

Now I don't want to explore at just this point what the precise effect is in the *limitation* of my stream of consciousness to being *just mine* and no one else's, because limitation is by no means an easy effect to describe, and this particular type of limitation is a bad kind to start with. Suffice it to say that *some aspect of the mind* (but not, as we saw the mind *as such*) is in all probability the cause of it.

Let me note, also briefly, a couple of other effects that we are not particularly concerned with here, but that will figure into our investigation later:

(1) *Consciousness begins* at the beginning of any period of consciousness; and (2) *Consciousness ends* at the end of the period. Consciousness "turns on and off."

Now since the mind exists throughout the period of unconsciousness (and if there is diversity in the conscious period, it also exists to unify that), then *the mind as such* can't account for why consciousness "turns on" at precisely this moment and no other, or why it "turns off" at this other moment. Neither can consciousness; in the first case, because there isn't any consciousness beforehand, and in the second, because if it "turned itself off" *because* it was *consciousness*, it would follow that it would be turning itself off all the time it was consciousness, which is absurd.

So even though the mind explains the problem of how these diverse periods of consciousness *get unified*, it doesn't explain the opposite problem of *how one and the same consciousness gets separated from itself*. Different effects have different causes, and though these are two different ways of looking at what is happening when we lose and regain consciousness, *that is precisely what we mean by "effect": a way of looking at something such that it doesn't make sense looked at in that way*.

And the fact is that consciousness as broken up into periods is unintelligible from *two* different and legitimate points of view: (a)

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these diverse conscious periods have to “belong,” somehow, to one and the same stream; but (b) this one stream needs to get separated by periods of unconsciousness.

But that second effect also breaks into two: It needs to get (1) turned off and then (2) turned back on. But since destroying an existing period of consciousness (the kind of limit called “ending”) is different from bringing into existence something that doesn’t exist (“beginning”), then each of *these* is a distinct effect, and so each has its own cause different from the other, and different from the mind itself.

Again, I don’t want to explore this in detail, or what as it stands is going to be an immense book would have to be a library. Let me just say that it might make sense to pick out a term like “fatigue of the mind” (if you included some aspect of a blow on the head or a Mickey Finn as “fatigue”) for whatever turns the consciousness off (and it is probably connected with inability of energy to flow through the brain’s nerves—because of their being clogged from past experiences or damaged); and “rest” (which allows energy to flow through them again) as what turns consciousness back on. There are probably some significant things you could do if you explored the minimum that had to be the case if consciousness were to turn off and on again; but let us leave this here.

But before going to on the effect involved in the fact that consciousness takes on many different forms, let me point out the following conclusion:

**Conclusion 10: a given period of my consciousness is a limited case of my consciousness.**

That is, today’s consciousness is obviously my consciousness, but is not the whole of my consciousness; and so it is *only this period* of

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my consciousness.

We are shortly going to have to see just how the fact that something is limited is an effect; but I want to point out here that we already have run across two different instances of limitation: (1) my (whole) consciousness is limited to being just mine and no one else's; and (2) any given period of my consciousness is limited to being just this period of this stream of consciousness and no other period of it; and this is a limitation *within* the consciousness.

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## Chapter 5

### The form of consciousness

We come now to another one of those facts that hides an effect which looks so innocent and is so sinister:

**I am conscious in different ways at different times.**

The effect contained in this is the following:

**Conclusion 11: One and the same consciousness is different at different times.** (I.e., it differs from *itself*, in the sense of what it was at the other times.) This is actually more of an observation than a conclusion, but I want to separate it out, and let's not multiply categories here.)

Well of course. But that's just another way of saying that I'm conscious *of different things* at different times, isn't it? It's the same consciousness, but it's not that *it* is different, it's what it's conscious *of* that's different. So what's the problem? Why call this an "effect" as if it didn't make sense?

Not so fast. Here is the place where it is most difficult to see that there is a problem at all, so we must be careful, or we will fall into the trap of people like Dewey in the preceding effect who claimed that there isn't any "mind"; all you need is the stream of

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consciousness, and what's the problem? The problem, as we saw, is that if you say this, you can't admit that you ever go to sleep.

So let us take what was just said as the first way of solving the problem by saying that there is no problem: "To be conscious in different ways" is the same as saying "to be conscious of different things."

But this would mean that when I imagine a unicorn, *I would then be conscious of a unicorn*. But there is no such thing as a unicorn, and so what could being conscious "of" it mean, when there is no "it" to be conscious "of"?

The only way to make sense out of being conscious "of" the unicorn is that, "Well, maybe there aren't any unicorns outside my mind, but they exist in my mind." Now of course, "mind" here is to be taken in the loose sense, not as if there were unicorns there trotting around inside your brain while you are in a dreamless sleep; and so what must be meant is not that the unicorn exists in the (technically defined) mind, but that the unicorn exists *in the conscious act of imagining*, but not outside it.

That is, if the unicorn *existed* in my mind, so that I *discovered* it by searching through my brain, then we've got a rather large animal with sharp hooves and a pointy horn in our heads somewhere waiting to be looked at when we open the right door—but it doesn't exist anywhere else. But that is absurd, and is clearly not what is meant by the unicorn as "existing in my mind." The only thing that exists is the *image* of the unicorn; even though it is imagined to have a sharply pointed horn, that horn will never poke its way through anything at all, either as "in my mind" or as "in the act of imagining."

So the first thing to note is that if the unicorn can be said to "exist" in the act of imagining, then *there is no distinction between the unicorn which exists and the image of it*. My mind does not, evidently, *produce* a unicorn which it then "looks at," giving me the image of

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the unicorn which the mind created. In that case, where is the unicorn with its sharp horn? If anything at all is “produced” by the mind, *it is simply the image*, and in this case the image *of* the unicorn is the unicorn; it is *all there is* to the unicorn.

Last step. If what the unicorn as “existing” is is just the image *of* the unicorn, then *in what sense is this being conscious of something as opposed to simply being conscious in a definite way?*

Remember, the attempt was to resolve any effect connected with being conscious in different ways at different times by saying that all this was was a poor way of stating that at different times “we are conscious of different things.” But the unicorn now is shown not to be something you can be conscious *of* that is in any meaningful sense different from simply a definite way of being conscious.

Notice, by the way, that if the act of consciousness is conscious of itself and you imagine a unicorn, it would make perfect sense to say (a) that the act of consciousness with this particular form *would appear to itself* so that you would be aware of the particular form your consciousness is taking at the moment, and (b) *that you would be aware that there is nothing “beyond” the act in this case*, or that the act was not *responding* to some “thing” the way you would be aware that your perception of your dog barking out in the back yard is a *response to* something or other, or is an awareness *of* the dog.

This long discussion allows us, then, to say the following:

**Conclusion 12: Not every conscious act is conscious *of* something (other than itself).**

Those, like Edmund Husserl for instance, who say that consciousness by its nature is “transcendent” and “goes beyond itself” and is always “consciousness-of” and is never just plain consciousness have not tried to see whether this can make any sense

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out of imagining as opposed to seeing. To say you have “consciousness-of” something that doesn’t exist is to say that (since there is no “something” that doesn’t exist) you have consciousness-*of* nothing at all, which is another way of saying that the consciousness is *not* consciousness-of in this case.

Once again, the attempt to remove the problem as bad formulation reduces itself to gibberish.

But eliminating this resolution of the problem as “bad formulation” carries with it an interesting difficulty in itself: If not every act of consciousness actually “reports” something other than itself, how do we know that *any* of our forms of consciousness do so? That is, maybe the idealists are right, and all there is is consciousness which has different forms, and there isn’t any “real world out there” at all.

We are actually headed toward an answer to this; but the point here is that you can’t answer it simply by *asserting* that all knowledge is “transcendent” (in the sense of “reporting” something “out there” beyond it) just because some or most of it *seems* to be this way.

What I am going to try to show is that if a person’s stream of consciousness takes on more than one form (irrespective of what that form is or seems to “report”), this very fact demands that there *be* something other than the consciousness or the mind.

But this seems to be saying that when we imagine a unicorn, there must be a unicorn which causes the form of consciousness called “imagining a unicorn”—and this makes nonsense of our classifying our consciousness into imagining and perceiving; and so there must be more to it than just this.

And the solution is that, given that we can somehow store our consciousness in our brains (which has something to do with the mind) to be reawakened, then the *cause* of the *particularity* of the form of the “reawakened” consciousness (the whatever-it-is “outside” that forced us originally to be conscious in this way) is now

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the *condition* for that act as “reawakened,” and its *cause* as “reawakened” is the “mind-in-the-condition-it-is-in-at-the-moment” (which is part of the reason why we don’t say that the act is conscious *of* something)—while “outside” things are the *causes* of *new* experiences, or in general of the ones we refer to as “perceptions” (and which we think of as conscious *of* something).

But it’s not that simple, of course, and we’ll have to investigate hallucinations (which are obviously imaginings masquerading as perceptions) and how we can be fooled by them if the conscious act is aware of itself. The answer has to do with the fact that the cause of the *beginning* of any form of consciousness is the raising of energy in a particular nerve-pattern above a certain level (called the “threshold of perception”) and this raising can be done either by outside energy coming into the nerves or by channeling energy that is always there in the brain into a set of nerves. Both of these, however, occur *outside* consciousness (i.e. below the conscious level), and so consciousness has to *interpret* whether the “beginning to be conscious” was self-initiated or not—which in some cases is easy (as when you are consciously trying to activate an image) and in some cases isn’t (when the mechanics of your brain is doing this for you).

We will also have to deal with “creative imagination,” where you are not simply recalling a perception you had, but combining pieces of past perceptions into new wholes (like unicorns) which you never experienced as such; and the answer to this, not to leave you in suspense, has to do with the fact that nerves used in one complex can be connected with nerves used in another complex, and somehow we can channel the energy in our brains.

At any rate, that is where this investigation is going. It is well for you to know this at the outset, because it’s going to look as if we’re stepping into a trackless jungle.

Let us now state the effect a bit more precisely:

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**Conclusion 13: One and the same consciousness is different from itself at different times.**

This is actually one way of calling consciousness *finite*, or limited. The fact that something is limited means that it is somehow less than itself, and so is different from itself, which certainly on the face of it sounds like an effect.

What I am going to do is to try to approach this effect from different angles (the first of which is in bold face above), to show that, no matter how you look at it, to be conscious in *more than one way* means that any *given* way of being conscious is a contradiction taken by itself. The different approaches will *appear* to be different contradictions, but actually will be just different *formulations* of the same one. When we are through, it will perhaps be clear that this is not just a game with words, and there is something funny about a consciousness that “takes on” different forms.

The first examination rests on the supposition behind the effect as stated above that there is no difference between my *consciousness* at the moment and the *form of* my consciousness at the moment; or, my consciousness at the moment *is* precisely *this way* of being conscious. Obviously, then, my consciousness last Saturday night (which happened to be that of listening to Chopin’s Second Piano Concerto), is *different from* the form my consciousness is in now (which is experiencing what I am typing into the computer). But if there is no difference between the consciousness and the form the consciousness happens to be in, then the consciousness (which is the same one, mine) is different from itself.

You can see why this looks like a game with words. Why make the supposition that there is no difference at all between the consciousness as “my consciousness” and the consciousness as “this way of being conscious”?

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So the second examination takes that alternative to see if it works. What it amounts to is to say that the *aspect* of my consciousness by which it is *the same* all the time is whatever it is about it that allows me to call it “my consciousness”; and this is *really distinct* from the aspect we can call the “form” it takes on (the watching the computer screen as opposed to hearing the symphony). One aspect of it is the same all the time, and another is different each time. Where’s the problem now?

Let us look to see if this makes sense. The problem with it consists in the fact that this “common aspect” that’s the same all the time is the fact that my consciousness at all times is (a) *mine* (or it would be someone else’s sometimes) and (b) *consciousness* (or it would be unconsciousness sometimes, and that’s a different problem). So all the time I am conscious, my consciousness has to be *my consciousness*, and on the assumption that there are “aspects” it splits up into, then it follows that the “form,” the distinctive aspect, must be *outside*, or “other than” or “different from” the “my consciousness” aspect.

That is, if the form were *included within* “my consciousness,” then of course “my consciousness” would *vary* each time, which is exactly what this formulation is attempting to avoid. Hence, the “form” must be *outside* my consciousness.

But in that case, how can I be *conscious* in this way? That is, if the form is *different from* my consciousness, then either (a) my consciousness is totally unaffected by it, and so far as my *consciousness* is concerned, it is always the same, and I am not *conscious in* different ways at all; any difference would have to be *unconscious*. Or (b) this form, which is outside consciousness *affects* my consciousness somehow so that at the moment it is *different from* what it would be if this (outside) form weren’t acting on it.

But alternative (b) simply gets us back to the problem we were trying to avoid. If the outside form *makes the consciousness different each time*, then it is the *consciousness that is different from itself* each

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time, however it got to be that way.

On the other hand, if the form is outside consciousness (not part of it) and affects it in no way at all, then *my consciousness is not different in any way at all each time*. That is, since the part that “remains the same” must necessarily be the part that is the “my-consciousness” aspect of this pair of aspects, then the form, as unconscious, could not be *recognized* in the consciousness—because, precisely, it isn’t *in* there.

Thus, if you take the form of consciousness as *different from* the consciousness itself and still say that it is meaningful to say “I am conscious in different ways at different times”, what you get is this:

**Conclusion 14: Any given way of being conscious is consciousness as containing what is outside itself within itself, or what is not itself as not different from itself.**

That is, the form, as different from consciousness, has to be *part of* the consciousness itself, so that what is always the same (my consciousness) is different each time. And after all, when I am conscious *of* my dog out in the back yard, then my *dog* is outside my consciousness, but the *form of my perception* can’t be. I recognize that the dog is there because *the way I am conscious* is different from what it is when I look down at the computer screen instead of out the window. So the form of the consciousness *itself* can’t be outside the consciousness the way the dog is, or obviously the consciousness wouldn’t be different in each case; if it’s “outside” at all, it has to be “outside as inside,” whatever that means.

To put this still another way, if the form is not *within* the “my consciousness,” then the consciousness (which is aware of itself, remember) would recognize *itself* as always the same, and would not know (how could it?) that it was different at different times—because

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as consciousness it wouldn't be. So it's the *consciousness* which has to be distinctive, somehow, at this moment.

But this gets us right back to the previous formulation: the consciousness at this moment is different from itself; and this formulation simply *describes* this difference in terms of “containing what is outside itself within itself” or “containing what is not itself (*this* consciousness) as identical with itself (consciousness).”

But perhaps *this* is just a bad formulation, because I am assuming that this “common element” is all there is to the “consciousness,” while the *actual act* of consciousness contains *both* the “common element” and this distinctive element, the “form.” That is, “consciousness-in-the-abstract” is always the same, but “consciousness in the concrete” contains both the abstract (same) element and another abstract, distinctive element, the form. This is the third examination.

The problem with this is that it is this “abstract” common element which *makes this concrete act deserve the name “consciousness”* and the form has nothing to do with this, unless it *alters* the consciousness so that the *consciousness* becomes at this moment just this way of being conscious.

The point is that to talk of the “concrete act of consciousness” as containing the form, while the “abstract aspect of it *as* the same as my other acts” doesn't, is simply to engage in a word-game that *hides* the problem which is still there. The only thing about this concrete act which allows you to call it (concrete) consciousness is precisely the abstract aspect which is the same in all concrete acts—unless you want to say that *in the concrete*, consciousness contains within it the form (so that it always has *some* form and can't be just “my consciousness”) and to talk about “my consciousness” as if it ever existed *as such* is to reify (“thingify”) an abstraction.

But actually, this insight argues *for* the effect above, not against it. If “my consciousness” as always the same (this common element)

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is actually just an abstraction and can't exist as such, then my *real* consciousness, my consciousness *as it actually exists always contains some form*, and hence always is "united" with something other than itself. My consciousness, apparently, can't even *be* my consciousness unless it "has" some form, which is *not* my consciousness.

Interestingly, to take up the fourth examination, there is another sense in which my consciousness contains inside it what is not my consciousness. We could never even recognize that we are conscious in different ways at different times *if my consciousness now were not conscious of the fact that at other times I am not conscious in this way*.

This is very mysterious indeed. What it means is *not* that I can recall a past experience and make it part of my present consciousness (as when, looking at the computer, I remember what the concerto sounded like). In that case, my present consciousness just has a more complex form (which is itself a problem, but not the one I am interested in at the moment). In order to recognize that I have been conscious differently from the way I am now conscious, *these different ways must be recognized as not now part of my consciousness*; that is I must be aware (a) that my consciousness now is *not the same* as past ways of being conscious (that they are not part of it); but this means (b) that these "past" ways are *conscious as being unconscious yet part of my consciousness*.

How's that again? Yes. I have to *know* now that there is at least one way of being conscious that is *not* part of my present consciousness, and yet *is part of my consciousness*. If I don't now know both of these facts, it is impossible for me to say meaningfully, "I have been conscious in different ways at other times." If the "ways" are part of my present consciousness, then obviously I am now conscious (in part) in the same way I was conscious, and the statement is false. If the "way" is *not* known now, then obviously I can't make the statement at all. And if it is not known as *a form of my consciousness*, then all I would be saying is something like "you have

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your consciousness and I have mine,” and would not recognize differences *within my own* consciousness.

So my consciousness now contains—explicitly as *unconscious*—what it recognizes as “my consciousness.” Or in other words, it contains within itself the opposite of itself as the same as itself. Or, if you want to put this another way, it contains within itself what is the same as itself (the past consciousness) as the opposite of itself, because it recognizes the past consciousness as *not* conscious (though as “having been” conscious).

Notice that my consciousness now does not know explicitly *what these past forms of consciousness are*, because as soon as I name them, they become conscious, and are now part of my present consciousness; so in order to be able to say, “I have been conscious in other ways than this,” I must know those other ways as being both conscious and unconscious: they have to be unconscious *now*, but I have to know *now* that there is something now unconscious which was (at the time) my consciousness.

But, to take up the fifth examination, perhaps I shouldn’t say that my consciousness *contains* these past acts as unconscious; perhaps the way to formulate this is that my consciousness *leaves out* the other ways of being conscious, and recognizes that it is leaving out *something* by being just this way of being conscious. But I also know that what it is leaving out is precisely other instances of *my consciousness*, which form part of that stream of consciousness called “my consciousness.”

But this gives us another formulation of the same effect:

**Conclusion 15: My consciousness at any given moment leaves out all of itself except this moment of consciousness (which is just this way of being conscious).**

This shows us another interesting fact that we can state as a conclusion:

**Conclusion 16: Most of my consciousness is unconscious.**

It gets more mysterious the more we probe, doesn't it? All the ways I *have been* but am not now conscious in, all my past consciousness, is precisely *unconscious* now; only the *present* consciousness is actually *conscious*. And yet you can't say that my present consciousness is *all there is* to my consciousness, because then a minute from now "all there is to my consciousness" will be unconscious, and so the whole of my consciousness will have gone out of existence—and then what can you call the consciousness that "replaces" it? As a matter of fact, it will then be "all there is to my consciousness."

And the point of *this* is that my present consciousness both is and is not all there is to my consciousness. How can what is *unconscious* be *consciousness*? and everything but my present consciousness is (now) unconscious. And yet this particular "unconsciousness" was precisely my consciousness, and I recognize that my present consciousness is only *part* of my *whole* consciousness, though all but this part is the opposite of itself.

So if my present consciousness leaves out all my past consciousness, it leaves outside itself what is *itself*, in such a way that it recognizes that it is doing this, and so by leaving out part of itself it contains within it the part it has left out *as* left out (and so recognizes the present as *only* a part).

I told you this was a jungle.

Let me make a sixth attempt. Let us look again at the form as somehow different from the consciousness: It would follow from this that the "common element" of "my consciousness," which (abstract

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or not) is always the same, would be *less than* the concrete act of consciousness, which *also* contains the form—which is not the same as the “common element.” So the concrete act is “my consciousness + this form.”

But the concrete act of consciousness (which is aware of itself) *recognizes itself as less than what it is “in itself.”* That is, I know that being conscious *in this way* is not *greater than* my consciousness, but is a *restriction* of my consciousness to being (at the moment) just this particular *way* of my being conscious, and my consciousness can have all sorts of other forms and still be my consciousness.

That is, my being conscious as looking at the computer *excludes* my consciousness of hearing the piano concerto (as well as every other form of my consciousness). Hence, this “addition” of the form *subtracts* from my consciousness, making it *less* than it otherwise would be. That is, to say that I *have* this form of consciousness is for practical purposes to say that I *lack* all the other ways in which I have been conscious; so to “possess” this form is really the same thing as to *leave out* all the other forms that my consciousness could be taking at the moment.

In the preceding examination, I said that my consciousness leaves outside itself all of the past *consciousness* (with their forms) I had; what I am saying here is that the fact that at the moment I am conscious in only this way and am not recalling the sound of Chopin’s concerto means that *right now* I could be recalling it and so have that form *in addition* to the one I am now having; but I do not have that form, and so my having the form I now have means that I *leave out* all the “additional” forms I *could* be having even now.

So if the form is not the consciousness, we have a different version of the dual formulation of “what is outside is inside” and “what is inside is left outside.” because “adding” this form leaves you somehow with *less than* your consciousness could be.

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But, in the seventh place, not even this is all there is here. Perhaps I could make what I am saying clearer by a comparison. We know that a temperature of 72 degrees is heat; and it seems obvious that the 72 degrees doesn't imply that you take "heat" (one aspect) and *add to it* 72 degrees of "temperature" (an additional aspect) so that you come up with something greater than just heat. No, the "72 degrees" actually means that *there is no more than this much heat here*; it isn't as if the "muchness" *increased* the heat. The particular amount of heat (the temperature), if anything, tells you how much *less* heat you have than you could be having. Heat as such is not "less than" any temperature at all; if anything (since it can take on any temperature) it is "in itself" greater than any definite temperature.

But the point is that the "temperature" is not a "something" that gets attached to the heat; it is simply *a way of expressing the fact that there is no more heat here (at the moment) than this*.

Similarly, the form my consciousness has at the moment is not a "something" that is attached to the "my consciousness" part of it; it is *simply a way of describing* the fact that my consciousness now is *no more than just this particular way of being conscious*.

Perhaps, then, we got into trouble by supposing that the form was a "something," when in fact all it is is a way of describing the consciousness itself. That was our bad formulation.

But, in the eighth place, the difficulty with *this* formulation is that it throws us right back to the original formulation of the effect: The way I am conscious *now* is not anything at all except my consciousness; the "way" is not a "something" in addition to it. But then the way I was conscious last Saturday night is not anything at all except my consciousness; and so what is identically the same as itself is different from itself.

Now don't go saying, "Well, it's not different from itself *in the same sense* as it's identical with itself," because *that* is precisely the "two aspects" formulation, which, if they *are* different from "each

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other,” are *not* different from “each other”; and our new formulation of consciousness “with” its form as analogous to heat “with” its temperature was supposed to avoid the difficulties in the form’s being a “something” different from the consciousness.

At this point, I hear you saying, “For heaven’s sake! Will you stop with the word-games already!” That is, a person who is not following closely will quickly become impatient with all my different formulations of the fact that my consciousness *somehow* differs from moment to moment, while at the same time it is *my consciousness* and not some other consciousness which is different from moment to moment.

The immediate reaction to this is, “So that’s what happens. What’s the problem?” This “approach” simply takes what I said just above as a *fact* and simply *alleges* that since it is the case, then it’s intelligible. This is true, of course.

But what I’m trying to show is that it’s not intelligible *in itself*, and therefore needs something *other* than itself to make it intelligible.

In other words, what I am doing is getting back to the original “solution”: my consciousness is conscious *of* different things at different times. And it is the thing it is conscious *of* that somehow restricts it to being *this* way of perceiving rather than *that* way. That is, I am proving that the *only* explanation of the fact that my *experience* of hearing a concerto is different from my experience of the computer screen I am looking at now is that (a) there *really are* (or rather were) those sounds “out there,” independently of my way of hearing them, and (b) they are different from the *reality* which is the screen I am now looking at. (This, of course, leaves us with the problem of imagination, which I will deal with later.)

But the point of all this discussion is that this is not now simply a “gut feeling” or an assertion, because what I have been at such pains to prove is that *there is no other way to make sense out of my different forms of consciousness but something or other outside it.*

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It's one thing to *say* that consciousness "refers to" some being outside itself, and it's quite another to know that it not only does but *has to*. In the first case, you're open to a "refutation" by someone who simply asserts the opposite as what seems more sensible to him (on the grounds, for example, that he can't see how what is "outside" consciousness—the object "out there"—could ever be "inside" it—i.e. known by it). Well, I'm showing not only *how*, but *why* the alternative that there's nothing but consciousness is self-contradictory.

And isn't that what we mean if we say that a given way of being conscious is the *effect* of the object "out there"?

Finally, consider this: If the form of consciousness is simply, analogously to a given temperature, a way of saying that the consciousness now is *just this* consciousness, then this gives us a new (and the last, thank God) formulation of the effect:

**Conclusion 17: My consciousness at the moment is my consciousness *as less than* what it is for me to be conscious.**

Here we have the limitation notion of the way of being conscious made explicit. The "way" is simply *the fact that* at the moment my consciousness is less than what it *means* for me to be conscious; I could, even at the moment, be conscious in a different way or even a "more expansive way" than I now am.

These other ways I could be conscious in are, of course, just my consciousness (since the "way" is just a way of *describing* my consciousness at the moment and is not a "something"); so the consciousness of the moment is only partially equal to the intelligibility (the "meaning") of my consciousness—or its *reality*. That is, its reality is somehow greater than its concrete manifestation at the moment, while not actually *being* any greater than this. That

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is, the *reality* of my consciousness at the moment is just this moment's consciousness (in this form), while in another sense my consciousness is *really* the whole stream of consciousness (with all the other forms, all of which, of course, are now unconscious).

To sum up, then, any *given* concrete act of consciousness is always *less than* what my consciousness *could* be, or is a limited example or instance of "my consciousness," which does not exhaust what my consciousness *is*. That is why it "leaves some of itself outside itself," or it "contains what is not itself as inside itself" or it "is different from itself."

Now at this point, if you don't see that there is a real problem here, go back over what was said and see if you can formulate things in such a way that "I have been conscious in different ways from the way I am now conscious" can be meaningfully said without somehow involving yourself in a contradiction. I don't think you can.



## Chapter 6

### The finite

The four formulations of the effect connected with varying forms of consciousness, as I say, are just four different ways of stating what is actually the same problem. And since this effect is going to crop up all over the place, not just in consciousness (where we have seen three different *types* of finiteness already), it would be well to make a general definition of the effect we are talking about:

*The finite is (a) That which is different from itself, or (b) That which contains what is not itself within it as not different from itself, or (c) That which leaves some of itself outside itself, or (d) That which is less than what it is to be itself.*

We have already seen an example of something finite which was not consciousness: heat, with its limitation called “temperature,” which is not the heat but is not anything but the heat.

Let me give another example, so that you can have something that at least seems concrete to hold onto: take a wooden ball with its surface.

Now what is the surface? Is it the wood or isn't it? Yes.

That is, if you were a termite inside the ball, and you were eating your way out, then you would find wood all around you, until you

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got to the surface; but when you got there, you would not find the *surface* to be anything but the wood; the air you would encounter is, of course, *outside* the surface (and it has its own surface touching the ball's surface); all you would find when you got to the surface would be that *there was no more wood* in front of you.

So the surface *is nothing but the wood*. It isn't a "something" added to the wood—which is easily seen from the fact that the ball was made by *taking away* wood from a block that was *bigger* than this one. That surface "was added" by *taking away* wood, or "came to be" simply because the carving-away process stopped, leaving *only this size* piece of wood. The point here is that *precisely nothing* was added to the wood to "make" this surface; what before was just wood and *not* a surface is now a surface *without being any different from what it was*; it just happens now to be "facing" the outside world.

Still, the surface *is not the wood*, because if it were, of course, you the termite would be at the surface before you got there. That is, if the surface *meant* the wood, then wherever there is wood, there is the surface, and so there would be a surface *inside the surface*, which is absurd.

To put this another way, when the larger block was found and it was decided to carve it into a ball, the *surface* which makes the wood a ball (and not a cube, say) *was not there at the time*. Say at that time the block was a cube; it didn't have a ball inside it, as if the surface were there; there was just wood inside it. So the spherical surface *is not the same as the wood*.

But still, as we said, *it is not "something" different from the wood*. What it is is the *self-negation of the wood* within the wood itself, making it "just this shape and size of wood" and not any other shape and size of wood.

So the wood with its surface is *different from itself*, because, though it is just wood, it is a *ball* and not a cube; but wood is wood

whether it's a ball or a cube of wood. It is wood as *containing non-wood within it as not different from itself*, because the surface is not the wood, but is contained within the wood *as non-wood* but not anything else either (remember, the surface is not outside the wood, it is *on* it; it is the last *of* the wood). It is wood as *leaving some of itself outside itself*, or wood *as being less than itself or its intelligibility as wood*.

If you ask yourself, "What is the surface?" you get into a contradiction, because the surface isn't really a "what" at all; it's a "where": it's just *where* the wood *stops* being wood, not even a "something it does" to stop being the wood. The wood just leaves off, and the "leaving off" *is* the surface.

That's interesting, because when we look at a wooden ball, what we see is the surface, isn't it, not inside it; and so we see—nothing? No, we don't see the *surface*; we see *the wood at the surface*, because the surface itself is nothing at all. But on the other hand, because the surface is nothing, this is *not* another way of saying "There's no real surface there; all there is is wood." There *is* a real surface, because the wood *really is* a ball; but the surface *is not a reality*, because it's really nothing but wood. The surface is a *real nothing*.

That, of course, is nonsense. But the reason this is nonsense is that you are trying to consider the *surface itself*, and the surface itself is nothing at all; what you should be considering is the *wooden ball*, which "has" the surface (i.e. stops being wood in this configuration of "stopping"). It doesn't *have* anything; it really just *stops being itself* at this distance from its center.

But how can something stop being itself if it *is* itself? Ah, here you have something that doesn't make *complete* sense (the wood is—shall we say?—partially itself), but at least makes *some* sense. The wood isn't a real nothing; it's just that it's nothing but wood but isn't *all that it means to be wood*. It's *less than* what it means to be itself, but not *the opposite* of what it means to be itself. It leaves *some* of its

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intelligibility (its “reality as wood”) outside itself, but not *all* of it.

So it looks as if the more proper formulations of what is finite involve this “leaving some of itself outside itself” and “being less than what it is to be itself” rather than “containing what is not itself as identical with itself.” The latter, which reifies the *limit* (makes it a “something”) makes it a contradiction (a real non-reality); there isn’t an “it” which is the limit; it’s a negation of something else, not anything positive at all.

Those of you who have read any Hegel probably find what I am saying rather familiar. For instance, when he talks about the limited and its limit, the limit *is* the limited in its self-negation, and so on; but actually this sort of thing is all through the dialectic.

And since what I say owes something to Hegel, I think at this point I should discuss him briefly. What I have called *the finite* and stated as an *effect*, Hegel would refer to as something like “the dialectical nature of the Absolute,” and as not something that belongs to the finite because it is finite, but as something that belongs to reality because it is real (“What is real is rational”; and rationality is a dialectical process).

So, since this “containing its own opposite within itself,” which is another way of saying “negating itself,” is assumed by him precisely to *be* rationality, then of course by Hegel’s “definition” of rationality it makes sense—whereas with me, it precisely *doesn’t* make sense. And Hegel’s assertion that it *does* make sense (because it’s a fact) is simply a gratuitous assertion of the fact that does not recognize what the problem is.

Hegel couldn’t be said not to recognize that there is an unintelligibility here, because it is precisely this “negation of itself within itself” that drives reason by the dialectic beyond the stage it’s at at the moment. But he thinks this unintelligibility is inherent to reality itself (which is somehow intelligible *through* the unintelligibility), while I am going on the assumption that reality

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ultimately is intelligible.

You might say that Hegel would agree with me; but when you get to Absolute Spirit as totally conscious of itself “in its otherness,” the end of the dialectic, it still *contains* its “otherness,” even though these “othernesses” are *suspended* by it; they are also suspended *within* it. So even if (a) the end of the dialectic ever could be reached (and there is some question of this), and (b) the whole is somehow completely intelligible, it *still* contains all these unintelligibilities suspended within it; in Hegel, they do not vanish in the “negation of the negation,” but, though no longer true, they are suspended as “moments” of the Truth with a capital T.

So if you look closely at what is going on in Hegel’s philosophy, you find that reality (= reason) *has* to be a *process* and a constant “advance” from one stage to the next, *because reason cannot rest at any stage; it is driven beyond it by necessity*. What necessity? That it sees that what it knows at this stage is *necessarily incomplete*, and it is *positively repelled* by this “incompleteness.”

But what *is* the “incompleteness” of any given stage that *forces* reason to go on to the next one? The mere fact that not everything is known?

No, interestingly enough. Whenever the stage “And so on to infinity” is reached (the so-called “bad infinite”), reason finds no drive (according to Hegel) to go through each of the members of this infinite set and learn about all of them; it is quite content with not encompassing explicitly all the individuals and leaping from *the fact that* here we have a “bad infinite” to the next stage of the *relation* which ties them all together.

Now what does that imply? It implies that it is not *the lack of* information or “facts” that “drives” reason on to the next stage, but *something about* the (incomplete) stage that is arrived at that reason finds *repugnant*, so that it *cannot* rest there.

And it is clear from Hegel’s description of each stage as forcing

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reason onward to the next one that what it is that is “repugnant” is *precisely the fact that this stage contains its own opposite as identical with itself—or that the stage in question is recognized as being its own opposite*. So you have to pass on to a further stage which contains these two “moments” as “suspended”: that is as different and complementary aspects of a whole that makes sense.

Hence, it is the precise *existing contradiction* that drives reason to find something else that makes sense out of the contradiction as it exists; or in other words, *it is the fact that this self-negation is unintelligible by itself—or in our terms is an effect—that forces reason beyond it into something which, when integrated with the effect into a larger whole makes the whole make sense—which is another way of saying that if you add the cause to the effect, then the whole (effect + cause) now makes sense*.

In other words, Hegel’s notion of something as containing its own negation within it is another way of saying “something which, taken by itself, contradicts itself” which is precisely our definition of an effect. His “negative moment” is precisely the *spelling out* of the contradictoriness *as such*, and so it is as such a “real non-reality.” Further, his “negation of the negation” or the “in and for itself” is the effect made intelligible by its cause. So Hegel is actually using effect and cause for his reasoning process.

He adds to this, of course, two things: (1) the statement that, until absolutely everything is known (until the Absolute knows all about himself as such), then it is always possible to look at *any* real situation as an effect, and (2) these effects arrange themselves in a logical pattern from the most abstract (most incomplete, containing the least information) to the most concrete (containing in the limit—Absolute Spirit—absolutely all information), such that a *given* effect demands a *given* cause and *that* effect-cause intelligibility *must* be looked at as a *very definite new effect* and no other one, leading on to the next stage.

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I would agree with statement (1) above; if not everything is known, then it is always possible to look on something as an effect (because some information is left out, and it is *possible* that the remainder could contradict itself without this information). But I can't see any *necessity* for statement (2), that there is an inexorable logic about which effect follows which solution; and I think Hegel's "bad infinite," which he just calls a stage to be passed over, indicates that there are things that just happen (the multitude of human beings, for instance) and don't have any particular reason for them (that is, he never gives a reason why *these* human beings *have to be* the ones that exist rather than all the ones that weren't born—why this set is the only *possible* one. This is just the "bad infinite" and isn't interesting to him).

Hence, Hegel doesn't actually fit *everything* into a logical scheme where everything is *necessary*, or he would have to account for the necessary presence of each member of the "bad infinite."

But it is further interesting to note that reason *has* the drive Hegel claims for it as long as knowledge is *incomplete*; if and when Absolute Spirit is attained and known in its fullness, history and so on stops, because everything is a "suspended moment" in Absolute Spirit; and finally all is at (dynamic) rest.

But that is another way of saying that reality is "rational" *because* knowledge is incomplete, and knowledge keeps going "beyond" itself *because it contradicts itself because of its incompleteness*. But to be incomplete, of course, is to be *less than itself*, and when knowledge finally reaches its *full* self, the process as process stops and becomes eternal act or something.

But of course "incomplete" is another way of saying "finite" or "limited." And so Hegel's dialectic is *driven* by the *unintelligibility of reality as finite*, not by the "necessity of reality as such."

What makes Hegel's philosophy so powerful is that he *did* hit upon the driving force that makes us investigate reality and not just

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“rest in the facts”: the fact that the facts as we know them *positively contradict each other*, in such a way that it is known that *additional* facts are “out there” somewhere which will make sense of the situation.

But even people who are taken by the dialectic (like Marx, or Kierkegaard, or Peirce, or anyone, really, who is bright enough to see what Hegel was doing) have all had problems with why *this* progression (the one in the *Phaenomenologie* or the *Logik*) *has* to be the “right” one, and why this next stage as outlined in Hegel couldn’t have been any other than the one he hit upon.

And, of course, if my approach is correct, this is precisely Hegel’s Achilles heel. His critics are right; there’s something about the dialectic that has to be on the right track; but the precise working out of it doesn’t have to be what Hegel outlined.

All of which is by way of saying that Hegel misinterpreted the *finite* and its *untelligibility* as if it were “reality” and “reasonableness.” And (like Marx) I think I have at last stood Hegel on his feet, by stating the finite for what it is, and pointing out that what Hegel was really talking about was the finite.



## Chapter 7

### The form of consciousness as nothing

If we return now to the form of consciousness, we can now see that the *form as such* is nothing at all. It is precisely *not* a little “picture” that the conscious act “produces” and then “looks at,” with the “looking-at” presumed to be the consciousness and the “producing” to be somehow “pre-conscious.” No, this is not what is going on at all; the form is the “surface,” as it were, *of the conscious act*, and is simply “where the conscious act leaves off.”

Let us look at this more closely, since this “little picture” idea of the form of consciousness is (understandably) spontaneously the way we think. So we have to work to get rid of it in order to get at what is really happening in our consciousness.

First of all, the reason *why* we think this way, and suppose that when (for instance) I am looking at my dog, what I am “really” looking at is the little picture in my head of “the way my dog appears” to me is that when we consider *the act of being conscious of* the dog (rather than the dog we are conscious of by that act), then of course we are considering the act as *an “object” of itself*.

That is, suppose you are just looking at my dog chewing at a bone in my back yard. I ask you what you are looking at; and your response will be “The dog back there.” *In this act*, you don’t think that what you are looking *at* is the “little picture you have” of the

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dog inside your head; you're looking *at a real dog*, some twenty or thirty feet away.

I now tell you, "Consider how the dog looks to you," and you now "look at" your "act of looking," so that it *as such* is what your attention is directed toward. Your act, as conscious, is of course aware of itself, and so while you were looking at the dog before, you were aware of how the dog appeared to you; but you were aware of this awareness as *how the dog appears*, not as something *which* appears to you.

But when I call your attention to the "how," it automatically becomes a "what," or is the focus of your attention, and is a kind of "object" which you are now "looking at" with the consciousness-of-the-consciousness. Hence, it *seems*, in this mode of paying attention to it, to be an *object which* you know, as if it were a "something" like the dog—when in fact it is just the *manner* of knowing the dog (seeing, as opposed to hearing, say), and is not a "something" at all.

What is going on here, really, is that the *limitation of the act of consciousness*, when contemplated by the "consciousness of the consciousness" is like the surface of the wood when you look at it. It seemed, remember, as if you could actually *see* the surface (that real nothing), when in fact all you saw was the wood on the surface or the "surfaced wood." It was the *wood* you saw, not the surface, but it was the wood *as limited*; and so you took it that what you were seeing was *the limit* as if it were something in its own right.

And so here. When you contemplate your own consciousness, *this* act of consciousness as distinctively *this* one is, of course, "c o n s c i o u s n e s s - i n - t h i s - f o r m , " o r "consciousness-limited-in-this-way," and it is as if you can see *the limit itself*, as if it were a kind of "object in your head" or a little picture "produced" by your consciousness. But it's not a "something" at all, any more than the surface is; *all it is is the act of*

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*consciousness as not being any more than this particular consciousness; the whole reality of the form of consciousness is the consciousness; the form itself is simply the self-negation of the consciousness within the consciousness, not a “something” at all.*

Let me state this as another conclusion:

**Conclusion 18: The form of consciousness is not “something,” still less what we are conscious of. It is simply the manner in which we are conscious: the limitation or the finiteness of the consciousness.**

So there’s *no* “little picture” there at all; there’s just a limited case of *consciousness*; it’s just that if you pay attention to the consciousness *as limited*, then the limit itself as “infecting” the consciousness (as if it were “something” that “infected” it instead of just being the consciousness as “stopping”) seems to be a something “known by” it instead of *the way something else is known*—or better, *the manner of knowing*. By contemplating the consciousness, you’ve made a noun out of an adverb; you turned a “how” into a “what.”

Many many philosophers have been fooled by this. Descartes obviously was, because he thought that the “little picture” was what we knew (and therefore had to “argue to” something outside it); and once you take this view, then the object of consciousness is *inside* consciousness, and the outside object isn’t the object which you know, but is the cause of what you know; and as the history of the philosophy after him has shown, once this initial mistake is made, you’re logically stuck, and you have to draw the absurd conclusion that there’s nothing really outside us at all.

But when you’re looking at the dog, you’re not looking at the *looking at* the dog, except in that “conscious of being conscious” sense, where you *recognize with perfect clarity* that the appearance of

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the dog is *how* the dog looks to you, not *what you are looking at*. The appearance, in fact, recognizes itself as *the restriction* of my consciousness at the moment to being *no more than seeing the dog*. It precisely recognizes itself *as* a limitation, until you pay full attention to *it instead* of the dog, in which case it becomes a pseudo-object of itself.

St. Thomas Aquinas saw this with respect to perception, where the “species” (the appearance, the way you are conscious) is not something “expressed by” the conscious act, but is simply the form under which the outside object is known. But he fell into the trap in considering imagining, because he didn’t see that you could know without knowing *something*, and so he considered the imaginary image (the unicorn-as-imagined) to be an “expressed appearance,” presumably like a little picture.

But as hallucinations show, there is not any obvious *subjectively discernible* difference between perceiving and imagining, and if there is a “little picture” in the one case, there must be one in the other; and if there isn’t one in the one case, there isn’t one in the other. What this implies is *not* that there is “both an internal and an external object” in perception and only an “internal object” in imagining, but that *imagination has no object*; there is only *the limited act of consciousness*, and the fact that it “leaves off” or “leaves some consciousness outside itself”—this *fact*—is the “image.” The image is not an “internal object” or a “little picture” or a “something” at all, any more than the surface of the ball is a “something” in any sense; it is, I constantly stress, an *adverb*, not a noun; what you “see” in imagining is the (limited) *act of imagining*, nothing else. What you see in looking at my dog is *the dog*, not the way of seeing the dog. But we will get to this later. For now, all I am stressing is that you *must* get this notion of a “little picture which you know” out of your head; it is a falsification of knowledge which misinterprets the “knowing that you know” as if the “knowledge”

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were the object known *by* the knowledge, just because it is self-transparent.

**Conclusion 19:** An imaginary image *is* the act of imagining; the “little picture” is nothing but the limitation of the act, (i.e. the act as limited): a reawakening of a previous perception.

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## Chapter 8

### Consciousness as finite

With that out of the way, I want to consider consciousness as finite by pulling some things together; we have actually seen three similar cases of consciousness as finite: (1) each stream of consciousness is *only this (stream of) consciousness (mine) and no other (stream of) consciousness*; (2) each period of consciousness within this stream is *only this (period of my) consciousness (today's) and no other (period of my) consciousness*; and each way of being conscious within any given period is *only this (form of my) consciousness (looking at the computer screen) and no other (form of my) consciousness*.<sup>34</sup>

I stated them in this way, obviously, to show how they are similar, and to separate out the points of identity from those in which they are diverse. Note first that they are *identical with each other precisely as effects*: as consciousness *insofar as it is* finite. The precise way each is consciousness-as-finite differs in each case.

That is, in the first case, the fact that this stream of consciousness is this one and no other means that (a) as a stream of consciousness,

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<sup>34</sup>Note that in the first two cases, the “mineness” and the “nowness” is not in any sense considered as a “something” added to the consciousness; it is only in the third case (because in the third case, you are actually looking *at* something or reawakening a past time when you looked at something) that the limitation of consciousness is thought of (because, really, of imagining) as a “something” in its own right.

it is different from itself as a stream of consciousness (because it is just this one, and it doesn't have to be this one to be a stream of consciousness), (b) it contains what it not itself as identical with itself (it contains the "myness" of it as "infecting" its consciousness, because the consciousness to *be* consciousness has to be *some* definite stream), (c) it leaves some of itself outside itself (it precisely excludes from consciousness all the *consciousness* of any other stream); and (d) it is consciousness as less than what it is to be consciousness (or all consciousness would belong to this one stream)

In the second case, the fact that this period of my consciousness is this one and no other means (a) that as a period of consciousness it is different from itself (because yesterday's period was just a period of my consciousness, and yet it isn't this one), (b) it contains what is not itself as identical with itself (it contains "todayness" as defining it as a consciousness, because consciousness to be consciousness has to be *some* period of consciousness, but it doesn't have to be today's), (c) it leaves some of itself outside itself (it leaves out of "my consciousness" all the other periods, but these belong in it as "my consciousness"); and (d) it is my consciousness as less than what it is for me to be consciousness (or today would be the whole stream of my consciousness).

And in the third case, the fact that this form of my consciousness is this one and no other means (a) that as a form of consciousness, it is different from itself (because any other form is just my consciousness and no more), (b) it contains what is not itself as identical with itself (because the form is not the consciousness and yet is not anything else), (c) it leaves some of itself outside itself (it leaves out consciousness beyond this form); and (d) it is my consciousness as less than what it is for me to be conscious (or I would be conscious only in this form all the time).

So all of these fit all the definitions of the finite—which is not surprising if they fit one of them, because the four definitions are

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simply ways of stating the same effect. In the case of consciousness as mine, the limit itself (the “real nothing”) is the “myness”; in the case of the period, the limit is the “duration” (or perhaps if you prefer, the beginning and ending instants); and in the case of the particular way of being conscious, it is the form. None of these limits are anything at all; what is “there” is the *consciousness*; they are simply *the fact that* it is not *all* there is to it (in various senses). This is perhaps more obvious in the case of the “myness” and the “end-points” than it is in the case of the form; but I must keep stressing that the form is no more a “something” than the “myness” of my consciousness is; they are strictly similar to each other as nothing but “leaving off’s.”

There are several avenues of exploration we could take from here: having established that anything finite is an effect *insofar as it is finite*, we could try to name a cause for the finiteness of *anything* finite (i.e. for finiteness as such), and then find the analogous causes of particular *kinds* of finiteness as—what? Limited cases of “the cause of finiteness”? But that sounds odd, to say the least.

Or we could take the three types of finiteness we have found so far, which are all *consciousness as finite*, and find the analogous causes for consciousness as finite, and then find how each of these is—restricted?—to being “the cause of (e.g.) just the finiteness which shows up as “myness” rather than “todayness.” But again this sounds like we’re going to wind up with a cause of finiteness that is itself finite.

But after all, we were investigating this to find out if there was a real world, based on some effect in our consciousness; and since at least some of our *forms* of consciousness can be called “perceptions,” it sounds as if the way we are conscious is the place to look to answer this particular question.

So what I propose to do is investigate *first* the way we are conscious: consciousness as “formed,” and see if it argues to some

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kind of “object” outside itself and outside the mind. And we can *use the fact* that the way we are conscious is similar as effect to other types of finiteness of consciousness to help us in our investigation (because similar effects have analogous causes); and then when we are done, we can perhaps *widen* the notion of “the cause of consciousness as formed” to include “the cause of consciousness as limited in any way” and even “the cause of anything as limited in any way,” since all of the causes will have to be analogous somehow—and once we have got one of them, we can see the analogy in terms of it—if we’re careful.

So let us concentrate on a given way of being conscious, and take as our example the particular way you are conscious now as you read this page. We are *not* interested in the particularities about this way of being conscious, but just in *the fact that this isn’t the only way you are conscious, and yet it is the same as your consciousness*; that is, we are interested in it as a case of (this type) of consciousness as finite.

We must be very clear on this. I am taking the reading of this page as an *example*, not as *what* has to be explained; *any other example* of a way of being conscious *will do just as well*, because all I am interested in is *the fact that my consciousness is at any moment some way of being conscious*.

If you define the effect in this general way, then, the particulars about *this* way of being conscious are irrelevant; you can replace any given way with any other one *and you have identically the same effect: consciousness is less than itself in (some) definite way*.

This, of course, was done deliberately, to avoid tangling ourselves up with the characteristics of the *page* and the particular words on it as explaining the way you happen to be conscious *now* (because obviously it is responsible for the way you see it) and confusing this with whatever it is about the page that is the cause of restricting your consciousness to being *a form* of consciousness (the page as causing the consciousness *to be finite* in this particular mode of finiteness).

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Remember, it is important to be very clear about just what effect it is you are investigating. We are investigating *all* forms of consciousness *insofar as they are identical as a mode of the finiteness of consciousness*, not *this* form of consciousness as *this instance* of this mode of finiteness of consciousness.

What, then, exactly *is* the effect in question, stated as a contradiction?

**(1) My consciousness as “formed” is nothing but my consciousness; and (2) my consciousness as “formed” is less than what it is for me to be conscious.**

You could replace (2), of course, with any of the other formulations of the finite as effect. That is, you are interested in the reading of this page as being your consciousness and yet being *only this form* of your consciousness; in exactly the same sense as your listening to a symphony is your consciousness and only this form of being conscious. The “this” in each case *refers to* different forms, but which form it refers to *makes no difference to the effect we are considering*; so that one form could replace another with no change at all in the effect as so defined. (Effects are abstractions, remember.)

Let us now recall Theorem I about effects and causes, and remember what it implies: Theorem I states that the cause is always outside the effect. The reason for this theorem was that the effect as a contradiction-taken-by-itself is necessarily impossible by itself and needs something other than itself to exist.

Let us make this “impossibility by itself” into an explicit principle applied here:

**Principle I: Any form of consciousness is impossible by itself; by itself it is a contradiction and cannot exist.**

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This should be obvious in the case of consciousness as finite, because *as* finite it both *is* itself and is *less than* itself (or it is nothing but itself but contains something else, or whatever other formulation you choose).

So right away we know that a form of consciousness can't be "alone"; if it were "alone" without something *outside it*—*i.e. outside this particular act of consciousness*—*making it less than it could be*, it would be greater than this or at least different from the way it is, because "in itself" it doesn't have this (or any) limitation; but "in the concrete" (as it actually exists) it does.

All right, so we know that there is something, somewhere outside of *this act of being conscious* that "forms" consciousness or "restricts" it to being *just a form of consciousness*, and not just plain "consciousness." Obviously, in the case of the way you see the page, this cause is going to be something or other about the page itself (we don't give up our sanity when we do phenomenology, remember)—and it's going to be something that the page has in common with any other thing that can account for any other form of consciousness.

But we don't want to leap to conclusions like this, because, remember, there *are* such things as hallucinations, and so it doesn't follow that the cause of a form of consciousness *has* to be "out there" in the real world unless we can eliminate all other possibilities. So let us see if we can.

So far, all we know is that the particular "formed consciousness" can't be *its own* cause. We then have several candidates for its cause before we get into the "real world": (a) the cause could be another *aspect* of this act of consciousness: e.g., its consciousness-of-itself-as-conscious; or (b) it could be another formed consciousness (*i.e.* some other act of my consciousness); or (c) it could be some combination of several formed consciousnesses (a stream of forms of consciousness, perhaps a stream of an infinite number of them, if

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consciousness as formed is “finite”); or (d) it could be the mind. Only if *all of these* are eliminated will it have to be (e) something that is not part of consciousness or the mind: something “out there.”

Let us now test these possibilities and see if they work. Possibility (a) is a little tricky, and so I am going to take these in the order (b), then (a), showing that in fact it is a case of (b), then (c), showing that any “set” of formed consciousnesses is also a case of (b) (even if the set has an infinity of members), then (d) (which will be easy); and then show that (e) is the only possibility.

First, then, let us assume that there are two “formed consciousnesses” Way A (e.g., seeing the page, the one needing a cause), and Way B (some other way of being conscious which is the cause of Way A).

Now then, since Way B is simply a case of formed consciousness, it is *identical* with Way A in every respect we are interested in. Let me make this clear. Let us say that seeing the page is Way A, and this supposed “cause” is that actually you saw it before and it is the *particular memory* you had (as, for example remembering your mother seems to be “caused” by your previous experience of your mother that you are now recalling—as indeed it is, but not *as* a form of consciousness, as we will see). What the *particulars are* about the conscious act that is the effect, however, is irrelevant; we are only interested in the act as (*some, any*) form of consciousness.

Hence, you could replace Way A with Way B *and not alter the effect in question at all*. As effects (consciousness as “formed”) they are absolutely identical. But Way B is supposed to be the *cause* of Way A as “formed consciousness”; but since identical effects have identical causes, *if it were the cause of Way A as formed consciousness, it would be the cause of itself as formed consciousness*.

But this violates Principle One: we would then have a case of a formed consciousness that made sense by itself.

Notice that it doesn’t matter *which* way of being conscious we use

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for Way B, because it is *the mere fact that* it is *some* form of consciousness that makes it identical as effect with A, and which therefore makes it impossible for it to be the cause of A as “formed consciousness.”

Hence, we can conclude,

**Conclusion 20: No way of being consciousness can be the cause of any other way of being conscious as “formed consciousness.”**

Notice that this doesn’t mean that *no aspect* of any way of being conscious can account for *the particulars* of the form of some other act of being conscious (i.e. can answer the question, “Why is it *this* form of consciousness at the moment and not some other one?”). Your memory of yesterday’s experience *as this particular act* is obviously explained by yesterday’s experience. What I am saying here is merely that yesterday’s experience “by itself” (i.e. as a way of being conscious) can’t account for *how your consciousness gets restricted* to being (some, any) way of being conscious.

Now let us look at possibility (a): the “consciousness of the consciousness” accounts for the restriction of Way A to being just a form of consciousness. The problem with this is that you either have to say (1) that *this particular* “consciousness of being conscious” is *restricted* to being “consciousness of seeing the page,” in which case *it* must be “formed” to being *just this* “consciousness of being conscious”—which makes it in some sense “another formed consciousness” and the argument above applies—or (2) you have to say that “consciousness of being conscious” is always the same, in which case it would know that your consciousness is “turned on” and would not know *what* that act of consciousness *was*—and we are back to the “two act” theory of consciousness. In fact, in either of these cases, we’re really back to a two-act theory, assuming that the

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“consciousness of the consciousness” is somehow “other than” or “outside” the “formed consciousness”; because if it’s “inside,” then by Principle One it couldn’t be the cause. No, in fact the “consciousness of the consciousness” is *identical with* the “formed consciousness” and if “one of them” is an effect, so is the “other,” because in fact they are one and the same. So that eliminates that possibility.

Very well, then, let us move on to possibility (c): What about saying that maybe *one* other “formed consciousness” can’t do the job, because as “formed consciousness” it’s identical with the effect it’s supposed to be the cause of, but maybe some *combination* of “formed consciousnesses” acting together could be the cause, especially if the number of them is infinite.

The trouble with this hypothesis is that if “they” are unified somehow *and are different* from the “formed consciousness” that they are supposed to be the cause of, then obviously (1) they *are* consciousness and (2) they “*have*” forms (in fact, many of them, all combined), and (3) they *exclude* from this “combination” the “formed consciousness” they are the cause of. But in that case, they are my consciousness *as less than what it is to be my consciousness*, because my consciousness has this *other* form which is explicitly *not* in the (multiplex) form that is supposed to be its cause.

This is true even if the forms combined are infinite in number; they still *lack* the one they are to be the cause of. They would *have* to, because the cause has to be outside the effect; and so they couldn’t contain the effect.<sup>35</sup> And in fact, *any* form of consciousness

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<sup>35</sup>That is, suppose the infinite set of formed consciousnesses contained the one it was supposed to be the cause of—but went beyond it, and so was not identical with it. Could not *that* be the cause of the one in question? No, because (1) it would both contain and *not* contain the formed consciousness in question, because on the one hand, the effect is one element within it, but *as cause* it is different from the effect; so

can be analyzed into an infinite set of “sub-forms,” if you want to do it; your seeing the page involves all the different colors you see, the different shapes you see, the distance at which you see them, etc., etc., none of which can be separated from the rest, and each of which can also be called “consciousness as formed.” So actually a “form” of consciousness (as a limitation) is not necessarily (and probably never is) *simple*; and in fact, it’s impossible to say when one type of consciousness ends and another begins, since the two forms “flow into each other” continuously. So the “form’s” being “just this” form does not depend on its being in a simple sense “just one”; all it means is that “This isn’t all there is to my consciousness, however infinitely complex it may be in itself.”

Hence, what that allows us to conclude is the following:

**Conclusion 21: no combination of “formed consciousnesses,” however many elements it may have, can be the cause of “formed consciousness” as a mode of finiteness of consciousness.**

There is something instructive here, and it is worth singling it out for emphasis:

**Conclusion 22: There are various senses of “finite” and “infinite”; and what is infinite in one sense can still be finite in another sense.**

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(2) that would make it consciousness as somehow different from itself. Anyhow, (3) it can’t be the absolute whole of my consciousness, since clearly it does not contain the forms of consciousness I am going to have tomorrow. Hence, in *some* sense, it is consciousness as less than what it is for me to be conscious, even though it has an infinite number of aspects within itself, and therefore it is (a) an effect, and (b) identically the same as effect as the one in question.

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In our case, even an infinitely complex way of being conscious (with an infinite *number* of sub-forms) is consciousness as *finite*, because it is my consciousness and yet is not all there is to my consciousness. And so the fact that it is infinite in *some* sense doesn't allow it to be the cause of "formed consciousness," because as a way of being conscious it is *finite* and so identical with its supposed "effect."

Well, that gets us out of consciousness, at least, because anything "in" consciousness is going to be some form of consciousness (because consciousness, for some reason, has to be some form at any given moment). But we already know that there is something outside consciousness: the mind. Can the mind account for "formed consciousness"?

In one sense it does, of course; *The mind is the cause which explains why all these instances of "formed consciousness" are my consciousness* and no one else's ways of being conscious. But that's a different effect from the one we are interested in.

That is, the mind accounts for the *unity* of *all* the ways I am conscious (as "mine"); but what we are interested in is how consciousness can be *some definite way* of being conscious *and no other one* at the moment. That is, how it can "leave some of itself as my consciousness *out* of itself." The form is my consciousness as *distinctively this instance* of my consciousness; it is not my consciousness *as the same as all other cases of my consciousness*.

The two effects, then, are actually opposite; and since different effects have different causes, then obviously the mind (which unifies) can't be what accounts for the distinctiveness of each way of being conscious.

**Conclusion 23:** There must be something which is not a way of being conscious and is not the mind which can "restrict" my



**consciousness somehow to being just a *way* of being conscious.**

Well, we made it to the “real world out there.” The idealists are wrong, unless perhaps they’re “transcendental idealists” like Kant, who holds that there’s an “x” “out there” which is somehow responsible for the “manifold of sensation,” even though, with his view of what “cause” means, he doesn’t say this “x” *causes* the manifold—and in fact doesn’t establish that this “x” *has to be* “out there,” but just takes it for granted that there’s something-or-other, and you can’t know *what* it is.

His instincts were right. You can’t have more than one form of consciousness unless there is more than just consciousness or even just consciousness and the mind. But Kant was wrong, as we will see, since it doesn’t follow that you can’t say anything about it.

Well, since we know that there *is* a distinct cause for any way of consciousness insofar as it is a mode of consciousness as finite, let’s pick out a term and define it as this cause: i.e. as the “whatever it is that accounts for consciousness’s ‘having’ a form.” And since we seem to be dealing with the “real world”, here’s our term:

***Existence* is the cause of a way of consciousness as “formed consciousness.”**

That is, existence is whatever it is that *anything* that “restricts” consciousness to being a form of consciousness has in common with any other something that does the same job; it is the minimum “common core” in every explanation of the problem of “formed consciousness.”

But since, in all probability, what actually *does* the restricting won’t be just what’s *necessary* to do this job (i.e. there’s more to the page you’re looking at than just whatever it’s doing to give you a

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form of consciousness), then we want a term to use to talk about the causer.

***Being* is the causer of a way of consciousness as “formed consciousness.”**

A being, therefore, “contains” existence, but may be more than just existence. If this sounds strange, what we are going to discover is that being (in every case but one) is actually existence as less than existence, or existence as finite; but that remains to be established. I mention it here now for those of you who have misgivings about saying that there can be something “more” than the very realness of reality (which is apparently what “existence” is talking about).

Once again, we must be very careful here. Just because we picked out “existence” and “being” as our technical terms, because they seem to be what the “formed consciousness” as incomplete-in-itself “talks about” or “reports,” it does not follow that we can know anything more about what is *referred* to by these terms than we can *prove is necessarily true* about them or our consciousness as “formed” remains a contradiction.

What then can we say about existence?

**Conclusion 24: Existence is not any “formed consciousness,” and it is not the mind.**

Here’s our first instance where we have to be careful. It doesn’t follow from this that the “formed consciousness” doesn’t *exist* or that the mind doesn’t *exist*. But how could they? Didn’t we just prove that they *couldn’t* be the cause of “formed consciousness”?

Yes. So they’re not *existence*. But let’s look more closely at the mind. We *do* know that there has to *be* a mind, because without it we

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can't have a unified consciousness, and we have one. So the mind, by explaining this effect, has somehow *produced* the particular way of being conscious which can be expressed in the sentence, "I know I have a mind"; and this is *a case of "formed consciousness."* Hence, something *about* the mind as the unifier of consciousness *also* accounts for this particular *restriction* of my consciousness to being "the act of knowing I have a mind" and not knowing anything else in this act. Or in other words, some *aspect* of the mind *is existence*. The mind, as well as being the unifier of my consciousness, is also a *being* of some sort, (and is "real").

Similarly, the act of consciousness is *recognized* by itself as "this act of consciousness"; now it isn't the consciousness *as* "formed" which is the cause of the (definite case of) "consciousness of the consciousness," but it is the act *as happening* or if you will *as an act* or *as real* that allows it to recognize itself. In other words, there is an *aspect* of the "formed consciousness" itself which is the fact that you're not just dealing with some theoretical construct but a *real* case of "formed consciousness" that allows your act of consciousness to *realize* that it's dealing with this real case. And what that amounts to is that *this* case of "formed consciousness" *exists*: some aspect of it is its existence.

All this tends to confirm that we didn't do a bad job in picking out the term for our cause; because in fact we recognize our mind as existing and our act of consciousness (the one we're *now* having) as existing—as well as recognizing (when we're perceiving) that there's something else that's existing too, or that something else existed, or whatever. We recognize the existence of the act of consciousness and the mind in *every* act of consciousness, simply because the act of consciousness is conscious of itself; and so it knows that it's real and that it's part of "my" stream of consciousness. We recognize *other* existences, presumably, by the particular form the consciousness "has" at any given moment. But more of that in the next section.

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Let me finish up this section by pointing out one more thing about the cause of any “formed consciousness”:

**Conclusion 25: Any way of my being conscious has as its cause both existence and my mind.**

Why is that? Because any way of my being conscious is both “*this form of my consciousness*” meaning no other one and “*this form of my consciousness*” meaning that it’s part of or “belongs to” my stream of consciousness.

Since I’m never conscious without the consciousness’s being both some definite form of consciousness and my consciousness (being both distinctively itself and the same as all my other forms of consciousness—but nobody else’s) then it follows that

**Conclusion 26: my consciousness comes about as the result of an interaction between existence and my mind.**

Somehow, presumably, existence “acts on” my mind, and the result is I become conscious in some definite way.

Well, of course. The light reflected off my dog (or if you prefer “re-radiated” from it) hits my eyes and sends nerve impulses to my brain, raising a certain pattern of nerves above the threshold of perception; and something about this reaction of my brain to the energy coming into it is the particular form of consciousness I call “seeing my dog.”

That’s the most plausible scientific explanation for a given form of consciousness. And it’s just a kind of speculative concretization of what we said; the “mind” as the “unifier that’s there even when we’re unconscious” is “fleshed out” as the brain with its neurons, and “existence” becomes the “energy coming in” which activates

certain neurons somehow or other resulting in consciousness.

But the point is that even if this explanation is disproved, our “common underlying core” isn’t; because *something* or other has got to “get together” *somehow* with whatever it is that unites all my consciousness into “mine,” in order for the result to be both mine and this instance of my consciousness. There’s the difference between this phenomenological method and science. Phenomenology, if it’s careful, will result in what *has* to be true of *any* scientific explanation of the same problem; and consequently it will be true of the true one. Science and philosophy don’t fight; they’re just on different levels; and science, being more concrete in its search for “the true explanation,” is more likely to take some part of the causer and assert that it belongs to the cause.

But that is enough for now. We can explore existence in the next section and see if we can make a distinction between what is real and what is imaginary. If not, we’ve misread our effect somehow, and will have to start again. But we have made a considerable harvest: twenty-six conclusions important enough to deserve numbers. Phenomenological investigation *can* arrive at the truth.

## 8: Consciousness as finite

**Section 4**  
Finite Existence



## Chapter 1

### Non-finite consciousness

**B**efore we get into the actual consideration of existence as the cause of the way of consciousness as finite, there are two at least possible instances in which the effect would not appear; in the first, the way of being conscious would actually be a case of consciousness as finite, but would not be recognized as such; in the second, the act would not have the effect at all.

To take the first case, it is not possible to recognize even that consciousness *could* be different unless there are at least two ways of being conscious that can be compared such that both are “my consciousness” and each is “not the other one.” Hence, the very first moment of our consciousness did not have (for us at the time) any notion of this problem of finiteness (and so didn’t “report” anything but itself);<sup>36</sup> and if that moment had been prolonged without change throughout our whole lives, we would never recognize any “transcendence” of our conscious act, because “this way of being conscious” would exhaust what would be all there is to our consciousness.

That is, of course, trivial. But actually, there is an attempt on the part of certain philosophies, like Buddhism, and especially Zen, to get back to this “undifferentiated consciousness” in which “being is

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<sup>36</sup>I.e. the first moment of consciousness was “all there is” *for me*, even though in itself it is only a limited case of consciousness. But I could not *recognize* this limitation until I had at least one other different way of being conscious.



nothing and all is one and I am all” and so on and so on. If you look at what these disciplines are doing, they are an attempt to *direct attention away from all relationships*, and simply *be conscious*, without advertent at all to the particular way one is conscious—even to the consciousness as “mine,” or as “of” something-or-other.

When this stage is reached, so that the person actually *is not aware* in the conscious act of its particularity as “this one,” then of course all that one is aware of is “consciousness of consciousness,” but not even of “consciousness” in some sense where it is *distinguished* from anything else. Therefore, there *is* consciousness, *but the act has no content at all*. It is like opening your eyes in a perfectly dark room, after they have got used to the dark and there are no more negative after-images of what you had been seeing. That black expanse you “see” is simply what *seeing nothing* appears as.<sup>37</sup> It is the form of your visual consciousness when it is *active*, but not *reacting to any energy*; it is the form of “consciousness-of-visual-consciousness-and-nothing-else.”

Similarly, this “nirvana” or experience of oneness-with-the-universe, which is completely ineffable (since what can be spoken must be conceptualized, which implies differentiation), is contentless because all contents have been deliberately “thought away” and there is nothing left to be conscious of. Like seeing the blackness, it *understands nothing*, and is the pure awareness of awareness itself. It is

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<sup>37</sup> Actually, of course, the consciousness of the consciousness is aware of *itself* (you know that consciousness is going on), even though not *as such*. And so what you are aware of in this experience is *being* in that totally undifferentiated sense in which Hegel talks about it at the beginning of his *Logic*. That is, you are not unconscious in this experience; and so the consciousness is aware of itself as “turned on,” but there is no other content to that consciousness. In that sense, you are “experiencing nothing,” almost as if it were a “something” to experience. It is obviously a very peculiar experience.

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absolutely next door to complete unconsciousness, because all it is is the awareness that your understanding is “turned on” without anything for it to act on or react to.

Needless to say, I don’t think this experience is anything to be striven for. Our consciousness-of-our-consciousness is present in all its clarity in every one of our conscious acts, and stripping it bare like this adds nothing to our awareness of it. And the notion that its non-contents is actually the revelation of the “meaning of life, myself, and the universe” is, I think, pernicious, because it leads to the notion that the differentiated universe (and even the differentiated consciousness) is really what the illusion is, and only this experience is “the truth.”

If somebody wants to say that you’re only *really* seeing when all the lights are turned out, and that the “messy” forms of seeing we have when in the light are imaginings, then I suppose there’s nothing we can do to disabuse him of this; he will simply sniff at us in his superiority and leave us to our “world of illusion.” But I don’t know why he’s talking to us in the first place if he believes this, because in his “real world,” we don’t exist, of course; and still less do I see why we should listen to him, because in order to do so, we’d have to admit that he has something to say—and how can he if he doesn’t exist as an individual and neither do we? But of course, that’s because I’m thinking “discursively,” like a Westerner.

At any rate, this is where I think the mystical experience of “absolute non-being” fits in our consciousness, why it is possible to have it, why you would think you were actually onto something if you achieved it, and why you are onto precisely nothing at all.

But at the other pole there is another version of the mystical experience which is at least possible, and which I think has happened at times (perhaps even with some Buddhists): This would be an act of consciousness *which exhausts what it is for me to be conscious*, such

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that any *particular* form of my consciousness would be only a finite instance of this.

We didn't handle the possibility that if there are two different ways of being conscious, *at least* one of them must be finite, but it isn't *necessary* for both of them to be so. That is, if Way A is contained *within* Way B, but Way B contains *more* than just Way A, the two would be different, but there would be no way from this that you could tell that any but Way A is finite, since Way B could encompass all the consciousness that I am in fact capable of; in which case Way B would *equal* "what it is for me to be conscious" and would not be my-consciousness-as-less-than-itself<sup>38</sup>.

If there actually ever is such an act of consciousness, then (like the purely negative version of the mystical experience) it would be completely ineffable, since, though you would recognize your consciousness, and that it was beyond any given way of being conscious (it is your total consciousness "rolled up into one," so to speak), there would be no way you could *describe* it except as *not* any particular, finite expression of itself. So the terms used to talk about it would be more or less the same as the terms used for the Buddhist type of mysticism, even though it would be the absolute totality of your knowledge rather than the knowledge of absolute non-knowledge.

I mention this for two reasons. First, we don't want to ignore possibilities and give the impression that they aren't possible simply

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<sup>38</sup>In this case, Way B could be the cause of the finiteness of Way A, since it is not a case of "consciousness as less than itself in some definite way." Even if it is just *my* consciousness, this is a different *sort* of finiteness from "formed consciousness," and so it would not be *identical* as effect with Way A. But unless a person actually has this experience (which, as consciousness, would be conscious of itself, so if you had it you would know you had it), then this possibility of solving the problem of the finiteness of a way of being conscious within consciousness is purely academic.

## 1: Non-finite consciousness

because they aren't common (or even never have occurred). Secondly, there are those who have reported experiences that seem to be like this one: the Christian mystics, some of whom seem to have had both types of mystical experience, and know the difference. The God these people say they have "seen" in this experience is the absolute fullness of being, and is anything but identical with nothingness.

From what I can gather, people who have this experience seem to carry it with them, as a kind of "taste" for the truth. They learn facts, just as we do; but facts will show up "within" this undifferentiated knowledge they have, and will be recognized somehow as true, while mistakes or falsehoods will immediately be spotted as such. Socrates is reported by Plato to have some sort of experience like this, which he called his *daimon*, or the equivalent of what we would call a "guardian angel." And if you look at the Gospels closely, Jesus seems to hit upon things as "right" when he confronts them, such as Peter's formulation of who he was, the metaphor of the bread of life, etc., etc. As human, he had to learn by having ways of being conscious; as divine, he had Absolute Consciousness; and the relation between the two was that the finite ways of being conscious "fit" into the Absolute as being true.

At any rate, there are possible only two ways of being conscious that would not be cases of finite consciousness: consciousness with contents removed, and consciousness whose contents exhaust what it is for me to be conscious. Anything else will be a finite way of being conscious, and will "talk about" some existence.

#### 1: Non-finite consciousness

## Chapter 2

### Multiple existences

**L**et us, then, explore our effect further, and see if there is anything more that must be true of the cause (i.e. of any explanation whatever) or the effect remains impossible.

#### Conclusion 1: There are many different existences.

The reason for this is the following: We know that our consciousness is just one consciousness, though it takes on many different forms. Now since different effects have different causes, it follows that if there are two different ways of being conscious, the causes must be different. But the difference can't come from the consciousness itself (which is one consciousness), nor from the mind (which is one mind, unifying it), and so it must come from existence. But if existence were absolutely the same in both cases, then there would be an absolutely identical total cause in both cases, and identical causes have identical effects. Therefore, the *cause* of our being conscious in different ways is that *there are different existences*.

So already we are one step beyond Kant, who held that there is some "x" "out there" which is responsible for the "manifold of sensation," but that we could say absolutely nothing about it because we could not know it as it is "in itself." True, we can't know it as it is in itself; but we can know what it *has to be* if it is going to make sense

#### 2: Multiple existences

out of our consciousness; and one of the things it has to be is multiple or our consciousness as differentiated from itself (in many forms) is impossible.

So Jean-Paul Sartre's gimmick in *Being and Nothingness* won't work. His idea is that "being" is one undifferentiated blob, and I "nothingize" it into "chunks" of "beings"; the limits of each "being" of my experience come from me, by blocking it off into an object. But this won't wash. If I do the job, then since I am the same all the time, and if being is the same all the time, this "nothingizing" must not simply be non-rational, it is positively *irrational*. You have all these different effects (the different "beings" within my experience) due to identically the same cause; and since the theorems about causes and effects are simply tautologies from the Principle of Causality, which itself is a tautology from the Principle of Contradiction, then Sartre is violating the Principle of Contradiction in his theory. Now, of course, you could say that I, as "subject," and so "nothing," am different all the time; but then you have the problem of how all these different "subjects" get to be the same one that "answers to the same name" without any unifying thread. Instead of just going to sleep and waking up a different person, on this view as soon as you have a different experience the one who is having it would be different. No, there's no way you can make sense out of this; and Sartre himself says, of course, that if his theory is true, things are "absurd." If so, why write a book about it? It can't be *true* (and not false) that what is true is false.

## 2: Multiple existences

### Chapter 3

#### The real and the imaginary

What the conclusion we have come to above at least seems to imply is that for every finite way of consciousness there is an existence which accounts for its being this particular way of being conscious and no other. I think at this point what we have to do is handle the vexed question of those finite ways of being conscious we call “images,” which certainly don’t *seem* to report any existence. We recognize that there are no unicorns.

So here we have a new effect, which we can state in the following way:

**(a) No definite way of being conscious is possible without consciousness + the mind + existence. But imaginary experiences are ways of being conscious, and are aware of themselves; and (b) they recognize themselves as *not* the effect of some existence (i.e. something “out there”), but as “spontaneous” acts of the mind.**

That is, the type of consciousness called “perception” seems to be what we have been describing; and it recognizes itself as *not* “spontaneous,” but as being caused by some existence different from itself (i.e. something “out there”). But how can the mind itself (which is one something) and the consciousness (which is also one something)

3: The real and the imaginary

account for the *differences* in imaginary experiences (which are many), if identical effects have identical causes?

First of all, let us see if we can “resolve away” the problem into a non-problem. If we say that both perceptions and images are caused by the interaction of the mind and some existence, then there is no way we can account for our having these *two distinct classes* of consciousness. The cause of both classes would be the same, and identical causes have identical effects. (Of course, if we say that all experiences are like the imaginary ones, and there is no existence in any case, then there is no way to account for the distinctiveness of *any* way of being conscious, as we saw in the preceding section.) So there has to be a difference between the types of experience called “perceptions” and those called “images.”

The only other possibility I can see for making this a “non-problem” is that when we are imagining, we are actually reacting to some existence, but are not aware of doing so. There is a certain plausibility in this, because we do have hallucinations, where we don’t recognize what is going on. But note that a hallucination *seems to be* a perception, and we think we are reacting to some existence, but we later find out that there was nothing “out there.” Hallucinations, in other words, seem to be cases of being fooled in the opposite way, which rather reinforces the idea that some of our experiences are *not* (direct) reactions to an existence.

But when we imagine and recognize we are doing so, we are precisely *conscious of being spontaneous*. We seem, at least, (often deliberately) to be “making up” whatever experience we are having; and it is a little hard to see how consciousness (which is, after all, conscious of itself—that is, the “two acts” are actually one and the same thing) could be erroneously conscious in a *positive* sense of being something which it isn’t. What could get in the way of an act and itself by which it could be fooled about itself?

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Of course, this same question could be raised about hallucinations, though less forcefully; but it certainly has to be handled. If the act of consciousness is consciousness of itself, then how can it ever think that it is a reaction when in fact it is not reacting to anything?

But we mustn't let difficulties overshadow sanity. Even if we can be fooled in some cases, to say that we are *always* fooled, and that all our experiences are actually all of one type and not the other, is another form of madness; as a matter of fact, psychosis is precisely the type of madness where the distinction between the real and the imaginary is blurred for the person.

I think the solution to this problem lies in the fact that when we have a way of being conscious, this is, as I said in Conclusion 25 of the preceding section, the effect of the mind *and* existence. The mind makes all the ways of being conscious "mine" and no one else's, and the existence makes this way of being conscious (we can now say) *this way* and no other one.

But if we notice something else about our consciousness, we may perhaps be on the way to the solution to this problem: My "stream of consciousness," as I add ways of being conscious to it, becomes *different* from the way it was before, without being *a different stream of consciousness*.

That is, your consciousness now is having the experience of reading this page, something that it did not have before. Hence, your "whole" consciousness (most of which is now unconscious, remember) is now a *different* whole from what it was before you read what you are now reading; it "contains" this way of being conscious.

Further, this "whole" consciousness (outside of the present) is somehow not *totally* non-existent, because consciousness recognizes that it can *recall* past "parts" of it and make them an aspect of the *present* consciousness; so as Aristotle would say, these past ways of

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being conscious are “potentially” conscious in the sense that they *can* be “reawakened” into present, actual consciousness.

And as I said, the presence of the past as “part” of my consciousness is *necessary* for me to recognize the present way of being conscious as “only this one” or as finite; because if I weren’t aware of being conscious in other ways, then *for me* this moment of consciousness would *exhaust* what it is for me to be conscious, and I would not be able to be aware of its finiteness.

Thus, we can draw the following conclusion:

**Conclusion 2: Something connected with the unity of my “whole” consciousness must make the past consciousness “potentially conscious” in the present.**

And what this has to mean is the following:

**Conclusion 3: The mind, in its interaction with existence, not only produces the particular way of being conscious, but stores this way as “part of” my stream of consciousness.**

What this amounts to is that once you have had a way of being conscious, which demands an existence, it is somehow “in your mind,” and is at least in principle recallable; so *some aspect* of the mind as integrating consciousness into “mine” also *preserves* each moment of my consciousness, making it “potentially conscious.”

In order to solve our problem, however, we need to make some hypotheses about this “storage.” First of all, the ways of being conscious must be stored in such a way that *different aspects of a given complex way of being conscious are stored independently, somehow*, so that these aspects are not necessarily always integrated into *just* the complex way of being conscious that they originally were, but can be

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recalled as “attached” to new complexes—perhaps new complexes that we have never perceived *as such*.

That is, we can explain unicorns by saying that we have actually perceived horses (or pictures of them), and pointed, twisted horns, and curly hair, and cloven hooves, and so on; but we have never perceived all of these *as the experience of one animal*. Having had all these experiences, even though each was “attached” to a different thing as it was originally perceived, we can now *assemble the parts* into this unity we call “imagining a unicorn,” and construct as it were a “reawakening” of a “perception” we never had as such.

And we seem to recognize that we are doing this when we exercise “creative imagination.” It is as if consciousness is searching through a filing system (which is itself unconscious, as can be seen from the fact that when we’re trying to recall something we’ve forgotten, we somehow “know where to look for it,” but we have to *do something* to our mind to “awaken it” before we can “look at it and recognize it” as what we were looking for). The consciousness awakens images, clips off pieces, sticks them together (recognizing that it is doing this), and behold, there is the unicorn—which we recognize that we “made up.”

So we seem to be on pretty solid ground. In order to be aware that a given way of consciousness is a finite case of consciousness, the other ways of consciousness have to be “present as not present in my consciousness,” or somehow stored as potentially conscious. Thus, the mind has an aspect which is the cause of the “storedness” of my past experiences as “mine.” But since there is no real demarcation between one way of being conscious and the next (they flow in an unbroken stream from “one” to “the other”), then it must be possible for them to be “chopped up” into “this way” and “that way.” Hence, the storage involves, somehow, the storage of the past *as* differentiated from other past experiences.

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And this is all we need to explain not only recollection of the past, but creative imagination.

But we have still not solved the problem of how we can *distinguish* imagining (and recalling a past way of being conscious *as* past) and perceiving. One might answer, “Consciousness is conscious of itself, and when it is reawakening what is stored in the mind, it recognizes that it is doing this, and when it is the result of the mind actually interacting with some existence, it is aware of this also.”

This must be generally true, but it can’t be the whole story, because if that were the case, we could never have a hallucination, which (if the theory above is true) must be a reawakening of a past experience (or even a new combination of past experiences) *without* realizing that this is what is happening, because consciousness assumes that the experience is the result of the interaction of the mind and some existence.

So the new aspect we have to add to the storage and reawakening, it seems to me, is this:

**Conclusion 4: Since the mind itself is unconscious, then whether consciousness is imagining or not, it finds its “material” for the form it takes on *outside* of consciousness.**

Thus, the *consciousness* cannot be *absolutely* certain of the origin of its way of being conscious, in the sense in which it is absolutely certain of *itself*. The unconsciousness of the “stored form” in the mind allows for the possibility of consciousness’s being fooled when it becomes conscious in a definite way: the way could *either* be an interaction of the mind and existence, or a recalling of a past interaction or a recombination of past interactions.

That’s one half of what we need. It explains how consciousness can be fooled, but not how it is not always fooled. The second half

### 3: The real and the imaginary

seems to be this:

**Conclusion 5: When we deliberately recall or deliberately make up a way of being conscious, we do so at a very low level of vividness, whereas when we recognize ourselves as reacting to some existence, the level of vividness of the experience is much higher.**

So apparently, this “storage” of ways of being conscious in the mind makes it possible to “reawaken” them *dimly*, though there seem to be various “levels of dimness,” because we seem to classify recollections as “more past” based on how dim they seem to be as we recall them. “I can barely remember that,” we say of something that happened a long time ago, while the experiences of a minute ago are much more vivid.

Of course, the importance of a past experience affects the level of dimness; and one says of his wedding day, for instance, “I remember that as if it happened yesterday.” That is, the level of dimness of this (important) experience is the same as the level of the ordinary experiences of yesterday.

Obviously, we have different levels of experience of perceptions also, from those that we barely notice to those that are so “strong” that they are painful. In general, however, the least vivid perception is considerably more vivid than the least dim recollection; and so in general the two experiences fall into two entirely different classes.

Now if we make the hypothesis that consciousness *uses* these two different levels of vividness to distinguish whether the consciousness is “spontaneous” and not a reaction to some immediate existence acting on the mind, but a reawakening of a stored form, then we can account not only for the distinction between perceiving and imagining, but for hallucinations also; and this theory allows for a

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prediction of a different sort of “hallucination” from the one usually called such.

Apparently, there is a dividing line of vividness somewhere, below which consciousness classifies the experience as “imaginary and spontaneous,” and above which it classifies the experience as “response to some existence.”

Now if for some reason a recall of a past experience becomes super-vivid, then consciousness would classify this as a perception, not an act of imagining. And thus we have hallucinations. No one is fooled by ordinary imagining, because it occurs at such a low level. If you imagine your mother pointing to the words you are now reading, you can see what I mean. The experience of the page is so much more vivid than the image of your mother’s hand that you can picture her doing this better if you close your eyes (and therefore imagine both of them). If you have a very vivid imagination, you can “all but see her,” though even then the difference is enormous.

But with a hallucination, the image is *so* vivid that it seems not to be a spontaneous act at all, but an actual perception. Of course, most hallucinations seem to belong in the category of “barely perceived” perceptions. For instance, someone asks, “Do you smell smoke?” and you start sniffing, and—yes, you do seem to smell smoke. Or is it your imagination? Here the “odor” is so faint (if there is one) that it’s on the borderline of imaginary anyway, and you doubt whether you are actually perceiving.

(Let me parenthetically note here that a hallucination is different from an *illusion*, in which the experience as perceived is distorted somehow from what you know the existence to be, as when the oar appears bent in the water. Your eyes are built to react as if light always travels in straight lines, and the light coming from the underwater portion of the oar gets deflected at the surface, and so you have the *illusion* of the oar’s being bent instead of the light. But

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in this case you are *reacting*, but reacting “wrongly.” In a hallucination, you *seem* to be reacting when in fact you are spontaneously *acting*.)

Now if my theory of hallucinations is true, then we can predict that there *ought* to be a kind of “reverse” hallucination, where you are having a perception that is so dim that you classify it as a *recalled* experience instead of a reaction.

And we do in fact have this experience; it is called *déjà vu*: that experience where you know that you are actually perceiving something but you think, “I could swear this happened to me before,” even though you couldn’t say where or when.

This experience is at least as common as hallucinations, and to explain it by some extrasensory perception seems a little far-fetched. And since it is the experience which would be *predicted* if borderline experiences get confused as to classification, then I think we can say that our theory about the true explanation of perceptions vs. imaginings has got to be on the right track.

Now if we add to this what is known nowadays from science and don’t just stick to phenomenology, the theory becomes all that much stronger. Obviously, the “mind” as the “unifier of consciousness” and the “storer of past experiences” is the brain. We know that there is a certain amount of energy in the brain’s nerves all the time, flowing back and forth in “waves.” We also know that certain nerves, when stimulated *above a certain level*, produce definite forms of consciousness, and the brain has been “mapped” as to where the different types of consciousness (seeing, hearing, feeling, emoting, etc., etc.) are. As the “brain-waves” scan the brain, various nerves get activated, and the “wave” integrates these, presumably, into a *Gestalt*, or single whole of perception or imagining.

So far so good. On the assumption that consciousness can seize control of the *flow* of energy in the brain, directing what energy is

### 3: The real and the imaginary

there into various areas, then we have the “deliberateness” of imagining. The level of vividness of imagining would be due to channeling *energy that is already there* into new “pathways.”

Perceiving, however, involves *new energy coming into the brain* from the various senses (the eyes, the ears, etc.); and this energy is *directed by the “input”* into definite parts of the brain: the input from the eyes goes to the visual center, the input from the ears to the auditory one, and so on; and it raises the energy in these areas *far beyond* where it would be if the residual energy were put into them.

This would result in two experiences in consciousness: (a) the recognition of the high level of vividness, and (b) the awareness of “being out of control” as to what actual experience is happening. When you look at this page, you are aware not only of the vividness of your perception of the page, but you *also* classify it as a perception because *you can’t make the words you see be anything but what you see*, the way you can turn the unicorn blue or increase its size, or chop off its head, or whatever. Your consciousness recognizes itself as *passive*, as *reacting*, not as active or spontaneous as in imagining.

Everything is perfectly consistent with our phenomenological theory so far. Now one thing we also know about the workings of the brain is that *energy gets directed by a “program” that is “there,” as well as by deliberately taking conscious control*. This program (instincts, drives) controls the energy flow in a complex way, and often acts below the conscious level (in fact, when the drives are consciously active, they show up as emotions).

Now if we suppose that some instinct, operating below the conscious level, channels an extraordinary amount of energy into a given “pathway,” consciousness would experience this as (a) a more vivid than simply an imaginary experience, and (b) as not something that it consciously did itself; or, in other words, we would have a hallucination. And, of course, if the energy coming into a given

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nerve-complex was so little that the “threshold of consciousness” was barely passed—especially if this were due to the person’s *consciously* “borrowing” from this energy to pay attention to other things also—then we could have the “reverse hallucination” of the *déjà vu*.

Note that hallucinations could also be produced *chemically*, by taking a pill (or smoking a joint) that *increased* the energy in the brain *without that extra energy’s coming in from the sense inputs*. The experience would then be that of a perception, because (a) it would be very vivid (indeed, perhaps “more vivid” even than perceptions), and (b) there would be no sense of conscious direction of the form of the experience. The energy would simply be “spread all over,” enhancing whatever happens to be being perceived at the time (as in marijuana), or distributed randomly, producing images that are not reactions, that overlie or even supplant the consciousness of what is “coming in” from outside, as in LSD, peyote, jimson weed, or other truly psychedelic chemicals.

These, if they were vivid enough, might be so “burned into” the nerves in the brain that the nerves afterwards would be open channels for energy, and any restimulation of them would drag a great deal of the energy in the brain down this pathway; in which case, the “trip” would be repeated with a fresh hallucination. And, of course, if this became widespread, then it would be impossible any more for consciousness to recognize when it was hallucinating and when it was really reacting to energy coming in from outside the body—and we would have a psychosis. And psychosis is in fact one of the effects of taking hallucinogens.

If the brain is the mind, and if the brain is a “receiving set” for energy from outside that comes through the senses, and which gets stored in such a way that past experiences can be recalled and recombined in controllable ways, then taking psychedelic chemicals is like taking an electrical probe into your radio-tape recorder, and

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touching the various parts of the transistors and so on at random with this electrical energy, and listening to the noise you get when you do that, and recording it on your cassette. You may get some interesting sounds; but the probability is that if you do this, you will burn out transistors and generally foul up the radio, and it will be useless for receiving programs any more—and may very well break down completely.

Stay away from those things. If you want “new experiences,” go to sleep and dream; this is good for your brain (as we will see much later). The possibility of wrecking this delicate receiving-storing instrument is too great and the instrument is too valuable to have any “interesting experience” worth it.

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## Chapter 4

### Possible being

What we can say, then, based on the theory we have enunciated about how there can be two classes of “formed consciousness,” recognized as perceptions and imaginings, is this:

**Conclusion 6:** Any form of consciousness *as* a case of consciousness as finite needs an existence as its cause.

Any form of consciousness *as* a case of imagining has the (present state of) the mind as its cause and one or more existences as its *condition*.

Any form of consciousness *as* a case of perceiving has a direct interaction of the mind with some existence as its *cause*.

In the case of imagining, neither the consciousness nor the mind “by themselves” can account for how my consciousness can be still mine and *less than* itself in a definite way; and so *this* problem of the imagining has the existences which were originally responsible for the stored experiences as its cause. If there had not been these original experiences, then there could be no storage of them, and if that were not the case, then this form of consciousness could not be a form of consciousness at all.

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On the other hand, insofar as this act of imagining recognizes itself as spontaneous and *not* a reaction to “something outside the mind,” then *in this respect* the *mind in the state it is in at the moment* (i.e. as having been altered by those outside existences) is the cause, and the existences which got it into this state are the condition for this act of imagining. This is a different effect from the act of imagining as a finite form of consciousness, though it is related to it; and I have tried to show the relation, and therefore how the causes of the two effects are related.

But the perception, of course, is not a spontaneous act of the mind; and so the existence explains *how the mind is producing now this particular form of consciousness*, or is the *cause* of the “thisness” of the particular form of consciousness, and not the condition for it (and the direct “action on” the mind is the cause of our recognition of it as a perception-of existence).

What this says is two things:

**Conclusion 7: Imagining as such *indirectly* refers to existence, not directly.**

It also allows the prediction that

**Conclusion 8: It is impossible to imagine what has not been perceived in some sense.**

That is, you may not have perceived unicorns; but you can’t imagine a unicorn if you have had no previous perception of either a horse or a picture of a horse or parts of animals such that you could reconstruct out of these perceptions a composite image of a horse. The “parts” that are put together into the image *must somehow have been perceptions* in order to be able to imagine.

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This prediction seems to be confirmed by people who have not had a given sense from birth. For instance, though a man blind from birth may *understand* what is meant by “red” (as electromagnetic radiation of a certain wave length, or as that which affects the eyes differently from blue, or as what traffic lights, rubies, and roses have in common insofar as they affect one’s eyes); but this abstract notion of what “red” is *related to* does not, apparently, allow him to *picture* “red” to himself. He does not even “see black” all the time, any more than we “see black” when we go to sleep; he is simply not visually conscious. Those who receive sight after being blind from birth report a totally new experience that has nothing to do with anything in their past, and to which they can now fit the *names* they learned dealing with this experience.

Hence, as near as we can tell, it is confirmed that our minds are “blank slates” at the beginning, and existence “writes” on them, and only the “writing” is stored. Locke was right and Leibniz was wrong. When Leibniz said “there is nothing in the mind from the beginning *except the mind itself*” and so justified “innate ideas,” he was mistaken. The mind is not *consciousness*. It is simply the receiving-and-recording instrument whose *act* is consciousness; and so there is no consciousness “in” it at all. How could there be? It would have to be “unconscious consciousness,” which of course Leibniz said was not a contradiction in terms. But we eliminated this in the preceding chapter. When “conscious acts” are stored in the mind, they are not stored *as* consciousness, but as nerve-patterns with a lowered threshold for consciousness.

We can also see a little more clearly how the unicorn does not “exist in the mind.” The colors, shapes, etc., are stored as nerve-patterns, and consciousness stimulates these particular patterns together, and the result is a lifting of this complex above the threshold of consciousness and “doing each of the parts over again,” but

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“redoing” only *one* part of a previous perception while simultaneously “redoing” a part of a different perception, with the result that the “combined redoing” is new.

So you didn’t search your brain until you “found” a unicorn; you simply restimulated a series of sets of nerves. And so the resultant form of consciousness *is not* consciousness “of” something, but is just a form of consciousness. Nor did the act of imagining “create a little picture” of a unicorn; it is just that these particular partial forms of consciousness (which are conscious of themselves) occurred at the same time as a single complex form of consciousness. There is no “picture” there; there never was a “picture.” There is just a definite way of being conscious, combined from “redoing” pieces of different previous ways of being conscious.

This is important, because it allows us to define “possible being” as opposed to “real being” and make sense out of it.

***Real being* is being as a causer or condition of a perception.**

***Possible being* deals with imagining, and is the fact that there is no contradiction in supposing that an image like this could be a perception.**

Let us take the first definition, because it contains something important: real being is a causer *or a condition* of a perception. That is, you know that there actually *is* something if you know that you are perceiving (meaning that an existence is responsible for this act) or if you know that the existence which caused this perception is impossible unless there is something which caused *it*. You will recall that we dealt with the question of knowing that Rome is real if you’d never actually been there. The people couldn’t have said to you what you actually *perceived* them as saying unless *they* had perceived Rome;

and since if it had been destroyed in the past day or so you would have heard about it in the news, you can say that there must *really be* a Rome; you have indirect evidence of its existence.

But if the original effect is not a perception, then you can't argue to existence as a cause of it as such (though we did argue to existences as conditions for *the constituent parts* of it); and when we realize that we "made up" some form of consciousness *we precisely realize that it does not "talk about" some existence the way a perception does.*

Nevertheless, since the act of imagining *is* a complex form of consciousness, then these nerves (which happen to be being stimulated from "within" at the moment) are also nerves which can be stimulated from "outside"; and so there is nothing *to prevent* something from "outside" from stimulating *this whole complex at once.*

In other words, if we can construct an imaginary image, *it is possible* that it could have been "constructed for us" by some existence, even though we know that (at the moment at least) it hasn't been "constructed from outside."

This, then, is what is meant by "possible being." *There is no possible being*, in the sense that there is a "being" halfway between non-existence and existence, or that there *is* a being which is "merely possible." If being is, it is, and it's not "merely possible"; and if it isn't, it ain't, and there isn't anything which is "possible."

No, "possible being" is just a verbal expression that refers to a way of stating a *sentence* which begins with the phrase, "It is possible that..." (meaning, "There is no contradiction in assuming that...")

So the act of imagining doesn't "refer to" or "talk about" possible being, while the act of perceiving "refers to" real being. There is only real being, and the act of imagining doesn't "refer to" anything at all. It is only that this act of imagining *has the same form as* it would

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have if it were externally caused.

We can see this when we recall something real; let us say your mother is alive, and you recall her now, and imagine her standing in front of you. *As* standing in front of you, she doesn't exist; there's no human being there; but of course, since you are recalling a being which you have actually perceived, she *could* be standing there if she weren't where she happens to be at the moment. And you recognize this. As you recall her, you recognize her as real as the *condition* for the complex experience you have *as* a recollection and not a "construct"; and so you recognize that *she* is a real being. Her "possible being" *as* standing in front of you isn't a *being*, however; it's just not a contradiction, supposing the conditions to be fulfilled; but what you are *aware* of is that she (who is real) is *not in fact* standing there. The point, of course, is that she doesn't "have" the "real being" of her physical self and some "possible being" of "standing in front of you."

Supposing that "possible being" is "something" is, however, an easy mistake to make, if you haven't carefully thought through the form of consciousness and the distinction between perceived forms of consciousness and imaginary forms of consciousness. If you're not very careful, you think that consciousness is always "of" something, and since unicorns aren't real, then the act of imagining a unicorn is an experience "of" some "possible being" in that never-never-land that violates the Principle of the Excluded Middle.

With that distinction out of the way, we can say this:

**Conclusion 9: We can only know that something exists if we recognize that (directly or indirectly) we are perceiving it.**

That is, existence is not a *property* something "has"; it is *the fact that it happens to be the cause of a given way of being conscious*. And



remember that Theorem II says that the cause is no different because it happens to be having an effect. So the fact that I can *see* my dog out in the back yard means that I *know* that my dog exists, because I know that this experience is a perception and not an image; but this makes no difference to my *dog*.

That is, my dog is lying there radiating out the light that allows me to see her whether or not I glance up and look out the window. That pattern of light, at the moment, is what makes me conscious “of” her, because it makes me conscious in the “seeing the dog” way—and in fact, I tend to suppress the causal chain between her (the source of the light) and me, because it is constant, and so I don’t need to consider her, really, as the condition for my perception; I think of her as *what* I perceive (though in a different situation—for instance, if I hear a bark and don’t see her—I might say, “Was that Luthien barking?” and then I might need to know her as a condition for what I perceived).

So all of those who say, “Existence is not a predicate” are right; existence simply is asserted *when* the act of consciousness is a perception (is passive) and not an image (spontaneous, reacting-to nothing at all). It is what is perceived; but it is not *caused by* the perception; the perception is caused by *it*; and so I can only say “X exists” when I mean “I am (directly or indirectly) being acted on by X.”

Here, then, is where the fallacy of “passing from the logical to the ontological order” lies, not in the fact that we can’t get “outside” our consciousness in the sense that we can’t know anything but our consciousness. If the *ontology* of my consciousness is such that *by itself it is impossible*, then *it is not alone, and something else exists*. This kind of reasoning is not “passing from the logical to the ontological order.” You are no more in the “logical” order when you know that perceptions “talk about” existence than I am in the “logical” order

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when I say that you had parents, because I know that there's really no human being who, like Topsy, "jus' growed." Either that, or there are real contradictions, and in that case, why deny anything, since the denial is its own assertion?

On the other hand, if I *construct* a form of consciousness, I precisely *cannot* assert existence of it, neither "real" existence *nor* "possible existence." I *know that*, as constructed, I am responsible *actively* for the form of consciousness, and am *not* reacting to anything. Hence, even though *it is possible that* this same form of consciousness could be a reaction to something, *I know that at the moment it isn't*, and so there's no way I can "argue" from the contents of this consciousness to existence.

I am, of course, referring to St. Anselm's famous "proof" for the existence of God, which Kant called the "ontological argument." His reasoning goes this way:

Think of (i.e. make a mental construct of) the greatest conceivable being (i.e. "that than which no greater can be conceived."). You can do this, because you can understand what these words mean. It is the greatest that *can be* conceived, and so obviously it can be conceived. Obviously, if this construct lacks any quality which, if added, would make it "greater," then it isn't the *greatest* conceivable, and so you would have to conceive it with that quality.

Now then, if you admit that it's greater to exist (and be something real) than not exist (and be nothing at all), and you now say this being doesn't exist, then obviously *any* being which exists would be greater than it is as conceived by you, and you are clearly not conceiving of the "greatest conceivable being."

This sounds very plausible, because in fact it *is* greater to exist than be nothing. But the point is that *I can't say that X exists* unless my consciousness "of X" is *not* a mental construct: unless I am *acted*

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*on* in such a way that this form of consciousness is produced *from outside*.

But based on the fact that I can form a construct of “the greatest conceivable” I can’t “include” existence in it, because existence is not something things “have”; it is *the fact that I am not constructing this*.

It is when we do things like this that we “pass from the logical to the ontological order.” It is when we make mental constructs and then based on the fact that this experience *could have been* a perception (if it were externally produced) we try to find a way in which we can assert “external production” (existence) of what we know was a mental construct (imaginary) that we are using linguistic devices to fool ourselves into thinking logically that an act of imagining is “of” something.

This whole subject can be very confusing; but I think I have said enough to show where the fallacy lies, and to show why there isn’t any such thing as “possible being,” even though it’s not impossible for (i.e. there is no contradiction in supposing) an image to be a perception.

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## Chapter 5

### Existence as analogous

From now on we are going to be talking about existence as the cause of *perception*, and not the existences which are the conditions for the act of imagining (because, of course, they were originally causes of perception too).

To resume, then:

**Conclusion 10: Repetitions of the same perception are caused by the same existence.**

When I look up now and see my dog again, the form of consciousness I have is for practical purposes the same as the one I had a couple of hours ago when I looked up. The sameness of the pattern allows me to say that I am looking at the same dog; if the dog out there “looked different” in a significant way (say, was black and had a bulldog face instead of brown with a long snout), then I would, of course, say that there was a different dog in my back yard.

Now of course, the perception I have of my dog is not *exactly* the same as it was two hours ago; but it is close enough so that for practical purposes it is a “repetition”; and so this allows me to say that for practical purposes, the existence is the same one. We will get to how a given existence can be the same and different later; all I want to say here is that we *do* know that, though there are many

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existences, it doesn't follow that every time we have a perception, this implies a special existence corresponding to it. Every time we have a *distinctive* perception, this argues to a distinctive existence; when we have the same perception "over again," the existence was the same.

It would seem that immediately we could say that all of these different existences are analogous (i.e. somehow similar to each other), because they are all existences, after all. But it turns out that this would be leaping to a conclusion. All unique objects are unique; but this obviously cannot mean that they *have something in common* as unique, which allows us to call each of them "unique"; because "uniqueness" means "the quality of having *nothing* in common with anything else."

So the fact that we can use the same *term* to apply to a number of things does not of itself mean that this term actually refers to something they have in common; it might be just that each of them happens to be connected with *me* in a way that makes me think of "them" as having a common trait, when the "commonness" is due to me, not them.

So what we have to do is to find out whether there is something about "formed consciousness" which demands that the cause of each case of "formed consciousness" be *similar* to the cause of each other case. We already know that the cause of each case is different from the cause of any other case (barring repetitions of the same form of consciousness).

How can we do this? Well, if the effects are *similar* among themselves *as* effects (i.e. precisely *as* "formed consciousnesses"), then the causes will have to be similar among *themselves*. So do all forms of consciousness have "something in common" *as* effects, or is each one (as an effect) a unique case of consciousness, and the fact that we can *call* them all "forms of consciousness" is just a linguistic

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convenience like the “common trait of uniqueness” that all unique things “share”?

Here the different types of consciousness as finite come to our rescue. “Formed consciousness” as an effect is simply consciousness as finite: the form is the fact that the consciousness is less than itself. But *any case of “formed consciousness” is a different sort of “consciousness as less than itself” than is “my consciousness” or “today’s consciousness,”* both of which are also consciousness as finite.

It follows from this that *no “formed consciousness” can be absolutely different from any other “formed consciousness” as an effect (as finite consciousness), or I would not be able to put it in this category and distinguish it from a period or a stream of consciousness.*

Therefore, any case of “formed consciousness” is both different from every other one (as *this* case) and the same as every other one (as *formed* and not “perioded” consciousness). Or, every case of “formed consciousness” is as an effect similar to every other one. And since similar effects have analogous causes,

**Conclusion 11: Every existence is analogous to every other existence.**

So existences are not absolutely unique; every existence is somehow both the same as and different from every other existence. There is a *real* similarity among all the existences “out there.”

That is, nominalism is false. What this theory, so popular just before the Renaissance, held was that *all* the terms we use to describe things were like the term “unique,” which *we* could use to put things into neat cubbyholes, but which *referred* to nothing in the things themselves. They didn’t have any “common properties” which were referred to by these terms.

But as we can see, this theory is untenable. If every existence were

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in reality totally dissimilar to every other existence, then there would be no way that “formed consciousnesses” could be similar among themselves; and they must be so, or it would be a mere matter of *convenience* that we put them all in the category of “formed consciousness” and not “periods of consciousness.” That is, if nominalism were true, then you could take the consciousness of reading this page and classify it with “today’s consciousness” as just another period and this wouldn’t make any difference. But you recognize that the *duration* of your consciousness isn’t the same as the *way* you are now conscious.

And since this distinction is *within* the consciousness itself (which is conscious of itself), then there’s no way we could be “fooled” into “thinking” that the limitations weren’t as we “perceived” them with the “consciousness of the consciousness.” Hence, nominalism won’t work as applied to consciousness itself; and if not, then it won’t work as applied to the cause of consciousness, because the causes of “formed consciousness” have to be similar somehow or the effect would be a contradiction, not an effect.

I hasten to say that this does *not* mean that *all* common terms refer to some common reality “out there”; we already saw one (uniqueness) that contradicts itself if it does. Presumably, sometimes terms refer to real aspects of things and sometimes they don’t; and you have to be careful to find out in each case which one of these is true.

## 5: Existence as analogous

## Chapter 6

### Existence as finite

It would be interesting if we could conclude that a given existence (the cause of a given form of consciousness) is a finite case of existence. There would be no contradiction in this, as there was in assuming that another form of consciousness caused a given form of consciousness. In that case, the “cause” was by definition *identical* with the effect, which would have made it the “cause of itself,” which is impossible. But if the cause of a form of consciousness is finite *existence*, then it would not be identical with its effect. They would both be *finite*; but the effect in question is not the general one of finiteness *itself*, but *consciousness as finite (in this way)*; and hence, the fact that the finite existence is *existence* could be the cause rather than the fact that it is finite.

Actually, we are going to conclude to just this; but it is not going to be an easy road to travel, and even the destination, as you can see from the above paragraph, is not all that pellucid. So in spite of the fact that it is “obvious” that the beings we are conscious of are limited, we have to be very careful what we are doing, because, as we saw, not every sense of “finite” or “limited” contains the problem of “being less than itself” that would demand a cause, and we mustn’t let terminology mislead us; not least because, of course, if the existences “out there” are finite in the technical sense, then this will probably be evidence for something that deserves the name

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God—and it is very, very easy to leap to a conclusion one way or the other as soon as the name “God” is mentioned.

We can begin, I think, with a couple of definitions:

***Existence*** is the cause of each “formed consciousness” as “formed consciousness” and therefore as the same as any other “formed consciousness.”

***Essence*** is the cause of each “formed consciousness” as **this case and no other**, and therefore as different from any other “formed consciousness.”

That is, we are now giving the name “existence” to that “aspect” of the cause of “formed consciousness” by which it causes the “common aspect” of our “formed consciousness,” and “essence” is now the “aspect” of the cause by which it causes the “distinctive aspect” of the effect.

Since we know that all existences are analogous, what we are now saying is that the cause of the form of consciousness is *being*, really, not existence; and being has two aspects: existence and essence, or the aspect of being by which every being is identical with every other, and the aspect of being by which every being is uniquely itself.

But we must not be over-hasty here. We got into trouble by assuming that the form of consciousness had two “aspects,” the form (by which it is distinctively itself) and the consciousness (by which it is the same as any other case of my consciousness); but we found out that these two “aspects” were not two distinct “somethings” which were interrelated somehow, but *a single* something which left some of itself outside itself. In other words, a *distinction* between the “consciousness” and the “form” is a nominal one that has *some* foundation in the (limited) consciousness, but not the one it seems to have.

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So we can't immediately say that just we can put two *names* on the different "aspects" of being, there really are two distinct aspects in it; it may be that essence is not an "aspect" at all, but just *the fact that* the existence in this case is finite, or "leaves some existence out of itself." And, in fact, that is what we will conclude.

And the reason we have to say this is the following: If we look at the effects these causes cause carefully, we will see that *in fact they are not distinct from each other*. If that is the case, then existence and essence cannot be distinct from each other either.

Existence, then, is supposed to be the cause of the form of consciousness *as a form* and as such as identical with every other form of consciousness; and essence is supposed to be the cause of the form of consciousness as *this* one and different from any other.

Now, does it make any sense to talk about the "common aspect" of all forms of consciousness as forms? But how could it? First of all, we saw that the form itself is precisely nothing at all; it is *not* a "something," let alone a something which can have distinct aspects such as "formness" and "thisness." If you think of the form as a "something," then it is a "something" that is different from the consciousness and "outside it but inside it as outside."

Talking about the "common aspect" of the form of consciousness would be like talking about the "temperatureness" of temperature as opposed to the "distinctiveness" of this particular temperature; as if the "temperature" were—*as* distinct from the heat—what all "temperatures" had in common, and the particular degree was distinct not only from the heat but the "temperatureness" of the temperature.

But this is completely absurd. The temperature is not a "something" which is different from the heat, let alone a "common something" which is different from *both* the heat *and* the particular degree. The temperature *is* the degree *of the heat*; it is *the fact that*

the heat *has a degree*, which of course is *this* one. The temperature is simply, as we saw, a way of describing the *heat*, and simply says that the *heat* stops at this degree.

Similarly, we saw that the form of consciousness is simply *the fact that the consciousness “leaves off” being consciousness* and is not something “added” to the consciousness at all. Therefore, there can be no question of “formness” here; all there is to the way of being conscious *is consciousness*; the “form” is simply the way the consciousness *is not*; it is its self-negation, its stopping, its leaving some of itself outside itself.

True, all forms of consciousness (i.e. all cases of “formed consciousness”) are *similar in the fact that at any moment*, consciousness “leaves some of itself outside itself,” but this fact *means* something different in each concrete case. So the form is not an *aspect* of consciousness, but a *fact about* it; and what the forms “have in common” is that in fact that consciousness at any moment *is not* all that it could be at that moment.

But there is no way that you could distinguish this fact as a kind of general fact from *how* the consciousness stops at this given moment, any more than you can distinguish the temperature (the fact that the heat is not all that it could be) from the concrete temperature. The temperature *is* the definite temperature. Similarly, the “leaving off” of consciousness at any given moment *is* the *actual* “leaving off,” which is actually *identical* with the *consciousness as less than itself*.

Another way of putting it is that the three different types of finiteness can be put in this way: (a) *at all times* my consciousness is less than “consciousness as such” (or is just “mine,” and so can be said to leave some “consciousness” outside it—that of other people); (b) *all during this period* my consciousness is less than “my consciousness as such,” (or it is just today’s); and (c) *at this par-*

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*ticular instant of this period of my consciousness* my consciousness is less than itself (or is less than it now could be). These are three different *facts* about my consciousness, not three different “somethings” that “attach themselves” to my consciousness. And the fact that the third fact applies to *any and every* moment of my consciousness does not mean that it *refers to* an aspect each moment “has” that makes it the same as every other, such that the actual “lessness” is different from this “factness.”

One final way of putting it. The form of consciousness is another way of saying that at the moment, the consciousness is a *definite* one (looking at the page). Now obviously the “definiteness” is not different from the “lookingness,” as if the “definiteness” were what looking at the page and listening to a symphony “had in common,” while the “lookingness” and the “listeningness” were different from the “definiteness as definiteness.” This would make the “definiteness” just “generalized definiteness as such” and so it would be *indefinite* “definiteness,” which makes as much sense as “common uniqueness.”

I think all of this discussion establishes pretty well that the “formness” of the way of being consciousness and the “thisness” are just two different ways of *talking about* what in reality is *one and the same problem: the fact that the consciousness at any moment leaves some of itself outside itself*. Hence, the “formness” and the “definiteness” are in fact *the same effect*. It isn’t that they are two “phases” of the same effect, it is just the same effect approached from different directions.

Then what does this mean? Obviously, since identical effects have identical causes, and these “two effects” are actually one and the same effect, then what it means is that the “two causes” are actually one and the same cause.

**Conclusion 12: Essence is identical with existence as the cause of “formed consciousness.”**

That is, since “formed consciousness as formed” (which is caused by existence) *is in fact* “formed consciousness as this way of being conscious” (which is caused by essence), then “existence” is just a generalized, abstract way of saying “essence.”

That is, essence is what causes the consciousness to be *this* way of being conscious (i.e. the page you are looking at is what causes the way you are now conscious; and so it is an *essence*.); and existence as *distinct* from essence would mean “the cause of thisness in general in consciousness.” But there’s no such thing as “thisness in general,” and so there’s no existence which is in any way distinct from essence.

Nevertheless,

**Conclusion 13: Essence is different from itself in each case, and is less than what it means to cause “formed consciousness.”**

Obviously, the *page* you are looking at isn’t the cause of the form of perception of your mother; that form is a *different* “thisness” from the perception of the page. Hence, essence *means* something different both times; both times it means the “cause of the thisness of the way of being conscious,” but the “thisness” is different each time.

But in the case of seeing the page, it is also obvious that the page *can’t* produce the other form of consciousness; or in other words, the essence can only cause *this* “thisness” and not the other “thisness.” So in spite of the fact that it causes “thisness,” it leaves some of itself as “the cause of the thisness” of a way of being consciousness outside itself.

But since the term “existence” was used for “the cause of formed

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consciousness as such,” (which in the concrete means the same as essence, because the form is the “thisness” and the “thisness” can’t really ever be anything but “this thisness”), then what essence “leaves out” of itself obviously is some of *existence*.

**Conclusion 14: Essence is simply a name for the fact that existence is finite.**

That is, you can use either term for “the cause of formed consciousness.” The cause is “existence” if you are looking at it as “the cause of formed consciousness”; but if you are looking at as “the cause of *this case of* “formed consciousness,” it is “essence.” Or, in other words, “existence” is “essence in general”; or, “essence” means “the definite existence.”

Let me state a possible exception to this, connected with the possibilities of non-finite consciousness I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, and then I will discuss the question of whether St. Thomas or Francisco Suarez was right on the question of the “real distinction” between essence and existence.

The exception is this: If ever there occurs a moment of consciousness which is equal to “what it is for me to be conscious” (in which *all possible* ways I could be conscious are “wrapped up” in this consciousness), this would still be *my* consciousness and *this instant* of my consciousness, and so it would still be finite in those two senses; but it would be a non-finite *way* of being conscious, and so the “way” in this case would not be a *limitation* or a “leaving out” of consciousness at all.

There would probably have to be some cause of this—I suppose you could call it “expansion”—of consciousness into its “full potential” at this moment; and so presumably some being would be responsible for this (supposing it to be possible). In that one

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hypothetical case, the only essence that could do this job is one which would cause a “thisness” which is equal to “thisness as such” or “all thisnesses rolled into one”; or in other words, the essence that could do this would have to be an essence which would be equal to what it means to exist, or a non-finite existence. Hence, if anyone were ever able to have that “absolutely full consciousness” I talked about at the beginning of the chapter, it would presumably be the experience of a being whose essence is identical with existence itself, or which would be the “absolute fullness of existence.”

But—at this stage at least of our investigation—this is just something that can’t be ruled out; we have no clear evidence either (a) that such a “total consciousness” has ever actually occurred in anyone, nor (b) that it is even possible in practice, let alone (c) that it would have to have a being of some sort as its causer (since as non-finite it might not be an effect at all). So let us drop this for now as just speculation.

But then it would seem that Francisco Suarez was on the right side of the “essence/existence” question when he said that there was no real distinction between essence and existence, and Thomas Aquinas, who held that essence was “really distinct” from existence (except in God’s case) was wrong<sup>39</sup>.

St. Thomas’s reasoning is based on the fact that the answer to the question, “What is X?” is different from the answer to the question “Is there an X?”; and this, he says, implies that what it is that allows

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<sup>39</sup>Incidentally, Suarez had Aristotle on his side, though you’d never know it from the translations of Aristotle. What Aristotle obviously intended to mean “existence” (*to ti en einai*; literally, “what it was [for something] to be”) has been translated “essence,” not “existence”; and what he intended as “essence” (*ousia*, lit. “beingness” or “reality”) was translated “substance.” And so the discussion in the *Metaphysics* on whether there is a real distinction between essence and existence appears in the translation as a discussion of whether essence is distinct from substance or not.

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us to answer one of the questions must be distinct from what allows us to answer the other one.

But especially in this case, this is very dangerous reasoning, because it implies that there can be “essences” that don’t exist, like the “essence of a unicorn.” That is, you can answer the question, “What is a unicorn?” by saying that it’s a horse-like animal with a single horn on its forehead and cloven hooves and a curly mane and tail; but there aren’t any unicorns, and so you’ve got an essence but not an existence.

But of course, as we have stressed so often, there is no essence of a unicorn, because there isn’t any unicorn, even as a “possible being.” All there is is a bunch of nerves that had been used before being reactivated at the same time. There is no such thing as an essence that doesn’t exist. How could there be? It would be the essence of nothing at all.

Nevertheless, Suarez does not necessarily have the last word. Essence (a *definite* existence) is really distinct from *existence*, because some existence is *left out* of essence in any given case. If essence were identical in every sense with existence, then every existence would be *this essence*, which of course would mean that every perception would be the one this essence causes (you would never be doing anything but seeing this page). Essence, as the “thisness” of existence, is (a) nothing but the existence, but (b) is not the existence.

That is essence *as such*, if you can put it that way, is the “surface” of the existence. What is really “there” is *existence*, the cause of “formed consciousness”; but *in this case*, the existence leaves some of itself outside itself, and this “leaving off,” this “stopping,” is the “surface,” the “essence as such.” “Essence as such” then, has the same function as temperature *as opposed to* heat; temperature in that sense is the non-heat inside the heat. Similarly essence is the non-existence inside the existence, the real nothing.

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Temperature can be said to be “really distinct” from heat in that heat (though it has to be *some* temperature) doesn’t have to be *this* temperature in order to be heat. So this particular temperature leaves some heat outside this case of heat, and so it is not *what it means to be heat*; it is heat *as finite*.

Similarly, essence can be said to be “really distinct” from existence in that existence (though in every case but conceivably one it has to be *some* essence) doesn’t have to be *this* essence in order to be existence. So this particular existence leaves some existence outside this case of existence, and so it is not *what it means to be existence*; it is existence *as finite*.

The upshot of this is that in the sense above, essence is really “distinct” from existence, because it means “existence as finite in this way” and not simply “existence”; and in that sense St. Thomas wins the debate; but in the concrete, the existence *is nothing but* this particular case of existence; and so it *is* essence, and there is no real distinction of essence from existence.

That is, finite existence is obviously an effect: it is existence as different from itself, existence as containing non-existence (the essence-as-such) within it, existence as leaving some of itself outside itself, or existence as less than what it is to exist. And since it is an effect, then if you “fudge” your description of it a bit so that it seems to make sense, it isn’t surprising that you can “fudge” both ways and make out a case that essence is really distinct from existence, and also a case that essence is not really distinct from existence.

Of such are philosophical disputes born. Of course, if Hegel is right, somebody should come along and show how both sides of the dispute are “suspended moments” of a point of view that in one sense repudiates each of them and in another sense preserves them as superseded. Needless to say, I think I have done this, and so made the “essence/existence” debate otiose. Both sides are both right and

## 6: Existence as finite

wrong; they are ways of misdescribing an effect in such a way that the description seems to make sense, rather than revealing the “contradictoriness-in-itself” which characterizes an effect as such.

That the “real distinction” as described by St. Thomas was “fudging” the data is clear from the Scholastics’ reference to “principles of being and not beings” when they talk about essence and existence, and when they mention their “transcendental relation,” such that the “meaning” or “reality” of the one is contained within the other. They are then “distinct” in such a way that they are “in” each other while not being each other, so they both are and are not each other—or in other words, the real distinction is a kind of non-distinct distinction. I think my description of the finite and the analogy with temperature and surface is a little more understandable than the “transcendental relation between really distinct principles of being,” which (to me at least) masks what it is saying. So even if the Thomists would agree with my actual description of finite existence as what they were getting at in this type of “real distinction,” I prefer my approach and my results.

## Chapter 7

### God

**B**ut however you formulate it, once you discover that the cause of a given “formed consciousness” is a finite existence, then of course you have a case of existence *as finite*, and anything finite is an effect, because it is less than what it is to be itself.

But if existence as finite is an effect, it follows that it cannot be the cause of itself. We saw this with respect to consciousness in Principle I; and all you have to do with that Principle is replace “consciousness” with “existence” and it is just as valid. Hence, any existence as finite is the effect *of something outside itself*.

We now make an argument *a pari* with the one from finite consciousness. Either its cause is (a) a total existence of which it is a part, (b) another finite existence, (c) a combination of finite existences, perhaps of an infinite number of them, (d) something other than existence altogether, or (e) a non-finite existence.

Alternative (a) is slightly different from the parallel one in consciousness; but what this amounts to is, of course, pantheism. It assumes that there is a “great whole” which doesn’t have the problem and of which each of us is a part. Could this be the case, knowing what we know about finiteness?

Let us again table this until we have treated alternative (b), and we will see that it cannot be the case. Could one finite existence be the cause of another finite existence as finite existence? The question

should answer itself to anyone who has read this far. Identical effects have identical causes, and if Existence B were the cause of Existence A, then since the particulars of the finiteness are not what is at issue, you could replace Existence A with Existence B without changing the *effect* at all (it would still be existence-as-less-than-what-it-is-to-exist); and so if Existence B could cause Existence A, it would be the cause of itself, which is impossible.

**Conclusion 15: No single finite existence can be the cause of the fact that any other finite existence is finite existence.**

Now then, (a) would the “great whole” in which Existence A is included as a finite part be able to do the job? No. The reason is that the *non-existence* that makes Existence A *this* would now be *contained within* this “great whole,” such that it would be *different* if Existence A weren’t in it; so *in part* this “great whole” would be “infected with” finiteness.

That is, it is one thing to say that whatever causes Existence A is *greater than* and therefore “at least equal to” Existence A, or that everything by which Existence A can be said to be *existence* is contained within this cause; but if Existence A is *explicitly, as something finite* contained within this thing as a *real part* of the whole, then *in part*, this “great whole” contains *non-existence*, making it in part self-contradictory in the same way anything finite is self-contradictory.

You can see this by asking the question, “Well, if the Existence A part is an effect by itself, and the cause is outside it, then is the *rest* of this “great whole” the cause, or does the cause permeate all of this “great whole”? In the latter case, of course, the cause is (also) *within* the Existence A part, in which case Existence A makes sense by itself and wasn’t an effect in the first place, which we know is not the case

(or we should, by this time); but in the former case, then there is at least this nagging “nonsensical” part of the “great whole” which is made sense out of by some *other* part which is outside and *lacks* the existence it is making sense out of. But if it lacks the existence which is Existence A, this other part is in fact just another finite existence, and we ruled this out as a cause.

**Conclusion 16: The cause of any finite existence cannot be a whole of which the finite existence is a part.**

That is, whatever this cause of finite existence is, *no finite existence is a part of it*. And we can see this if we take alternative (c). The cause of the finiteness of any finite existence cannot be any combination of finite existences, not even a combination of an infinite number of finite existences. Why? Because this combination would contain the essences of each of the members, and so would be “infected” with all those “non-existences,” making it less than what it is to exist; and it would lack the particular existence that it was supposed to be the cause of, again making it less than what it means to exist. So even an infinite combination of finite existences would be a (complex) finite existence, in the sense that it would have the same problem as the one it is supposed to be solving; and by the argument dealing with alternative (b), it could not therefore be the cause of *any* finite existence as finite existence.

**Conclusion 17: The cause of the finiteness of any finite existence cannot be a combination of finite existences, even of an infinite number of them.**

This leaves two possibilities: either (d), analogously to the cause of finite consciousness, something which is not “existence” at all (call

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it a “shibboleth” meaning “the cause of finite existence”), and this might turn out to be either finite itself or not; or (e) a non-finite existence, meaning an existence that is not “internally infected” with non-existence or one whose existence is equal to “what it means to exist.”

It turns out that we can eliminate the first of these two remaining alternatives. Similar effects have analogous causes. But since consciousness as finite is similar as effect to existence as finite (they are both “X as less than what it is to be X,” which is the problem in each case), it follows that the cause of finite consciousness must be analogous to the cause of finite existence.

Now obviously, the respect in which the two causes are the same can’t be the *finiteness*, because (1) we saw that it wasn’t because existence was *finite* that it caused consciousness to be less than what it could be, it was because the (finite) existence was an *existence* that it did so; and (2) the finiteness is precisely the *effect*, and if the causes were similar *as finite*, then this would mean that it was *the finiteness* of finite existence which caused the finiteness of finite consciousness, and we would have a case of the effect’s causing itself.

This needs a little expansion. In one sense, the finiteness of any finite existence (the definite essence) is the cause of the finiteness of the finite consciousness (the definiteness of this particular act of consciousness); but it is that cause *insofar as it is existence*, not insofar as it is finite. It is just that, *as finite*, it can’t cause anything more than a *finite* case of consciousness. In other words, existence causes the form of consciousness; but since any existence (except possibly one) leaves some of itself (as existence) outside itself, then the form has to be less than simply “form of consciousness” in general.

So it isn’t really the case, as I said before, that existence causes the consciousness as “formed” and essence causes it as “this form.” It’s just that, when you have the finite existence and you look at it as

*existence*, you are aware of it insofar as its effect is a form of consciousness and not a period; but when you look at the same thing as essence, you are aware of it as producing a *definite* form. But it can't produce a form without its being a definite form. That's the real-distinction real-identity debate all over again.

In any case,

**Conclusion 18: The cause of the finiteness of any finite existence cannot be a (finite or non-finite) non-existence.**

Hence, whatever this cause of finite existence is, it must be analogously *existence*, since it is the “existenceness,” as it were, of the finite existence which does the “restricting” of consciousness to being less than itself—and this is exactly what this cause has to do to finite existence: it must “restrict” it to being less than what it otherwise would be.

Furthermore, since every finite existence is *positively impossible* without this cause (because as finite each is self-contradictory and so doesn't exist without the cause, and nothing else can cause it but this cause), then *we know that this cause exists as a condition for finite consciousness*. But I just used the word “exists” there—in a non-technical sense, to be sure; but it confirms the argument above.

**Conclusion 19: There is a non-finite existence.**

That is, the only possible explanation for the finiteness of any finite existence—the only thing which *could* make sense out of it has to be (a) an existence, and (b) an existence which is *equal to the meaning of “what it is to exist,”* one that does not leave some of the reality of existence outside itself, one that does not contain any non-existence within it as identical with itself, and one that is not

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different from existence; or in other words there is one essence which *is* existence, and isn't "only this much" existence.

But wait a minute. If no finite existence is part of this infinite existence, then doesn't it leave some existence outside itself? It's clearly only one of many beings, and so doesn't that mean it's less than the totality of existence or is less than what it means to exist?

No. There is an equivocation here, which can be seen from the following example. If you have a temperature of 80 degrees, then this is *not* a temperature of 40 degrees, but clearly all of the heat contained within a temperature of 40 degrees is in this temperature of 80 degrees.

Similarly, this infinite existence is not (for instance) human existence, and it doesn't have a human being "inside" it; but it is *more than* simply human existence, because human existence *as human* is simply a *lessening* of existence to be no more than human. So that the infinite existence would have "supereminently," as the Scholastics say, all the existence of any finite existence, because it has *unqualified* existence, and every other existence is only a qualified one.

Incidentally, if the infinite existence "had" human existence "inside it," then this would be like the big block of wood "having" the ball inside it before the ball is carved out. But that would make the wood like an onion, and several *different* blocks of wood, not just one; the surfaces precisely *exclude* what is outside them as "not this piece of wood." It is this "onion" view of the infinite which is the notion of the infinite existence as the "great whole" *actually* including the finite existences within it with their limits; it becomes a set of finite existences.

No, in the infinite existence, there is no *internal* limitation of the existence. And just as the presence (in a different room, say) of a temperature of 40 degrees doesn't make the temperature of 80 degrees any less than it is—in fact it doesn't alter *what* it is in any



way—so my existence as distinct from this infinite existence doesn't *diminish* the infinite existence in any way. It is not *the only existence*, but this doesn't make it not *the greatest existence, the one equal to what it means to exist.*"

To put this another way, "what it means to exist" is not to be taken in the sense of the "sum total of all beings"; it deals with, if you will, the "degree of power" of any being, or the "energy level" of any being. The infinite existence is the being whose "energy level" is not internally restricted at all; and the presence of lesser degrees of energy "beside it" does not restrict "how much internal energy" it is<sup>40</sup>.

We might as well give this infinite existence the designation it usually has:

***God is the non-finite existence.***

Before getting back to finite consciousness, is there anything we could say about God just from what we know so far?

It turns out there is. Suppose there were two Gods, such that one was really not the other. Then what makes the second one *not* the first must be something other than existence (because the first is just plain existence); and so it would have to be *the fact that* this second one is existence-with- some-qualification; or in other words some *essence* that is *this particular* existence and not "just plain" existence. But that means that the second one is *finite*, and not God at all.

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<sup>40</sup>This is actually a rather bad way of putting it, because "energy," as we will see later, means "quantitatively *limited* existence," and so "infinite energy" is a contradiction in terms. But at this stage, it might be useful to use this limping metaphor to show that internal non-limitation is compatible with being "only one out of many" objects.

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**Conclusion 20: There is only one God.**

But we have to be a little careful here. We saw that there is a sense in which my consciousness and my consciousness-of-my-consciousness are not the same; and yet (as we also saw) “they” have to be *one and the same act*. Whatever is “in” one is “in” the other, because the act is totally transparent to itself.

Hence, we can’t rule out the possibility that there could be two Gods (in *some* sense) which are identically the same thing; i.e. identical as “just plain existence,” without one’s lacking anything at all that the other one was. But in that case, there would be nothing *real* by which they could be distinguished; because it is *differences* in existences (essences) which make different forms of consciousness possible; and so they would have to be “two” in the sense that consciousness and the consciousness of being conscious are “two”: two but in reality one and the same.

Obviously, what I am getting at here is that there is no way that you could *exclude* God’s being a Trinity, if the “three persons” are in fact “one and the same reality.” And, as I said, we have something analogous in our own consciousness which seems to make this more than just “Well, you can’t prove it’s *impossible*.”

But in the sense of two *really distinct* Gods, such that one really *is not* the other, there is only one God.

As we investigate finite consciousness further and find out various things about finite existence, we will also in many cases be able to say something about God; because insofar as the finite existence is *existence*, then God has to be analogous to it; and insofar as the finite existence is *finite*, then God must be unlike it.

**Conclusion 21: There are *no* really distinct “parts” of any sort within God. God is absolutely simple.**

The reason for this, of course, is that if “Part A” was *really distinct* from any other “part,” then “Part A” would have to *lack* whatever made the other “part” different from it; but this “whatever” has to be either some finite existence, or existence itself, in which case, “Part A” is “infected” with non-existence, which means that God is (in part) “infected” with non-existence, and therefore God is in fact finite, in that God then has the same problem God is supposed to be solving, as we saw above.

Once again, if one and the same God “contains,” as it were, the whole of himself<sup>41</sup> within himself in the way consciousness of being conscious contains the “being conscious” within it, while the “being conscious” contains within *it* the “consciousness of being conscious,” then this does not imply any limitation (or any *real* multiplicity), and it is not incompatible with the simplicity of God. Our act of consciousness is a simple act, because the consciousness of being conscious is *not* a part distinct from the other part; it is *the whole act as transparent to itself*.

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<sup>41</sup>I have not established that God is personal yet, of course, and so have no logical right to use a personal pronoun referring to him. But much later, this will be established, and I would prefer to use the personal pronoun rather than the neuter “it.” The pronoun is *not* the masculine pronoun, however; it is the *generic* pronoun that means “not a non-person”; and until the language finds such a pronoun, we must submit to what is actually in the language and use this pronoun, being aware that it carries no sex or gender with it at all. That is, to call God either “she” or even “he/she” as if he were either “male” or “female” or “both” would imply (since maleness and femaleness—or masculinity and femininity—are both *limitations*) that he “contains but extends beyond” these limitations; and he doesn’t. To refer to him as “it” would be to imply that he is beneath personhood, which is false. (Similarly, simply to use nouns—to replace the pronoun with “God” all the time—is to imply that the personal pronoun does not apply, which is another way of denying personhood to God.)

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**Conclusion 22: God is not and cannot be an effect in any real way, of anything at all. God can “contain” no unintelligibility.**

The reason for this is that God is simply existence, and existence, of course, is what it is that is *intelligible* about any object; it is what is *finite* about finite existences that gives them unintelligibility, because as finite they are not quite what they are. But since God is *simple* existence, there is nothing about God which *could* be an internal contradiction, by which “by himself” he would not be what he is. Hence, he is absolutely intelligible in himself.

This doesn't mean that *we* understand all about him, of course, because we only know about him because of the *unintelligibility* of his *effects*, and have no direct knowledge of him. As St. Paul says, “What we see now is darkened as if we were looking in a poor mirror”; we see the reflection, not the reality. So any defectiveness in our knowledge about God comes from the indirect way we know about him, and is not due to any defect in *what* our knowledge *refers to*.

But of course, if God can't have any internal unintelligibility, then obviously he can't be the effect of anything. So God is the “uncaused cause.” Some (Kant among them) have thought that “uncaused cause” is a contradiction in terms; but that was because what they meant by “cause” is different from what we mean by it. For us a “cause” is simply “the fact that makes some otherwise contradictory set of facts intelligible,” and there is obviously nothing in this notion that demands that this fact be *itself* unintelligible in any way. And here we have an unintelligibility (finite existence) which *cannot* be rendered intelligible unless the fact (which in this case is a being) that makes it so *cannot itself be unintelligible in any way*. Hence, there must be such a fact; and this is what we call God.

**Conclusion 23: Everything but God is a finite existence.**

This is obvious. Once having established that the cause of the cause of our finite consciousness can't be something outside the category of existence altogether, then everything that can be talked about has to be an existence of some sort. And since there can only be one non-finite existence, then everything else has to be existence-with-a-qualification, or an essence which is not equal to the meaning of existence, or a finite existence.

But this does eliminate the possibility some have considered: that maybe the "real world" has as its cause God; but maybe God is caused by *his* own "God," and so on. That is, this view says that maybe God is God just from the point of view of our "level" of existence; and from his "level," he's just the effect of the "God" on the next higher level, and so on. This might be possible if God were outside existence altogether, and not an existence, just as the cause of finite consciousness is outside *consciousness* altogether, and therefore can be finite and need a cause for its own finiteness. But if God is (as God must be) *existence*, then this means (a) that he is like finite existence in *accounting for* the finite as an effect, and (b) he is *unlike* finite existence *in being finite*; and as we saw, this implies that he cannot be the effect of anything, on any "level."

As can be seen, many of these erroneous speculations with respect to God come from considering God as analogous to finite existence *in its finiteness*; and in that respect, he is "totally other," as Karl Barth would say.

## Chapter 8

### Proofs for God's existence

Having said that, I suppose I should mention a few of the arguments for and against God's existence, because it is very easy to say, "Well, why didn't you just . . . (for instance ask 'Where did you come from?' and go back from that to the 'first cause?')", or "But your argument has the obvious refutation that . . ." These are based on the assumption that the argument I have given is a kind of "reworking" of past arguments, when in fact, though there is a superficial relation to them, what it is doing is very different.

First of all, there is the temptation to say, "Oh, well, another 'proof' for God's existence. In every age somebody finds something inexplicable and drags God in; and then somebody else finds a perfectly natural this-worldly explanation."

The answer to this is that in this case, the problem (the in-itself-impossibility) lies in the mere fact that something is finite. And what I tried to show is that no this-worldly explanation *can* be the cause, since it (as also a finite existence) is bound to be the effect it is supposed to be the cause of.

"Well, but what about the causal chain, where B causes A and C causes B and D causes C and so on to infinity. No one cause can do the job, but who says that you have to go outside the chain, if it's got an infinite number of links?"

That is a legitimate riposte to a totally different argument that is usually given for God's existence: the "Where did you come from?" argument. Your parents caused you, and their parents caused them, and so on back through the first living being and the "primordial soup," and so on and so on and so on.

But the problem there (the effect in question) is the fact that you *began* to exist, not that your existence *now* is finite. And your parents are the causers of your *beginning* to exist, and their parents were the causers of their beginning to exist and so on; and there is no necessary reason why there has to be a non-infinite string here, if the universe didn't have a beginning (as is conceivable if Einstein is right and there is a certain total mass in the universe, which then might alternately expand and collapse for ever and ever).

But first of all, the "chain" can't account for the *finiteness* of any finite existence, because the B (which needs accounting for) which was supposed to cause A *can't do it whether or not it is "caused,"* because as a finite existence *it is identically the same effect,* and if it could (whether "caused" or not) cause A it would while it was doing it make sense by itself, and there would be something which was finite that made sense by itself. So B *can't* be the cause of A, whether it is the "effect" of C or not. Secondly, even an infinite set of things which "caused" any finite existence would still be a single (complex) finite existence, as we said.

In other words, this alternative "solves" the problem simply by ignoring what the problem is. It is like "solving" the problem of falling bodies by solving what makes magnets attract iron.

Nor do the "refutations" of Kant address the issue. First of all, if you say that this is just an example of Kant's "cosmological argument," where the contingency of the world is supposed to demand a non-contingent being, Kant refutes this by "proving" that it is the *definition* of "contingency" as "dependent on something

## 8: Proofs for God's existence

else” that means that if you say that “there is something that is contingent (dependent)” you must *logically* get to something that isn’t. But this is the “passage from the logical to the ontological order.”

But as we saw when discussing consciousness as finite, the “contradiction” involved in finiteness is not a *logical* contradiction, but two *facts* which render the *reality* positively *impossible* as it is known. And as Kant’s own philosophy exhibits again and again (as does every other one), when you have *this* kind of “impossibility,” then you know that the “conditions for the possibility” (what I call the “cause”) are given (such as, for Kant, the *a priori* forms of sensation, the categories, etc., etc.).

So it isn’t because the *notion* “dependence” implies “that on which something depends” that we call finite existence “unintelligible” without God; it is because finite existence *as it exists contradicts itself if it is “on its own”; but it exists nonetheless. Hence something makes it exist this way.* This is no more Kant’s “cosmological argument” than Newton was using a “cosmological argument” when he asserted that there was an unseen force which he called “gravity,” or one is using a “cosmological argument” when one asserts that there is something about a magnet that pulls iron towards it.

And I would point out that if you deny my argument above for the existence of God, you have no reason for saying that anything at all is real, because we do dream and have hallucinations, and while we’re having these experiences they seem to deal with reality; and on what grounds are you going to say that not everything is a dream, except something like the inadequacy-in-themselves of our perceptions? But what it *is* about them that can’t be explained internally is their *finiteness*; which is just what is the problem about



the real objects which they “talk about” by this<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup>As to St. Thomas’s arguments, first of all, each of the “five ways” is a fallacy as it stands, which would take too long to go into (I wrote a whole article in the *International Philosophical Quarterly* on just the First Way), though of course each Way reveals a defect in reality which is an example of existence as finite (though it is not used as such). As to his argument from the “real distinction” between essence and existence, I think his argument *for* such a real distinction is shaky, and as such, as I said in a previous footnote, it implies “essences” that don’t exist. Hence, though my argument is in a sense based on the distinction between essence and existence, the *problem* I see is that this distinction is also an identity; and so my argument is not really a “reworking” of St. Thomas—though I would say that St. Thomas’s is a kind of Hegelian “moment” suspended in it.

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## Chapter 9

### Existence as activity

There are some loose ends we have to tie together before we go on.

First of all, we said that there were three modes of consciousness as finite: the single stream of consciousness, the delimited period of consciousness, and the form of consciousness. Since these are similar as effect, then their causes must be analogous.

And as we can see now from the argument for the existence of God, what the cause of these *other* types of finiteness must be is some sort of existence (analogously, of course, because each effect is a case of limited consciousness, though not of it as *formed*, so the effects are similar); and, of course, since they are types of finiteness of *consciousness*, then in all probability, their causes will be different *sorts* of *finite existence*.

That is, the cause restricting my consciousness to “lasting” only for a day or so before it “shuts down” and I sleep must be in some sense existence as finite; and in all probability what this is is *the fact that* my brain as “producer” of the acts of consciousness has *a finite ability to do so continuously*; its neurons get “filled up” with the information coming into them, and can’t clear themselves out while more information is coming in; so periodically the whole brain must “shut down” and “erase itself,” so to speak, “resetting the nerves to zero,” so that they can take in new information.

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That seems to be the most reasonable explanation based on what we know of the physiology of the brain; but in any case, it is because the mind *can't* unify the whole of my consciousness into one single stream that it breaks it up into periods.

Thus, the *existence* of the mind accounts for the (unified) “stream” of consciousness, and the *finiteness* of the mind accounts for the *finiteness* of a given stream, and the fact that it breaks up into a set of periods.

Similarly, the fact that my stream of consciousness is only *mine* is accounted for by the fact that my mind is *only my mind*, and is *incapable* of encompassing all of *consciousness*. In physiological terms, my stream of consciousness is what is produced by the activity of my brain, which is only one brain among many; and the fact that it is *not* any more than just this one cuts off my consciousness from anyone else's.

And, of course, since I *recognize* my consciousness as only mine and not anyone else's, then the cause of *this* awareness (the particular form of consciousness whose contents is, “I have only my own consciousness”) is *the existence of my mind*, which forces me to recognize that my experience is not all there is to consciousness. Again, the form of consciousness which is the recognition of the particular period of my consciousness has as its cause the other mode of finiteness of the *existence* of my mind, its subjectivity to fatigue (as when I feel I “need sleep”). Finally, I recognize the act of consciousness in the very act, because I recognize the act as *this finite existence* in addition to the existence it “talks about” if it is a perception. So when I imagine the unicorn, I recognize the existence of the act of imagining, but *not* the existence of the unicorn.

Now then, I want to make a move which is basically just terminological. Since perception recognizes itself as not alone and therefore as caused by some existence, while imagining recognizes

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itself as spontaneous and not needing (now) any existence, it is *here* that the most basic notion of “acting” and “being acted on” comes. Any other form of “acting” or “being acted on” would be something recognized as similar to this. That is, imagining *and* perception are both recognized as “*doing*” something; but perception is recognized as “*doing something in response to something else*” or *reacting-to*.

To put this another way, the “prime analogate” of “doing” or “acting” is our own experience of our own consciousness (i.e. our own reaction to our own consciousness, our awareness-of-our-awareness), which is, of course, identical with the consciousness which is experienced. All other “doings” are bound (as far as consciousness is concerned) to be seen as *similar somehow* to “doing” in this sense in which the “doing” is directly and totally conscious of itself; or the other senses of “doing” are going to be *analogous* to the “doing” which directly experiences itself.

Hence, when we *react* and recognize the “doing” as “talking about” something else, we are aware that this “something else” is *analogous* to consciousness, because we are *also* reacting to the *consciousness* as *it* reacts to this outside existence. So the outside existence is “doing” something to our consciousness *in a way analogous to* what our consciousness is “doing” to itself.

And of course, what we are reacting *to* when we react to our consciousness is our consciousness *as existence*. Hence, the “doing” of our consciousness *is its existence*. And similarly, that analogous “doing” we are reacting to in perception is the (finite) *existence* which caused it.

We can therefore say the following:

**Conclusion 24: Existence is activity. To be is to do.**

This is “activity” taken in the broadest possible sense, since the

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*reaction* of consciousness to external existence is also recognized as existence (it is an *activity*-in-response-to).

Note that “activity” does *not* imply “acting *on*” something, because the spontaneous activity of consciousness is not acting *on* itself in any real sense; it *is* itself; it is just “being active” as opposed to “doing nothing.”

*Acting on* is another name for *causality*; and it is what existence *does to* something when it accounts somehow for it. That is, “acting on,” like “reacting to,” deals with a *relationship* between two existences, and these are obviously the relationships of causality and being-affected respectively. But activity is the name for the *cause* whose causality is “acting on.”

We can perform a little “thought experiment” to test whether “existence” and “activity” mean the same thing by supposing the opposite: that there is something that exists but is totally inactive, neither doing anything at all nor reacting to anything, but just existing. Would there be any meaning to the word “existing” in this case, or would it be identical in practice with its opposite?

Well, if we take a theoretically perfect knower, one who could react to any activity at all (who had all the instruments to detect any activity whatsoever), and we ask whether this knower could distinguish this “existence” from the nothingness that is beside it, we can see that he couldn’t. None of his instruments could detect it, so that as far as that goes, there would be nothing there. If he sent out a probe into the nothingness and into the “existence,” then the probe would, of course, not affect the nothingness in any way; and since the “existence” doesn’t (by the supposition) react to anything, then *it* would not be affected by the probe either in any way. So there is no way, either by reacting to this “existence” or by acting on it, that a perfect knower could know that it existed. For the perfect knower, it is the same as nothing at all.

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And of course, if we say, “Well, God created it and as creator he knows it (because he knows his creative act of causing it) even though he can’t be acted on *by* it.” But if he created it and there is no difference at all (which of course would be some act) after it was created from before it was created, then this means that he has created something which is no different from not creating anything at all; in which case, what sense does it make to say that he “created” anything?

So a totally *inactive* being—one that doesn’t even *resist* action on it—is not a being at all; there isn’t anything like this. And therefore, *being is what is active*, and *existence is activity*.

But this brings up the question of acting *on* something; and since the cause is no different whether or not it happens to be having an effect, we can say the following:

**Conclusion 25: Existence need not be acting *on* a mind in order to be active or to be existence.**

That is, *esse is not percipi*, as Bishop Berkeley held. *Percipi* (perceiving) depends on *esse* (existing, existence), but on the other hand, whether the sense organs or the receiving instrument is or is not in the way to be acted on, the *activity itself* is no different.

And you know that your mother doesn’t go out of existence as soon as she gets out of the way of your being able to perceive her; and even if she’s in a room without windows or mirror and is asleep (so that she’s not even perceiving herself), she doesn’t stop existing; she’s still *active* in all sorts of ways even if there is no one to perceive her.

“Ah,” the good Bishop would say, “but God is perceiving her.” No, he’s not. He *can’t* be *acted on* by her, and so be the effect of her

finite existence.<sup>43</sup> God can't *be acted on in any way at all; he is totally self-sufficient*, as we saw. So God does not "perceive" your mother. Now it's true that your mother can't *be active* in the *finite* way she is active if God is not *making the act this finite act*; but that has nothing to do with whether anyone is perceiving her<sup>44</sup>.

At any rate, we can see from this that there may very well be many existences that we know nothing about, and which we *could* perceive if we happened to be in the right place at the right time, but which for us are just "possible beings," because we have no evidence one way or the other (i.e. they aren't in fact acting on anything that is

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<sup>43</sup>This sort of thing is what is apt to happen if you start with the "perception" and aren't very, very careful. We know that we "perceive" the perception, and so it's apt to be taken to be the *object* of our consciousness, rather than *the form under which* we are conscious (generally, of something else). True, we are conscious of our perceptions or imaginings, because the act is self-transparent; but in perceptions, the form of consciousness is simply the *way in which we perceive* the external being, not a something *which* we perceive, arguing to the being as its cause or "object." True, I *did* construct an argument proving that there had to be an existence "out there," but that is not the way we actually do it ourselves; we simply see the object, and see it in this way.

Put it this way: we *know by the analysis above* that we have to be seeing some existence, because the percept itself is unintelligible without it; but the percept *recognizes itself* as a *reaction*, and so obviously immediately "talks about" the existence which caused it.

The point here, however, is that if you take the *perception* as the object, then you have poisoned the well, and you get into silly positions such as Bishop Berkeley's, where the existence not only depends on but is identical with the perception itself. But then what do you do with imaginary "images." *They* would have to "exist" in the same sense that the page you are looking at exists.

<sup>44</sup>If God can be said to "know" (and, as we will see later, he can), then this has to be only his knowledge of his own activity as cause (of whatever effect), and it can't be by being affected in any way by the existence which he knows. Hence, if God knows in any way at all, it is not analogous in any way to "perceiving," which is passive.

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acting on us, though there is no contradiction in supposing that some acts that haven't done so so far could act on us directly or indirectly).

There may also be existences (acts) that we have no senses to perceive, and which we have devised no instruments as yet to perceive. No one knew about the acts called "radio waves" until instruments that could receive them were built; and if those instruments had never been built, we would never have known that there *were* such acts. But the sun has been emitting radio radiation for millions of years, and it was doing so long before any human being or anything else was *aware* of its doing so. And who is to say that there aren't a host of other acts that we don't have any way of reacting to *because we don't have a reacting instrument*, and which will be forever unknown because the proper instruments for detecting them will never happen to be devised? We can't exclude this possibility.

Hence, we know that existence goes beyond just the world of our immediate experience, and even the world of our direct and indirect experience of the moment; and there is no reason for saying that there are not "more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy." Existence in all probability is wider than (a), the cause of my perception; (b), (a) + all the conditions for my perceptions; (c), (a) + (b) + the causes and conditions for all my past, present, and future perceptions.

Now if we look at these similar cases of finite consciousness and their cause as finite existence, recognizing that existence is the cause of the finiteness of the consciousness in each case, and existence is the cause of finite existence, we find that "finite existence" is actually just the most general way to formulate the problem of finiteness; since *any* case of finiteness *must* be a special version of finite existence. That is, finite consciousness is the case of the finiteness of



the existence called “consciousness”; finite heat (temperature) would be a case of the finiteness of the existence called heat, and so on. As “special,” these cases of finite existence can have as their causes other finite existences; but *as* finite existences, only God can be their cause.

This allows us to say several things about God. First of all,

**Conclusion 26: God is pure activity.**

Say “doing” in the broadest possible sense, and without any qualification whatever (i.e. in no sense “doing this,” but just plain “doing”) and you have said what God is.

So Thomas Aquinas was right when he called God “pure act.” And I think he meant “activity” in this broad sense of “doing,” not some kind of inert sense of “perfection,” because I think he interpreted Aristotle’s notion of “activity” (*energeia*) correctly; and if you want to know why I think Aristotle’s notion was “activity” and not “actuality,” see my book on the subject. I won’t bore you with it here. (“Perfection” was a [bad] translation of Aristotle’s *entelecheia*.)

**Conclusion 27: God is not the only cause of any finite existence.**

The reason for saying this is, of course, that different effects have different causes, and God is *only* the cause of *the fact that* a given existence is less than what it is to exist. The fact, for instance, that the form of consciousness you are having now (which *is* a finite existence) is that of seeing this page and not listening to a concerto is a different problem from the problem of finite existence as such; and *its* cause is the finite existence (the essence) which is the page; the fact that you *began* to exist when you did is a different problem from the fact that the act of beginning was a finite act; and the “beginning as such” was caused by the sexual activity of your parents,

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not God; the beginning *as a finite act* was caused by God, as was the sexual activity *as a finite act*, but the sexual activity *as sexual activity* was caused by the love and desire and choice of each partner—by their combined mental state and physical condition.

Remember, we argued to the existence called God on the basis of the fact that, because of the general way we were defining finite existence, *every finite existence was identical with every other and so could replace every other without changing the effect*. It is only *this* fact about the finiteness of anything that needs God as its cause, and every other fact about it that is unintelligible by itself needs a different cause. Effects are abstractions, in other words, and since there are different ways of focusing on an activity or set of activities such that something is left out of their intelligibility, the facts left out (as we have said so often) will be different in each case. And this is true even though the next conclusion is also true.

**Conclusion 28: God is one of the causes in absolutely everything that is real or happens.**

The reason for this, of course, is that everything but God is a finite existence, among other things; and *as* finite existence, it needs God for its intelligibility. Hence, God is the cause of everything (except himself, of course); but God is not the only cause of anything.

This means, of course, that God could *prevent* any act from occurring simply by withholding his causality from it; in which case, not having the conditions without which it is impossible, the act can't happen. To take a perhaps poor analogy, I can prevent my hand from moving by not choosing to move it. (The reason the analogy is poor is that *if* there is some external energy acting on it, it might move by that cause in spite of my choice; but supposing that it can't

move by itself and there is nothing else but my choice at the moment to move it, and I don't make the choice, then of course it can't move.) So with God; it is not that God would "keep" something from acting if he withheld his causality from it; it's just that, not being able to act "by itself," it simply wouldn't act without God's causality.

And this leads to the following:

**Conclusion 29: No finite act can act without God's *actively* causing it to do so.**

That is—and this is an important conclusion from our argument for God's existence—God does not simply "permit" things to happen, as if they could happen "by themselves" without his *doing* something to *make them active in this finite way*. This is complete nonsense. If a finite act could act "by itself" and all God could do to prevent it would be to "do something to block it," then there is no God. Why? Because that means a finite act can act without God, which means that as finite existence (activity) it is possible without God, which means that it can make sense without God, which means there is no evidence that there *is* such a thing as a God.

No, ladies and gentlemen, there is no such thing as the "permissive will of God," where he "allows" things to happen that he'd really rather see not happen, but he simply chooses (presumably for some "greater good") not to block them. Nothing can happen without God's *actively causing* it to happen as the finite act which it is; and hence, he must *positively will* it; and of course, it happens *exactly as he wills it to happen*, since nothing finite has the ability to affect God's act in any way, and how could any finite act in any sense "thwart his will"?

So the God we are talking about doesn't look like the God you

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were perhaps brought up to believe in. But if you believe that God would “rather not” have certain things happen but just “doesn’t do anything about it,” then you believe in a finite God—and you are wrong.

My, my, I have said “You are wrong.” How bigoted of me! You find me *evidence* that the God you believe in *actually exists*, and I will listen to you; I don’t care if the God that “wills good and only permits evil” is the one you “feel comfortable with.” *That* God is a contradiction in terms, unless you can disprove my argument by something else than not agreeing with the conclusion.

You see, when you do philosophy, you are bound by your evidence. Philosophy is not a game by which you find reasons to bolster the position you “feel comfortable with”; philosophy is an adventure precisely into the unknown, and you must follow where the path leads. If the truth were known before you tried to find it, what would be the point of the search?

So God causes me to sin. Yes. My sin, as a finite existence, *can’t* be caused by me, and *must* be caused by God’s act—*actively* caused by him to be the finite act which it is. But this will be partially explained by the next conclusion, and a rather more full treatment will be given in the next section in the chapter dealing with goodness and badness.

I might remark that I think that what I have just said is compatible with Christianity—obviously, since I am a Christian; it is just not compatible with what I consider certain naive *interpretations* of Christianity. I might also say that I think my view is implicit in what many Christian Theologians—St. Thomas among them—have held about God as being totally self-sufficient and immutable; though I think that they have drawn the wrong conclusion from the facts if they talk about God’s “permissive will” as if it implied that we’ve made a mess of what he “wanted” for the world he created.

At any rate, the following also must be true:

**Conclusion 30: God causes finite existences to exist as they actually exist, including their existence as effects of finite causes.**

A finite existence is what it is; and it is what it is in part because of the finite causes which made it to be what it is. Finite causes specify the *particular* essence which is the limitation (in this case) of the existence; and of course, the particular essence *is* the essence, which in turn is nothing but the existence as less than what it otherwise would be. But “essence as less than what it otherwise would be” is *precisely* what is caused by God; and if God is going to cause an “essenced existence,” he obviously has to cause *this* one.

In other words, even though existence as finite is an abstraction, the *reality referred to* by those terms is the concrete existence as less *in a definite way* than what it means to exist. Hence, an abstract *way of looking at* any definite existence is the fact that it is finite (and in that respect analogous to all other finite existences); but it itself, of course, is the concrete essence (“finitized existence,” if you will) which it is; and *this* is what God is the cause of—but not *insofar* as it is this particular one, but insofar as, as finite, it is the same as all others.

Put this another way: In any finite being (any essence) there is nothing “there” but existence; the limitation of the existence is not “something else” in any sense, but merely the fact that this existence leaves some existence outside itself. God accounts for how it can do this; but other causes enter into just *what* it is doing.

Hence, God causes the existence to be finite *in the way in which it is actually finite*; and it is actually finite *as really being the effect of its finite causes*. If God’s causality usurped the causality of the finite causes, then what exists-as-dependent-on-finite-things would in fact

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be independent of finite things, and this would be a contradiction in terms.

Leibniz, in recognizing God's universal causality, fell into this trap, and assumed that God "created" everything, but that everything was really only dependent on God, and totally independent of everything else. But that forced Leibniz to posit his "preestablished harmony," which made things act (coincidentally) together *as if* they were actually acting on each other, so that the page is actually radiating out light and you are perceiving at the same time, just as if the light were actually making you perceive what was on the page—while all the time you and it are totally independent of each other.

But if that is the case, of course, we have no reason for saying that there is a God at all, since we only got to God by knowing *first* that there were finite causes of our consciousness, which as causes were impossible unless there was the infinite existence. Now if we say that the infinite existence makes these finite causes not actually do anything, then the source of our evidence for saying that there is a God in the first place is a falsification, and the argument for his existence falls apart. Hence, there have to be finite causes.

Needless, perhaps, to say, one of the other traps Leibniz fell into with his "preestablished harmony" was that in having God pick out the "compossible monads," he had to assume that there *were*, somehow "possible beings," among which God could choose; and if I am right, this is just nonsense. Suffice it that I think that Leibniz's theory just doesn't work.

As to God's causing my sin, then (a) God causes my sin *as a finite act*; (b) *my choice as self-determining* specifies *what* that finite act is; but since what the finite act is is identical with the finite act, then God causes my sin to be this act *as dependent on the self-determination of my choice*, and hence I am responsible for it; and

God wills it to be what it is, with me responsible for what it is. It happens to be a self-frustrating act (and is recognized as such, as we will see, or it is not a sin but a mistake), and God *actively wills* that my choices *be what I want them to be* when I make them.

There is no question of “permitting the sin”; he actively wills it to be this act if this is the act I will; and so if I knowingly choose to frustrate myself, then God wills that I do so, and it doesn’t bother him if that’s what I want.<sup>45</sup> He lets me know (by his law) that that’s what I am doing; but if I want to do it, this is what he wants me to do—and causes me to do in such a way that *I* am the cause of the specification of the act.

If, then, you want to interpret God’s “permissive will” as being a “hypothetical will” with respect to human choices, I could go along with it: God *wills*, actively the act which *I* actively will; and so he wills me not to frustrate myself *if* I will not to do so<sup>46</sup>.

In other words, what this means is that if God wills that there be a self-determining act, then it would be contradictory for him to will this act to be other than what it determined itself to be; or in other words, if he wills a self-determining act, *he cannot have any “stake” in the outcome: whatever* act is self-determined has to be “all right” with him. He doesn’t *allow* us to frustrate ourselves or bring suffering on ourselves; he *helps* us do so if that is what we want to do with ourselves, because our *becoming what we choose to be* is what it means

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<sup>45</sup>I will get into the implications of this later, in the next section when I discuss goodness and badness.

<sup>46</sup>Of course, much of this would depend on what you mean by God’s “will”; but clearly if he is simple, his “will” *is absolutely identical* with his act of causing what he “wills.” All his “will” would mean is that he doesn’t *have* to cause this particular finite act—which must be true or he would be dependent on the finite act, and this would make him an effect of his own effect, which is absurd.

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for us to be ourselves as self-determining; and God wills us to be what we are—and to “will” or “prefer” anything else for us (like our “happiness” even if we didn’t want it) would be to want self-determining beings to be other than what they determined themselves to be—which is a contradiction.

This whole issue is clouded over by the sentimental notion we have of God as “sorrowing” over our sin and suffering because of it. It prevents us from seeing that the “sorrowing” God would actually be a God who regrets that we are free to do with ourselves what we want, and only reluctantly lets us set goals for ourselves.<sup>47</sup>

But as I say, more of this later, when we discuss goodness and badness. To resume,

**Conclusion 31: God cannot delegate his causality to any other being.**

The reason for this is that any other finite existence, whether it is “being caused” or not, *cannot* be the cause of the *fact that any other existence is finite*, because if that were the case, as we saw so often, it would be identical with the effect it was causing, and would be a case of finite existence which at the moment made sense by itself. But *no* finite existence makes sense by itself, and so it doesn’t have, and *can’t* have, “what it takes” to make sense out of the fact that any other finite existence is a finite existence. Nor can it be *given* this, because after it had been given it either (a) it would be infinite and

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<sup>47</sup>There is actually more to it than this for a believer, who (from revelation) is aware that God is good. As we will see, “goodness” is relative to a person’s subjectively set standards, and so has meaning only from the human point of view; and if God *is* good, this means that every human being will ultimately come to recognize that God is good; that is, that any harm the person has received is exactly what he asked for, and isn’t “God’s fault.”



no longer finite, or (b) it would be a finite existence which made sense by itself.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, the motion of my arm, which is a finite act, is caused *as* this motion now, by my choice to move my arm; but it's not caused *as a finite act* by my choice or by anything else about me, because my choice and everything else about me *is also a finite act*. So the movement of my arm, *as a finite act*, needs God to *be acting on it*, making it an existence-which-is-less-than-existence; even though it *also* needs my choice in order to be occurring now and in this particular *way* in which it is a finite act. So God's existence *and* my existence together explain the finite act of moving my arm; it wouldn't be what it is if either God or I didn't do what we did<sup>49</sup>.

—I told you we could resurrect medieval metaphysics (not that it was my intention to do so) from the tomb it was sealed in by Descartes' mistake of taking "truth" as "matching the perception with what is 'out there.'" The rock has been rolled away; but be careful: the resurrected body is not going to look the same as it did

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<sup>48</sup>On the supposition that God, in His "self-duplication-without-multiplication" implied in consciousness "duplicated" Himself in a finite way (e.g. as human), then that human (Jesus) would exist with the Infinite Existence, and would in fact be God, just as your "formed consciousness" is as it were a finite "duplication" of the "consciousness of the consciousness" which in a sense is beyond it (as it must be since it recognizes itself as greater than just this act, as we saw). In *that* sense, a "finite" being (which is one of the "duplications" of the infinite being) could cause the finiteness of other things. This is alternative a).

<sup>49</sup>Note that, since my choice as conscious contains itself within itself, it is self-determining—it "chooses itself," as we will see later; and *as* self-determining it is self-explanatory and "uncaused"; but *as* a finite (self-determining) act, it is caused by God. So God's causality over my act does *not* "take away" its freedom; God *causes* it to be free because he causes it to be what it is: self-determining. But we will discuss this more at length much later.

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before it was killed—I think I had better drop this metaphor before it gets too ridiculous.

At any rate, what I want to look at in the next chapter is precisely what all of this implies with respect to subjectivity, objectivity, and truth.

## Chapter 10

### An objection

**B**ut there is a very serious difficulty with this view that is not based on someone's disagreeing with the conclusions it comes to, but seems inherent in the view itself:

We argued to the fact that there are many finite existences by the fact that the differentiation of consciousness into many forms of consciousness could not be explained either by consciousness (the effect) nor the mind (the single cause of sameness of all the forms as "mine"); and therefore, there had to be existence. But if existence were absolutely the same, then the total cause (mind + existence) of any "formed consciousness" would be identical with the total cause of any other; and since identical causes have identical effects, this would mean that there would be only one case of "formed consciousness."

But these many existences, then, we saw, had each of them to be a finite case of existence; and we argued then that the cause of each of them had to be analogously existence, and hence had to be a non-finite existence.

But it was demanded by this solution that the non-finite existence, God, be absolutely simple existence, and *not* something differentiated into many somethings really distinct from each other.

But that certainly *seems* to mean that the cause of any finite existence is *identically the same* as the cause of any other one; and

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there would be no problem with that if the existence were *really* distinct from its essence: we could have God the cause of the existence (what they all have in common) and finite existences the cause of the essences-as-distinct.

But in *that* case, the argument we gave from “formed consciousness,” that the form *couldn't* be “separated” from the *particularity* or the “thisness” of the form—is false. Or alternatively, if the finiteness (the “formness”) of the “formed consciousness” is not different from the “thisness”—which means that any cause of “formness” is *also* the cause of the “thisness”—then this must apply to finite existence also.

That is, every finite existence *as* finite has the absolutely simple God as its cause. Presumably, *as* “this case” of finite existence, it has God + a finite existence as its cause. But if the “thisness” can't be separated from the “essenceness,” or even the existence, and if *everything else but God is a finite existence, how did the plurality of these finite existences come to exist in the first place?*

That is, it would seem that plurality of existences could be accounted for only by God + some finite existence; but that *supposes* that there would have to be God + *more than one* finite existence (because if there were just God and one other, then there could be only *one* “thisness”). But then if all of them owe their finiteness to God, how could they be?

There are actually two possible solutions: First of all, God was “never alone”; that is, God *could* have been the only existence (and of course, he *can* be now), in the sense that no finite existence is necessary for God's existence to be God's. But this situation is *purely possible*, and is not what actually obtains: it is eternally true that God + at least some finite existences exist.

As a Christian, I happen to believe that there are angels, who

never began to exist and are not in time, but exist eternally<sup>50</sup> (and whose finite existences as eternally finite are eternally caused by God). There is no contradiction here; God's causality does not make anything *begin* to exist; and so an eternal finite existence is not a contradiction, nor is an eternal finite existence as eternally dependent on God for its finiteness a contradiction.

This would solve the problem, though it would leave it very mysterious.

The other thing that could solve the problem is that, like the "differentiation" within my consciousness into "being conscious" and "being conscious of being conscious," which is *some* kind of a differentiation without being a *distinctness of parts* or a *separation into two connected acts*, so if there were a kind of differentiation like this in God (into, for example, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, each of whom is one and the same *reality* with the other, but is a different *person*, whatever that means<sup>51</sup>), then this differentiation would be enough to account for the plurality of finite existences. God would then be absolutely simple in the sense that his existence

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<sup>50</sup>I am using "eternity" here to refer to what St. Thomas calls "aeviternity": the "eternity" that belongs to creatures rather than God. But I differ from him on a few counts. First, he thinks that angels can change (accidentally), and I will prove a couple of sections from now that this is not possible. Secondly, however "long" the angels exist, they owe, of course, their existence to God. Here I agree with him, but I stress that eternity is not "a long, long time," but eternity is to time as colorlessness is to color; time-words simply do not apply to it, as we will see. Anyhow, I see no need for using two terms. The point is that it was and is never the case that God exists, and also that angels exist; but their existence depends on God's causing them to be the finite beings they are. They don't have to *begin* to exist to be finite, because the type of "infinity" which is implied in "eternally existing" is a different kind of infinity from the deficiency in being that any finite being has.

<sup>51</sup>We will see what it means much, much later.

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does not contain finite *parts*, but would not be absolutely simple in that his act “reduplicates itself” as “the cause of this finite act” and “the cause of that finite act” more or less as we actively *form* our imagining by “finitizing” our consciousness while it is (as consciousness of what it is doing) *actively beyond* the act which it spontaneously limits itself to be.

This, by the way, would allow for the possibility of God’s “finitizing” himself into a kind of finite expression of his infinite existence, and *actively* being beyond the “version” of himself that he limits himself to being—as when we recognize that when we choose, we choose to *limit our choice* to just this one of the alternatives (even when we could choose something greater).<sup>52</sup>

This also is extremely mysterious; but since there are two possibilities which would make a simple God the cause of the finiteness of any finite existence, and since I can’t see how any other alternative but having a God doesn’t leave the universe as we know it *positively self-contradictory*, I think we will have to say that the argument for the existence of God is not refuted by the difficulty in that God would seem to have to be a plurality if there have to be many finite existences to account for many finite forms of consciousness.

On, then, to the next section.

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<sup>52</sup>This is what I was referring to about Jesus in the previous note. When we talk much later about sense consciousness, I will show that there is an analogy between God’s incarnation as a man and what sense consciousness does with the energy of the brain. Note that I am not asserting in this philosophical investigation that Jesus the man *is* the infinite being in one of his “reduplications” of himself; only that there is no *contradiction* in this sort of thing, however paradoxical it may sound.

**Section 5**  
**Truth and Goodness**





## Chapter 1

### Subjectivity

**B**efore going into an exploration of the various modes of finite existence as cause of various similarities in forms of consciousness, I think it would be well to explore the relationship between finite consciousness and existence: that is, the being-affected of consciousness by existence (generally finite existence, of course, but also—at least indirectly—by God).

But I want to leave until much later what this means for the act itself and the person, and take it now only from the epistemological point of view; and, taking the two elements of the cause of finite consciousness, the mind and existence, show how we can “separate out” the mind’s contribution to the form of consciousness, allowing the consciousness to report the existence.

In other words, here is the place to deal with the question Galileo and Descartes raised and Kant saw perhaps most clearly: If our only contact with existence is by the form of consciousness, and this is “infected” with subjectivity because it is actually the *mind’s* act in response to the existence, how can we ever know the existence as it is in itself?

As I mentioned several sections ago, we must be able to do so, because otherwise we would think that the existence is as it appears; and we know that the sun on the horizon is not (as an existence) the color it seems to be; and we know that the oar is not really bent when it is seen as bent in the water.

#### 1: Subjectivity

Hence, we have an effect, not an impossibility; it must be possible to “bypass” the subjectivity which results from the mind’s contribution to the form of consciousness and leave only the contribution of the existence, and so know the existence objectively.

But first we must be clear about what we mean by “subjectivity” and “objectivity”; this is especially necessary because Kant “solved” the problem of “objective knowledge” by making the *mind* the source of *objectivity*, and denying that existence had anything, really, to do with it.

But Kant was plagued by the point of view of Descartes: that the “object” was the “little picture” in my consciousness; and what he argued was, basically, that the structure of my mind organized this “little picture” in various ways—and to him, the distinction of the “little picture” from the “organizer” is what made it into an “object,” and so the “picture” as organized by the *mind* was the source of the objectivity of knowledge. He called the “consciousness of being conscious” the “(I think)” that is contained in every act of consciousness.

But Kant saw something that logically he should not have admitted: that there is some “x” that is responsible for the “manifold” data that “the (I think)” organizes into what he called the “object.” The reason he shouldn’t logically have admitted that there is an “x” is that if you can’t get outside the “little picture” so that you don’t know what’s out there as it is in itself, how (as Fichte and Hegel said) can you know that there *is* anything “out there”—especially if “existence” is a *way my mind organizes the data into an “object,”* as he held.

But it’s not my purpose here, really, to critique Kant, though I will be making references to him as I develop my theory—since his analysis, though flawed, is really brilliant, and because of its brilliance is responsible for the epistemological mess I referred to in the first

chapter.

At any rate, to recall where we are now, we know that it is impossible to account for consciousness by just consciousness + the mind, because since imagining is as much a “little picture” as perceiving, both would then be “objects,” and we wouldn’t be able to distinguish the two kinds of experience.<sup>53</sup>

So the problem *for us* is whether all we have done is justified Kant’s “x” against people like Fichte and Hegel, or whether we can say anything *about* the “x” based solely on our subjective experience of it. And this brings us back to where we were when we brought Kant up: What makes our experience “subjective”?

In the ordinary sense, my experience is called “subjective” and not “objective” because (a) it’s different, insofar as it is “subjective,” from what is “out there,” and (b) I can’t even match my experience with yours to find out whether your experience is the same as mine. The first sense might be called “epistemological subjectivity,” and the second “social subjectivity.”

That is, if we all knew that we all saw things in exactly the same way, then for practical purposes this would probably be enough objectivity for most people; we could all agree together on what our impressions were. Of course, this would mean that the impressions were, so to speak “collectively subjective,” but *my* impression would be known to be “out there” at least in the sense of “out there in everybody else’s consciousness,” and so there would be a certain

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<sup>53</sup>I realize that Kant distinguished the two on the basis of the fact that imagining doesn’t behave “lawfully” the way perceiving does; but this doesn’t fit the facts of experience either, since there *are* laws of imagining, as esthetics shows; and as autism and schizophrenia reveal, the imaginary world can often be even more logical than the real world. But, as I say, it is not my purpose really to refute Kant, except in the sense of providing a simpler theory that explains all that he explains and some things that he can’t.

## 1: Subjectivity

“out-there-ness” about it. This, in fact, was what Kant’s theory led up to; the “little picture” was objective because of his assumption that “the (I think)” with its laws for organizing data was the same in each of us, resulting in the fact that each of us formed the same “little picture” from the same data.

But this runs into the difficulty that you have to know that there *are* other minds “out there” who are *in fact* of the same type as mine; and how can you do this if all there is is the “little picture”? If you deny that we can know anything “out there” as it is in itself, then we don’t know whether there are any other minds than our own, let alone whether they are really identical with ours. This is why the “problem of other minds” has been a pressing one in some philosophical circles.

In that case, “collective subjectivity” can’t be the solution to epistemological subjectivity; if we are closed into our own consciousness and our own mind, then collective subjectivity is not possible. And what that really means that subjectivity really deals with the fact that my consciousness (including my perception) is different from the existence which caused it or is its condition.

Now, based on Conclusion 25 in Chapter 3 (that any way of being conscious has as its cause existence and my mind), we can say the following:

**Conclusion 1: The mind is the cause of the subjectivity of all my forms of consciousness.**

Since the mind is what makes all of my consciousness the consciousness called “mine,” and cuts it off from anyone else’s stream of consciousness, and since the mind contributes to the form of consciousness, because the form of consciousness is a form of *my* consciousness as well as being this way of being conscious, then it is

obvious that it is because the mind enters into the causality of the form of consciousness that the form itself is mine and no one else's, and so is subjective.

And this allows us to take another step:

**Conclusion 2: The self is the subject of consciousness, and the mind is that by which the self is the subject of consciousness.**

The self, remember, is the causer of my consciousness as “mine,” or it is the concrete thing of which the mind is an abstract aspect; and since the mind makes my consciousness subjective, then obviously the subject of consciousness is the self.

The subject, then, is precisely *not* what Sartre thought it was, a “non-being” which “nothingizes” being into various objects. You might get this if you pushed Kant to his logical absurdity; and Sartre admits—glories in the fact—that his philosophy is absurd. The self is a *being*, because, as we saw, the mind as restricting consciousness to being just this stream is *existence*, and so the self is something that exists. Furthermore, the subject is what unifies consciousness, and it is the *unification* that makes the form of consciousness “for itself,” not the “cutting off”; the “cutting off” has to be done by a *different* existence from the mind.

Note also that, *pace* Sartre and Kant and practically every other analyzer of consciousness since Descartes, *the subject of consciousness (the self) is not totally identical with the mind*. The subject of consciousness is, if you will, *at least* a mind; but we have *no grounds for saying* that the subject of consciousness is *different from* the subject of other acts (like eating, moving, radiating out colors of light, and so on), which are also “mine.” That is, if the subject of consciousness were the mind, then the subject would be “in” some kind of machine called “the body I inhabit,” and its acts would not really be my acts,

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any more than the squeaks and rattles of my car are my acts just because I am inside it.

No, there is one subject of both my mental acts and my bodily acts; and that is myself. How there can be one something that is really one (and so must act as a unit) and simultaneously acts with many different acts (and so must be really multiple) is an effect which we will get to later; but we mustn't close off this possibility by a restrictive definition now<sup>54</sup>. In fact, what I am is a *body*, as we will see: a body one aspect of which is a mind (and the mind, as I have already mentioned, is in fact the brain, which is only one part of the body, and even of the body's nervous system); and the fact that logically we can't talk about bodies yet doesn't mean we should be Cartesians and make it impossible to do so by the way we define our terms.

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<sup>54</sup>In other words, we are tabling the issue of whether the self is a "substance" in any sense or not, which Descartes affirmed and Kant denied. All I am doing so far is leaving the issue open, because it is thought to be closed because of the mess Descartes made of "substance," and Locke's and Hume's and especially Kant's demolition of the whole original idea of "substance."

## Chapter 2

### The object of consciousness

But if acts of imagining, when not hallucinations, recognize themselves as spontaneous and not “about” anything, and if perceptions recognize themselves as reacting to existence—then our spontaneous notion that images are totally subjective, while perceptions have a certain objectivity about them, makes sense. Perceptions “report” something other than themselves: the finite existence which caused them.

This allows us to conclude to the following:

#### **Conclusion 3: Being is the object of consciousness.**

Once again we are dealing with the *causer* rather than the cause, because (for instance) when I look outside and see my dog, I say that my *dog* is the object that I see, and the *light pattern* is the *aspect* of my dog which allows me to see her. This aspect (color, or perhaps “shaped color”) is the “object” in the Scholastic sense of the “proper object” of my vision and what I call my “integrating function” (which gives me the patterned whole I am calling a “perception” here)—in the same abstract sense as the mind is the cause of the “myness” of my consciousness; but the object in the sense we normally use the term is like the self, the subject: it is the *thing which* or the body which we perceive by means of some set of acts by which

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it acts on one or more of our sense organs.

But then what does “being” really mean? It has three senses:

***Being*** is either (1) **God, the infinite existence;** (2) **a finite existence;** or (3) **some unified combination of finite existences.**

Being is, of course what exists, or the causer of a form of consciousness. The most usual sense of being (the sense in which it is *more than* just the cause of our consciousness and contains aspects that are not causing the form of consciousness) is the third sense; and in this sense, a being is some body. We never perceive or even know all there is to know about any body at all, not even our own; it acts in some ways “privately”; there is, as we will see, an internal activity which organizes its parts into the unit which it is, and which excludes any other being from belonging to it. Hence, a body is a being in the most proper sense of a *causer*.

But there is at least one case of the causer of our form of consciousness which is identical with its cause, because it must be identical with it, or there is one case of a being which is the same as existence; and this, of course, is God. God is the being which is the causer of the form of consciousness I have when I have concluded to the fact that there must be an infinite existence: at that point, I recognize that (because God is the *condition* for *other* forms of consciousness—as caused by finite existence) God must exist; and *that* act of consciousness is accounted for by God. That is, at the point of drawing the conclusion and recognizing that it is valid, I now eliminate all the intermediate causes in the causal chain and recognize the dependence of the conclusion on the existence of God—just as when I see my dog, I ignore the causal chain of the light as transmitted to my eyes and then the nerve impulses going to my brain, and I talk about the dog as the cause of my perception.

## 2: The object of consciousness



In any case, the being which causes my knowledge of God as existing is, of course, the infinite existence. And since I know that that being has to be absolutely simple and be nothing but existence, then god *is* a being, and yet God is also just existence. The only reason God “contains more” than I know about him is, as I said, that I know him indirectly, not that there is any more about him than just existence.

Finally, whether we can ever know a single finite act that is not organized somehow into a system or a body is problematical; so whether the second meaning of “being” actually refers to anything is not clear. If there are such things as angels, as we will see, they would have to be individual finite acts, and as nothing but spiritual acts they would be simple and couldn’t be bodies; so if there are angels, then presumably they would be beings who are nothing but a single finite act.

But that exhausts all the possibilities for being as causer, and therefore as object, of consciousness.

## 2: The object of consciousness

### Chapter 3

#### The epistemological problem

Now then, we are not actually in the dismal position of being able only to verify that Kant's "x" is actually "out there," without being able to say anything at all other than that. In the preceding section we saw (in Conclusion 1) that there are many different existences, and that the "x" cannot be just a single blob; and we also saw (in Conclusion 10) that repetitions of perceptions imply the same existence.

This means that we can in fact say things about the existences beyond merely talking about some "x" which is totally unknowable; and we can say these things based on what necessarily must be true about existence based on the fact that otherwise our form of consciousness is impossible. How *much* we can say is another story, of course; and the rest of this book is going to list some of the things we can say—and if you look at how many pages face you, you can see that it is quite a bit; and this book only scratches the surface.

But let me set up the problem in such a way that just what the issue is can be seen. Let us say that I am looking at my dog lying down out in the back yard. The molecules of her fur react to the light falling on it by having their electrons get excited and return to their "ground state" (this is really the color), radiating out light; this light comes from my dog, hits my eyes, gets translated into nerve-impulses, which then reach my brain, lifting certain nerves

#### 3: The epistemological problem

there above the threshold of consciousness; and the effect is the form of consciousness I have of seeing the dog.

If we take the dog as something sending a message and the perception of the dog as receiving the message, we can see what the difficulty is. The dog might then be compared with someone over in France, sending a message over the radio using a telegraph key. The clicks of the key then correspond to the molecules of the dog's fur, which absorb light and radiate out certain wave lengths. The actual color (the way the dog's fur absorbs and radiates out light) would correspond to the actual message sent by the sender. Let us say that it is "*Allons, enfants de la Patrie*," and so on. Now the first thing to note about the message is that it has got *translated* into a bunch of dots and dashes, and the key clicks don't sound at all like what the man would be saying if you heard him. Similarly, what the fur is *doing* responding to the light isn't what it's doing as a dog, or what it's doing as fur either; the dog which I perceive is "translated" into a set of electrons returning to their ground-state.

The radio radiation across the ocean corresponds to the light being transmitted between the dog and me. Note that the sound of the key clicks is not sound any more, any more than the resonance of the molecules (the color-as-such) is the light frequency. A second translation has occurred.

Then let us say that the message gets picked up by a receiving set in the United States. This is then translated further by a computer which is programmed to receive Morse code, and the electrical impulses generated by this computer are sent to a printer, which then prints letters to form the message received. Note that we don't know whether the original message was actually in Morse code; and in any case, the receiving instrument never hears any clicks; there is a very complex transformation here, leading to electrical impulses to the printer.

### 3: The epistemological problem

Similarly, the light reaching my eyes doesn't get translated "back" into molecules returning to their ground-state: my eyes don't become tan; but a whole new transformation occurs involving the chemicals in the cones on my retina, resulting in nerve-impulses going to the brain, where finally the self-transparent perception occurs (to keep the analogy at this point, we will have to say that the "message received" and the "reading of the message received" are the same, because the consciousness is one and the same act as the consciousness of the consciousness). At any rate, the message *as received*, is, say, "*Fourscore and seven years ago*" and so on.

"Wait now," you say. "How are you so sure that the act of consciousness didn't actually translate it back to a copy of the essence? How are you so sure that 'Allons, enfants' wasn't what was received?"

Well, when I go outside and see the light of the sun and feel its heat, I perceive these with two different *kinds* of forms of consciousness, whereas if science is right, the heat is just "redder" light; it is the same kind of thing and just a different wave length. Now you can say that science is wrong, of course; but (a) there is no reason why the perception would be able to "translate back" and re-perform the act that is the existence because precisely it has no way of getting "out there" and finding out what it should do; (b) it certainly *seems* as if "seeing a tan color" is not the same as "doing tan color" (if it were, then why do I *see* the sun as red and not white at sunset, when it's still actually white?); and (c) on the basis of what do you deny the evidence of the spectrometers, which certainly seem to be reacting to the same sort of energy?

No, it's just wishful thinking to hope that the conscious act "reproduces" the original act. I set the situation up just this way to show how forlorn a hope this actually is. This was actually Aristotle's solution to the epistemological problem; his idea was that the mind

### 3: The epistemological problem

was a kind of “universal doer,” and when it was acted on by some outside activity, it reproduced the act “without the matter”; that is, a body “becomes colored” when light hits it, because it responds to the light by acting; but as a body, it can act only in one way. The mind doesn’t actually become colored when acted on by the light from the body, because, not being a body, it doesn’t actually *change into* something; but as a “universal actor,” it reproduces the *act* while remaining the “universal actor”; and so it only in a sense “becomes” the object. But the point is that the *act* of the color (the form of the existence) and the *act* of seeing it (the form of consciousness) are for Aristotle the same form of activity—or in Aristotelian terms, the same activity, since the “form” *is* the activity itself.

This gets complicated by the fact that Aristotle sometimes is talking as if the “act” in question was the cause, and sometimes (to show that the two must be one and the same) he talks about the act as being the *causality*, which of course is the same as the being affected. But that would mean that what you meant by color is the actual *action on*—not the eyes but—the brain’s nerves by the nerve impulses; and this, of course, is the same as the reaction of those nerves (which at least in part is the conscious act as a reaction). But that would mean that the *color* of the dog is not what is in the dog, but what is going on in my *head*, and color is actually nervous energy<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup>Incidentally, the silly “philosophical” conundrum about whether the tree that falls crashing to the ground when no ears are around made a sound is based on this assumption that the “sound” is the causality *on the ear* of the air vibrations (the cause). But that isn’t what we mean by “sound,” because we say, “Did you hear that sound?” and the one who didn’t hear it still thinks that there was a sound that he didn’t hear. Further, I see my dog *as at a distance* from me (and as independent of me), not *as* acting on my eyes. So yes, the tree made a sound (made the air and ground vibrate), even if nothing heard it.

### 3: The epistemological problem

Aristotle didn't have the information we now have about nerves, and so he could hold, based on what he could observe, that changes in the blood occurred right there in the eyes (and *this* was what he thought was the physiological aspect of seeing), and the altered blood was then carried to the heart, where it was integrated with altered blood from other senses into the single perception. But we know now that the energy acting on the eyes is nothing like the energy that is transmitted from the retina to the brain, and so it simply makes no sense nowadays to adopt Aristotle's epistemology, even in terms of "causality."

Nor does the Scholastic "intentional identity with ontological diversity" save the basic Aristotelian approach—except by defining *the fact that* there is *some* solution to the problem as *what the solution is*, and thus ignoring the problem altogether.

That is, the idea of "intentional identity" is that, even though the two *acts* are different, still *for purposes of knowledge or representation* they are the same; this seems to be what "intentional" deals with.

But what could that mean? It means that "Fourscore and seven years ago" is *for representational purposes* the same as "Allons, enfants de la Patrie." Now *somehow or other*, there has to be *some* truth in this; but (a) what on earth does it *mean*; and (b) *how* do they get to be "the same" if they are so very different?

### 3: The epistemological problem

## Chapter 4

### The solution

Actually, the solution is pretty simple, once you see it. If we now suppose our Frenchman sends another message—say, “*Les sanglots longs des violons de l’automne,*” and so on, then this will be translated into—note—a different pattern of clicks, which will then be translated into a different pattern of radio waves, which will then get translated by the receiver into a different set of ASCII codes, which the printer will print out into something like, “Whose woods these are I think I know.” Once again the message sent is entirely different from the message received; but if the reader now reads the *two* messages received, he will conclude what we did when we looked at the many forms of consciousness: “Since my receiver is the same both times, then *different messages must have been sent.*”

Similarly, when I look beside my dog at the grass, and my consciousness responds with a *different type of visual consciousness*, I know that what it is about the dog that affects my eyes (that particular existence) has to be different from what it is about the grass that affects my eyes.

This is even more evident than in the case of the messages above *because I am looking at both the dog and the grass with the same eyes at the same time*; they are both within my field of vision. But if different effects have different causes (and they do; this was Theorem IV of

#### 4: The solution

Section 2, remember), then my eyes and my mind *can't* account for the difference, and so the difference *has* to be due to the fact that the grass is different in the act by which it affects my eyes from the act by which the dog affects my eyes (see how handy the term “act” is?).

If we take another step, we can see our way to the key to the solution. If we assume that our Frenchman now sends, “Allons, enfants” over again, then, supposing once again the same set of apparatuses, the message received will again be “Fourscore and seven.” And this, of course, is what we were driving at when we said that repetitions of the same form of consciousness imply the same existence.

But this is a little broader than we stated originally. If I look at the grass and then I look up at the trees, and then look at emeralds, and if I look at traffic lights, I get the same visual reaction every time—or at least very similar ones, and ones vastly different from the visual reactions of looking at my dog or the sand or camel’s hair coats, or varnished pine boards—which are also similar among themselves as visual reactions.

Then what this *must* mean is that grass, trees, my monitor, emeralds, and traffic lights *act* somehow *similarly to each other and differently from the dog*; while the dog, the sand, the coat, and the wood act similarly to *themselves* and differently from the grass.

We have begun to classify, in other words. Differences in the form of consciousness imply differences in the existences; similarities in the forms of consciousness imply analogies among the existences: the existences *have* to be somehow similar if the forms of consciousness are similar.

And this allows us to interpret what is meant by “intentional identity”: If a person keeps getting the message, “Fourscore and seven” among a whole series of other messages, then he knows that, *whatever the message was that was sent*, the same one is being sent

#### 4: The solution



whenever “Fourscore” is received; and so he could now *take* “Fourscore” as “standing for” whatever it is that caused it, and “intending” that, or “referring to it,” especially since it is a message *received* and not one he typed on his own keyboard.

So even though there is a difference between the message received and the message sent, once one recognizes that (a) the message received *is* received (i.e. that you are perceiving and so reacting-to), and (b) that this particular message always is *the way a given* (unknown-in-itself) *message sent was received*, (i.e. this type of perception reacts to some definite act) then the message received can be understood as “pointing to” the unknown message sent as distinctive—without ever knowing what the message sent actually *was*.

And this solves the Kantian problem. We don’t know what the existence “out there” *is* in itself; what we know is *what other existences it is related to, and what the relationship is*, based on our conscious forms as effects of existences. We know what it is like, what it is beside, what it is the cause of, what it is the effect of, what it is unlike, etc., etc. In all cases, what is known is the *existence as related*, not the “thing in itself.”

But this is real knowledge—and it is objective. I may not know what “green” is *as such*; (i.e. I may not be able to reproduce the *act* green in my consciousness, as Aristotle thought I could); but I do know that whatever it is, it’s an act of grass, trees, and emeralds: I can recognize *the act* when I see it because I can (a) know that I am reacting to it, and (b) *distinguish* it from acts that cause different effects on me and (c) *liken* it to acts that cause the same effect.

Note that “intentional identity” is *not* “identity of informational content,” as if the message sent was sent from a different country, but the actual *messages* sent and received were the same. After all, the contents of the message is the informational content. No, the

#### 4: The solution

messages are totally different from each other. *There is no question of “matching” the perception with its cause; intentional identity simply means that a given perception points to a given (totally different from it) cause.*

And since we can never get “outside” our minds, we can never know what that cause *is*, in the sense in which we know what our conscious act is; we can only know that, whatever it is, it is the same as whatever affects us in the same way, and different from what affects us differently, and in general that *relations between the effects* will be the same *relations* as the relations between these unknown causes.

## Chapter 5

### Mistakes

“Well yes,” you say, “but how do you know that in all of these transformations of getting the message from France to your printer something didn’t go wrong, and because of some glitch in your program or some electrical storm out at sea, your printer prints out a different message when the one that was sent is the same—or vice versa?” You don’t.

How could you? You’re stuck here in the United States, and you can’t even look inside your computer and printer; all you can do is read messages. And in perception, you don’t know what is going on in your brain; your consciousness is just your consciousness. Hence, when I look out at the dog, it might be that differences in my eyes, differences in the lighting, differences in expectations—all sorts of differences—make the dog’s color appear different at different times, even if it’s the same color all the time.

And in fact this happens. In dim light, the *form of consciousness* I have of the dog is the same as that of a much darker brown in bright light. Painters know this; it is a rule of painting that “The lightest light color in the dark must be painted as darker than the darkest dark in the light” in order for the painting to “look right.” But clearly the color of the dog’s fur hasn’t changed, any more than the sun changes color at sunset.

Dip one hand in hot water and the other in ice water; then dip

#### 5: Mistakes

both of them in tepid water; it feels hot to the one that was in cold water and cold to the other one; but the water is the same temperature—and you *know* this, interestingly enough, though not through your hands at the moment.

This indicates two things: (1) that there is a whole causal chain between me and the existence I am interested in, generally; and anywhere along the chain things can happen that distort the information coming in in such a way that identical messages sent become different messages received, and different messages sent turn into similar messages received, and so on. (2) We can sometimes know this is happening and correct for these wrong impressions.

But before discussing this, let me point out that if we leave the place where we are at the moment and fall back on our years of experience in using our senses as receiving instruments, we find that they are quite consistent. For instance, the fact that the same color looks different under different lighting conditions is in practice compensated for by the fact that *all other colors* look different in parallel ways; so that you if you move from bright light to dim light, the *relationships between the color values* is more or less maintained, and dark green looks darker than light green. If you put on sunglasses, at first everything has a greenish tinge; but since the relationships between the colors remains more or less the same, then after a while your visual mechanism compensates for the greenish cast and erases it from your consciousness, and you see white as white again. This even works for those who put on glasses that make everything appear upside down; after a few days, they see everything as right side up through the glasses. The other senses also tend to adjust to different conditions so that the relationships between the acts can be noticed.

Nevertheless, we do get fooled. And we can correct ourselves if we notice some *effect* whose cause is a distortion making our

perception “point to” the wrong object. In the case of the water’s feeling hot and cold, the effect is that the water is seen as a single body of water, and our experience, confirmed by physics, indicates that water has a basically uniform temperature. Add this to the fact that one hand *was* hot and the other was cold, and feeling different temperatures with the different hands makes sense because of the condition of the hands, not the water.

The most common way to correct forms of consciousness that point the wrong way is to ask other people. It is reasonable to assume that they have perceiving mechanisms that are basically the same as ours; and if the relationships between *their* forms of consciousness do not match the relationships between *ours*, then either we are perceiving different objects, or one or both of us have got something wrong with the way we are perceiving. If large numbers of people have a different relationship among perceptions than I do, I tend to say that there is something wrong with me.

For instance, color-blind people learn that they are color-blind by noticing that other people seem to see the stop light and the go light as different, whereas the color-blind see them as the same. Since (a) most people see them as different, and (b) making them the same color would encourage traffic accidents, then the only reasonable hypothesis is that they really are different colors, and the people who see them as the same have faulty vision.

I referred to this checking by using other people earlier when I mentioned the psychological experiment where others deliberately lie to fool the subject. This, as now can be perhaps more clearly seen, is a deliberate falsification of evidence, destroying the main means we have of correcting faulty impressions.

But something important is implied here: *It is not necessary for other people’s perceptions to be the same as ours for us to use them to check on the objectivity of our relationships; it is enough for them to be*

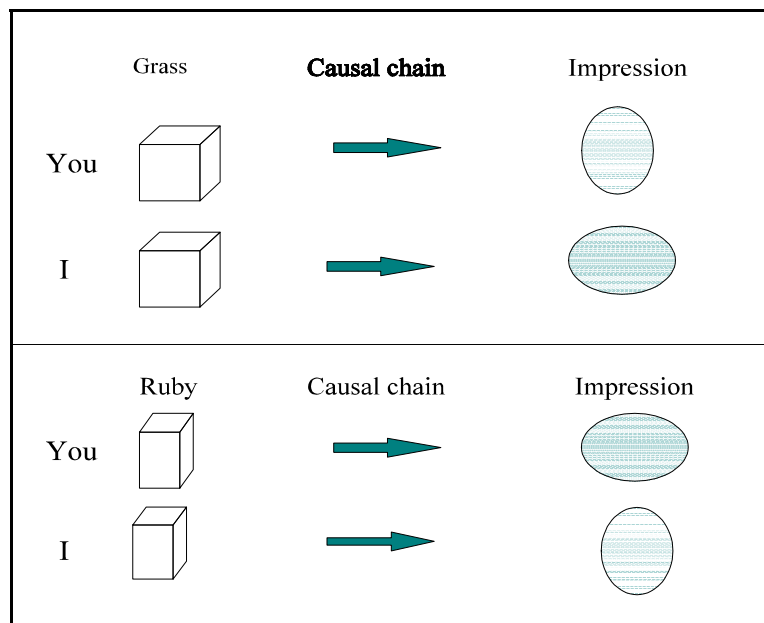
## 5: Mistakes

*consistent.*

What do I mean? Let us suppose a situation in which neither of us is color-blind (so that we see two different colors as the same), but our sensations are reversed, so that the subjective impression you have from grass, emeralds, etc. is the same as the impression I have of rubies, stop lights, etc., *and vice versa.*

This can get a little complicated, so let me draw a picture of what I mean: The shapes in the diagram, of course, represent the colors as transmitted and those as received.

The point of this is that the top picture will occur whether the source is grass, trees, emeralds, or anything else that is green; you will get the upper impression, and I will get the lower one; *and so your*



*impression will be the same for all these objects, and my impression will also be the same.* My impression will not be the same *as yours*, but every time you get the upper impression, I will get the lower one.

And in the bottom picture, every time a ruby, a stop light, or anything red occurs, you will get the upper impression (which happens to be the same as my impression in the top picture) and I will get the lower one; and so once again your reaction to red will be (a) different from your reaction to any other color, and (b) the same as any other reaction you have to red; and *exactly those two facts are also true of my reaction*, in spite of the fact that my reaction is different from yours.

Now in this situation, two things occur: First, it would be impossible for either of us to tell that the other was reacting differently; and secondly, the actual differences would be completely irrelevant, because what we mean by “green” is “whatever it is that grass, trees, emeralds, etc. have in common that affects my eyes.” And *this is identically the same meaning for both of us.* That is, we are *not* matching the perceptions with the energy “out there.” We are referring to *relations between* the energies “out there” based on *relations* between the reactions “in here.” And since, even though the *reactions themselves* would be different in your case and mine, the *relations between them* in your case would be the same as the relations between my reactions *and* the relations between the energies, then we don’t need to bother about whether the way I see green is the same as the way you see green.

This can be confusing, so let me try to state it briefly. Suppose you and I don’t see things in the same way (your subjective reactions are different), but in both cases the reactions are consistent among themselves (though not between you and me; what I am saying is that whenever the same act occurs, you see it as the same, and whenever there is a difference, you see the two as different; and this

## 5: Mistakes

is true for me also, even though *my subjective impressions* are *in fact* different from yours.

It would follow from this that the *relationship* between your subjective impressions (e.g. sameness) would be the same relation as the one between my (different) subjective impressions. If you see grass as the same as emeralds and I see them as the same, this *same relation* will obtain in both cases, even though your reactions are in fact different from mine.

Of course, because we have basically the same visual apparatus, it is extremely unlikely that the way you see green is very different from the way I see green; but the point is that whether or not there is any difference, or whether it is great or small, is irrelevant *as long as our receiving instruments are consistent with themselves*. That is all we need in order to achieve knowledge about the relations between the causes of our impressions.

In other words, once we recognize that it is *relationships* that are what is being “matched,” the nature of what is being done means that we need no guarantee of “social” or “collective subjectivity” to establish objectivity; even though it is a fair bet that this kind of social subjectivity actually obtains.

But to resume our inquiry about mistakes, if we check on ourselves by asking other people—who, as I said, have basically the same receiving mechanisms—there might still be some fault in *all* our receiving instruments that we couldn’t catch, precisely for this reason.

For instance, we feel heat and see light; but since we have different receiving instruments for this, is the difference due to different *kinds* of acts acting on our eyes and hands respectively, or to the fact that we have different receivers? Asking others can’t answer this question, because they have the same problem.

But we find that instruments that react to light (spectrometers)



register a certain number when pointed at what we react to as green, and another number when pointed at what we react to as red. But they register other *numbers* when pointed at what we react to as heat, and at what our radios seem to be reacting to and we can't react to at all.

Presumably, because spectrometers are simple instruments, they are reacting to the same basic kind of activity; and so in all probability light and (radiant) heat are the same kind of activity, and we perceive them as different because we have different receiving mechanisms. Presumably, our eyes can react only to one *part* of the "electromagnetic spectrum," and our tactile nerves to another part, while the spectrometer can react to the whole range of acts of that type.

This is why scientific instruments are helpful, really. Not because they measure, and the quantity is such an "objective" something-or-other; but because, not being human, then relationships between their reactions can offer us a check on whether the *humanness* of our receiving instruments are entering into the relationships among our forms of perception and making us think that there are relationships between the existences that aren't actually "out there."

In any case, it is the *relationships* "out there" which are objectively known about the existences, not the existences themselves; and I have shown how we can have relationships "in here" which should be but aren't the same as the corresponding relations "out there" between the beings that caused them, and how at least sometimes we can discover these faults and correct them.

## 5: Mistakes

## Chapter 6

### Facts

Now since we tend to think that what we know that is objective about objects is “what the facts are” about them, we now can see that these facts must be relationships. Therefore, let us define the term technically:

**A *fact* is existences as related.**

This fact may occur *within* a single object, if the object is a being which has many existences (acts in many ways) and there is some relationship between the ways in which it acts (as, for example, *the fact that* its different acts are different). It also happens that the fact is a relationship between this object and other objects, as *the fact that* all green objects are the same in the existence that affects our eyes (though they may be different in other respects).

That something exists is also a fact, because we can only *know* of the existence of something when it is directly or indirectly causing some perception, in which case our *asserting* existence of it is based on this relation, which of course is a fact. The existence *itself* is not a fact (i.e. as it is in itself); it is simply existence; but it can only be *known* through the fact of its exerting causality on some mind (and of course it can only be known *by me* by exerting causality on *my* mind).

I know my consciousness when I am conscious; but I know *the fact that* I am conscious when I *distinguish* my consciousness from my unconscious states; I am immediately aware of the form of my consciousness, but I know *the fact that* my consciousness has this form when I *relate* it to other forms of my consciousness.

Hence, we can say the following:

**Conclusion 4: What we know objectively is not the object, but facts about the object.**

We react to objects, but this reaction is subjective; when we grasp how the object is related to some other object or object-class, or how it is related to our knowing it, or how its acts are related internally, we are understanding *facts about* it, and these facts are known to be “out there,” and objective.

Another couple of definitions:

***Understanding* is the act of consciousness by which we know the relationships among our perceptions or images and, if they are perceptions, therefore among the objects that caused them.**

The *concept* is the relation *as* understood.

We can understand relationships among or within imaginary images, but these relationships can't be said to be facts. For instance, it is not a *fact* that unicorns have curly manes, or that unicorns are like centaurs except for their heads and hooves; it is not a *fact* that Hamlet was neurotic or that Iago was thoroughly evil. We can have *concepts* about the curliness of the mane or the evil of Iago, but we don't understand these concepts as *facts*, but simply concepts.

There is, of course, a certain “pseudo-factuality” about these par-

## 6: Facts

ticular examples, based on their “collective subjectivity,” meaning that pictures of unicorns have been drawn (and the pictures are objects, of course), and *Hamlet* and *Othello* are plays with characters in them that speak definite lines (and the text of the play and its performances are objects). But in that sense, the fact is that “the unicorn as drawn” has a curly mane; and “Hamlet as the text describes him” is neurotic—if *in fact* the text describes him that way. But the Hamlet that Shakespeare describes is really nothing at all, and so there can’t be facts about *him*.

Whether understanding is an act of the mind which is distinct from perceiving or imagining, or what, is something that we will leave until much later; what we are interested in here is solely the relation between our consciousness and its objective knowledge (i.e. *the fact that* this or that aspect of it is “objective knowledge”); and it is our knowledge of relationships that is objective.

But since, as I just said, understanding can be totally internal, dealing with imagining and not perceiving, we perhaps had better be more precise and use another term for our *factual* understanding:

***The judgment is the act of understanding as understanding a fact.***

That is, understanding that the dog you are imagining has black fur is not a *judgment*, because this isn’t a fact; it could just as easily have white fur if you wanted it to. Hence, understanding must recognize (a) that the basis of your understanding is a *perception*, and so “points to” some object, and (b) that the *relationship* between the perception and whatever else it is connected to *is also a fact about the object*.

In other words, the concept becomes a judgment when it is recognized as (at the moment) *both* “in here” and “out there.” Thus, there are no *judgments* about the dog you are imagining, but you

can form *concepts* about it; but you recognize that the concept of the dog's fur *can't* be a fact, because it is not externally caused.

And this is the fallacy we saw in the "ontological argument" of St. Anselm a while back, dealing with God's existence. You can't establish the *factuality* of God's existence by constructing a *concept* of God from the basis of imagining; and when you do this, you *know* that the concept cannot be a judgment, and remains just a concept. A concept can only turn into a judgment by having a perceptual base (i.e. by having its internal data be a direct or indirect effect of existence). This is where the fallacy of "passing from the logical to the ontological order" lies.

Hence, when you understand that my dog has tan fur, the basis of your judgment is either that you have seen her yourself, or that you are *perceiving* what I write as *the expression of my judgment about her*, which you take as (a) based on my perception, and (b) not mistaken or deliberately misleading (i.e. that I know what I am talking about and am not lying). Hence, you know that it is a fact that my dog has tan fur, even in the second case, because you have *evidence* (testimony) that it is a fact.

We now come to something quite mysterious. There is no *act* connecting grass, emeralds, trees, etc.; it is just that each of them happens to be green. When the leaves turn red in autumn, this makes absolutely no difference to emeralds at all, or to the relationship of sameness among all green objects; it is just that the leaves on the trees no longer belong to the class, because they aren't doing what they used to be doing.

And this allows us to say the following:

**Conclusion 5: Facts do not exist as such.**

Now there are, in fact, real connections among objects, such as

**6: Facts**

the gravitational attraction the sun exerts on the planets, keeping them in orbit; and when you express this real connection as a fact, of course you have an instance of a fact which is *also* an existence. Any case of being-affected would be an existence which is also a fact (though the corresponding causality, as we saw, is a fact but not an existence because the cause is not different because it is exerting causality).

The point is that even with being-affected the reality of the relation is incidental and irrelevant to its factuality; and all relations except being-affected are facts but not existences.

But what can this mean? Basically it means that, because of the partial subjectivity of our perceptions, we cannot “intuit” existence, as they say; we can’t know it as it is in itself, and so we have to perform that device of comparing effects to find out how the causes are related.

Hence, *what* we know, in the sense of the *object* of our knowledge, is *being*; but what we know in the sense of the *contents* of our objective knowledge doesn’t exist as such, but is simply *facts about* the being, which “in itself” remains outside our knowledge and unknown as it is in itself.

Heidegger would make (and did make, in his own way) much of this. Being forever hides itself from us; we can never know it as it is in itself (except for the being of our own conscious act—and is not this, in the last analysis, the *dasein* of Heidegger’s *dasein*?). But in hiding itself from us, it discloses itself—unconceals itself—to us through what is *not* itself (the fact) but which *points to* itself and is true about itself.

Truth, to be a bit proleptic, is not being, but it is *about* being. The “truth” about something is the facts about it. In one sense, those facts are “there,” because grass *does* do the same sort of act as emeralds, whether I know this or not; but in another sense, the facts

aren't "out there" at all; because there's no *act* which is the "sameness" between grass and emeralds. So it is true that grass is the same as emeralds, in the sense that it is a fact that grass is the same as emeralds. But the truth itself is not a *reality*, it is just a fact.

## Chapter 7

### Truth

**B**ut that sense in which “the truth” means “the facts” is really a secondary sense of truth. Generally speaking, when a person would say “That’s true,” he’s either referring to a *judgment*, or a *statement*, the expression in language of a judgment. In the former case, “That’s true” always means the same thing as “I am not mistaken” or “You are not mistaken”; in the latter case, it can also mean, “You are not mistaken and you are not lying.” So truth refers to *the fact as understood to be a fact*, or perhaps as *expressed as a fact*.

Some more definitions are in order, then,

*A judgment is true* when the **fact as understood is actually the fact**.  
*A judgment is mistaken or in error* when **the fact as understood differs from the actual fact**.

So perceptions are not true or mistaken; they just are what they are. Not even all acts of understanding are true or mistaken; you can’t make a mistake about the unicorn you are imagining.

Notice this latter. There are two senses involved here. In the first sense, you can’t “make a mistake,” because there is no unicorn to be mistaken about; it can be whatever you want it to be, and so you don’t have to “conform your judgment” to anything at all.

But also, you can’t make a mistake about the unicorn you are



imagining; in the sense that you can't *think* that you are imagining it with a curly mane when *in fact* you are imagining it with a straight mane. Why? Because the act of imagining *is one and the same as the unicorn and as your knowledge of the act of imagining*. Hence, it is *impossible* for you to be imagining one way and be conscious-of-imagining a different way; this would imply that the "imagining" was actually unconscious, like some object, and was "made" conscious by the "being conscious of being conscious." But the imagining is conscious, and so *is* the consciousness of itself; and so *it is absolutely known by itself*. Hence, it is impossible to make any mistake about it.

But how about those people who think that imagining and being conscious of imagining are two acts; aren't they making a mistake? This involves a third sense, and here, yes, they can make a mistake (and are in fact mistaken) because this is a fact *about* the act as an act, and not exactly the awareness of the act itself. That is, the act *is* conscious of itself; but whether this is immediate and direct or mediate and indirect is something that one can at least reason about. One can say, "It certainly *seems* that I am aware of my awareness; but this sounds impossible, and so I must be indirectly aware of it." Thus, because the direct awareness of one's own awareness is so different from anything else, and when it is examined seems to defy the laws of physics, people can regard this as an effect and argue to a cause which is a mediate awareness (and in that argument, which involves indirection, they make a mistake). But in this third sense, they are taking the act as an object, and looking at the facts about it. We will do this much later ourselves.

In any case,

**Conclusion 6: In the truth-relation, the judgment must agree with what the fact is, not the other way round.**

7: Truth

That is, your mind is a receiving-set for information given off by objects; it is your job to “tune the mind in” to the right frequency, and the energy given off by objects has no “responsibility” to be what you judge it to be. So, my dog’s fur is tan; and if for some reason I see it as brown (i.e. as the same as earth or walnut wood), then *I* am the one who made the mistake, not my dog or the light or whatever. The mistake disappears *when I correct my judgment*, not by the facts adjusting themselves to my preconceptions.

The position of relativism, which we saw in the first chapter, basically thinks of truth as totally inside consciousness, which is assumed either not to “point to” anything outside it, or not to be able to know anything that it is “pointing to.” Hence, truth is at present regarded as “internal consistency.”

But of course that position *has* to be a mistake, because it asserts that this is what truth *in fact is*, and that those who think that truth deals with “matching” are *mistaken*. If you read what Hume and Dewey and the rest say about the “conformity” theory of truth, you can see that they are not saying, “Well, that position is not internally consistent,” they are saying, “That is *wrong*.” Then clearly those who hold that position (the “matching” theory) are taken by them to be objectively mistaken, because truth for them is only internal consistency. But, as I pointed out, this position contradicts itself.

But now we can see how we can get round the difficulty that led these people to that absurd position. Truth does not consist in the “matching” of the perception with the object, but in the “matching” of the *relationships between* perceptions with the *relationships between* objects (the facts); and it is the job of understanding to see to it that the relationship “in here” *is* the same relationship as the one “out there”; and when it assures itself that they are the same, then the judgment is confident of its truth. And that this is what truth is confirmed by those who deny it, when their denial entails that those

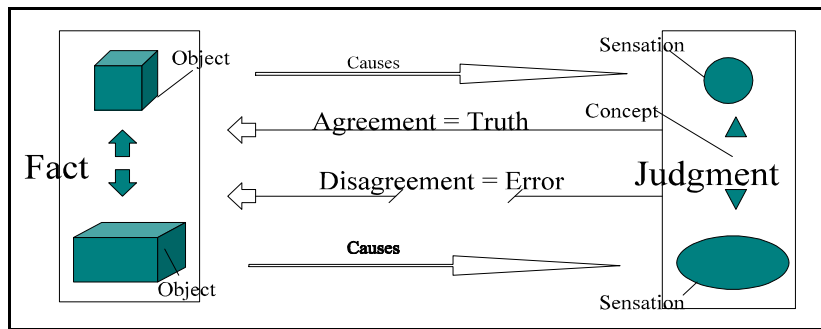
who disagree with them are mistaken.

Let me make another diagram to clarify this truth relation:

Let me now look again briefly at James's criterion of truth that I mentioned in the first section in Chapter 10 on opinions: "what works." I said there that it could be used as a negative criterion, but wasn't much good positively.

That is, if concepts "fit together," (which is basically what he meant by "works"), then all you know is internal consistency; but this doesn't tell you whether your concepts are perception-based or image-based. This is the flaw in all "internal consistency" theories of truth.

On the other hand, if the concepts *don't* "fit together," and if as



facts they would contradict each other, then either (a) there is some effect here, and there is a cause that makes them consistent, or (b) you're making a mistake.

For example, the internal consistency theory of truth itself doesn't fit with the proponents thinking that they've hit on the right definition—because if that one is right, then all it means (on that

## 7: Truth

theory) is that it's consistent with the rest of *their* theory, not that *anyone else's* theory is not as good a one. So there has to be a mistake in it somewhere.

I have also been using James's criterion as a way of finding out whether terms mean anything as defined in certain ways. Very often, I have showed that a term defined in a certain way makes it "point to" exactly the same thing as its opposite, in which case there must be something wrong with defining it in that way. For instance, you will recall that I said that if existence didn't mean the same thing as "activity" in general, then an *inactive* existence could not in practice be distinguished from nothing at all—in which case, why say that this inactive thing exists?

But James tried to use his "pragmatic" criterion as a definition of truth; and on his own criterion, it doesn't work. The "matching" is the one that does; but it's not a case of matching perceptions, but of matching concepts with facts (i.e. of judgments, because this is precisely what the judgment as such is).

One of the problems any theory of truth faces is how we can be mistaken, how we can know that we are, and how we can correct mistakes. We have already taken care of that. Other theories of truth are apt to make error a kind of moral fault; Descartes, for instance, clearly held this—and was (presumably sincerely and quite morally) mistaken. His idea was that you take an "idea" (a perception) that isn't "clear and distinct" as if it were clear and distinct, and therefore assert it as real when it isn't. But this can't be a really honest mistake for Descartes, because clarity and distinctness are part of what I called the "consciousness of being conscious," and of course you can't really be fooled about the act itself. Hence, error for him (and many like him) is really a kind of moral evil.

But obviously, this can't be the case, or Descartes would have seen the lack of clarity in his concept of a "clear and distinct idea"

itself. No, it must be possible sincerely and honestly to be mistaken, without having the least inkling that you are. Who knows? Maybe my own theory is totally on the wrong track—and maybe you see where the error is, or maybe you don't see anything wrong with it and both of us are wrong. It has happened before, God knows.

But at least I can show (a) why it would be natural for people to be mistaken fairly often, (b) why there are some facts we *can't* be mistaken about (those immediately evident from our consciousness of our consciousness), and (c) how we can at least sometimes recognize errors and set ourselves straight. How you do this *in practice*, in a given concrete situation, is another difficulty; and there things depend on what kind of factual knowledge you are talking about: correcting errors in physics involves one strategy; correcting errors in a law court involves another; correcting errors in art something totally different.

As long as I have mentioned art, let me say a word or two about aesthetic judgments that I mentioned in passing in the Section 2 in Chapter 7 on analogy, while distinguishing analogy from metaphor—and which I will devote a section to much later. Basically, what aesthetics does is use the emotions as “receivers”; and since the emotions are the consciousness of the “program” in the brain, which connects the information coming in (the existence) with behavior (based on the state of the body), then a given emotion is partially due to the state of the body, but also partially due to the existence in question.

Hence, emotions are not totally subjective, though they have more of a subjective element to them than perceptions (they vary depending on bodily needs in ways in which the sense organs don't); but there are ways, based on relationships, of assuring oneself that the subjectivity is circumvented, in which case the emotion would “point” only to the existence as the cause of this “component” of it.

## 7: Truth

Relationships between emotions thus restricted would then be the same as the relations between the existences that caused them; and thus we would have a new “receiving instrument” by which we could learn facts about objects. For instance, a sunny field *is* the same *in fact* as a smiling face, because *it in fact* makes a (normal) person *react emotionally* in the same way as being smiled at does. (And since most of us are normally in a normal emotional condition, we understand what is meant by the phrase “the smiling meadow.”)

But of course, if there are aesthetic facts, there can be mistaken aesthetic judgments, where the internal relationship of the emotions caused (in part) by the objects is not the same as the relation between the objects, but is due to something in the body of the “emoter.” For instance, saints are not *in fact* what they are pictured to be in those sentimental statues seen in many churches; the way one feels at seeing them is obviously not the way they made people feel when in the flesh, any more than Uriah Heep is a good expression of what humility really is.

In any case, I am not trying at the moment to be an art critic, but just to mention that if my theory is true, (a) it is not surprising to find that there is such a thing as art, (b) it is even less surprising to find that artists think they are “making statements,” (c) that these statements can’t be translated into *perception*-based statements, and yet are regarded by artists as nevertheless “true,” and (d) that artists regard certain esthetic expressions as “prostitution of art” or false.

But before we go on to look at the same truth-relation from the opposite direction, let me draw another conclusion:

**Conclusion 7: Truth is basically objective, but it involves the subject; this involvement, however, does not make it in any way partially subjective.**

The reason truth is basically objective is, of course, that in any case of truth, the fact is the standard to which the judgment must conform, or there is a mistake and no truth. But the fact, though it doesn't exist as such, nevertheless is "embedded" in the objects, which are as they are independently of what the judgment about them is. Hence, what truth basically is belongs to the object, or is objective.

But of course, since truth involves a relation between the relation between the objects (the fact) and the relation in consciousness (which, of course, as within a subject, can be called "subjective"), then there is this subjective pole to the truth-relation itself, or there is no truth, but just the naked (unknown) fact. But the reason this subjective pole is not a subjective "element" in the truth making it "partially subjective" is that when there is truth, the relation "inside" *is identically the same relation* as the "outside" one; or there is no truth, but a mistake.

Hence, the "outside" relation totally controls the truth, and so the truth, though it *involves* a mind, is *objective* and not "infected" with subjectivity at all.

All I am saying here, really, is that a fact is a fact, but a *known* fact can't be a fact *known* without someone's knowing it. But it is still the same *fact* whether it is known (and there is truth in the judgment) or not.

## 7: Truth

## Chapter 8

### Aspects

Now a further analysis of understanding reveals that any relationship involves (a) the objects related, (b) the relationship itself, and (c) the *aspect* of the objects *by which* they are related with this relation.

Thus, in the grass and the emerald, those are the objects; the relationship is similarity; and the *aspect* is the existence by which they affect my eyes: the “greenness” of each of them. This aspect is merely the object *as* related to the other one; or it is the finiteness of the existence *insofar* as this finiteness is similar, different, cause of, effect of, beside, or whatever the other object.

One thing that must be stressed here is that the aspect is *not* a “part” of the object. As a matter of fact, the aspect is really no more real than the relationship itself is; greenness is no more a “separate” existence of grass than “sameness” is a characteristic of it. There is only one existence to the grass, really—we know it as one being—and it only “separates” itself into various aspects (green, small, shiny, soft, etc.) *insofar* as we see how it is related to other objects. The aspects are the “how.”

That aspects are not realities can be seen from the aspect of uniqueness that all unique things have in common (making them all the same as unique). Now it is a fact that all unique things are unique; but what “unique” means is “having nothing in common



with anything else.” Obviously the aspect of having nothing in common with anything else cannot be “something” that these objects have in common.

No, the aspect, like the fact, is due to the indirect way we have of knowing existences, by being affected by them in various ways. When we compare the effects, we see that the (in themselves unknown) causes have to be related in the same way as the effects are; and since the relation needs a “hook,” as it were, to attach itself to the object, this “hook” is the aspect.

Any concept includes *both* the relationship itself (the “connection,” be it similarity, difference, causality, or whatever) and the aspect in each of the objects. Neither of these is known “first” and then the other “afterwards”; they are understood *in each other*. If you had to know the aspect first, how could you pick it out unless you knew what it was connecting to, and what kind of connection you were looking at; but how could you know the connection without knowing what was connected and what in each object was the way each was connected with the other? The objects, the aspects, and the relationship must all be understood *together* in order for the relationship to be understood at all.

We will examine this in considerably more detail later as we investigate the act of consciousness as an existence (in discussing the modes of life). I mention it now, however, because it does enter into epistemology, and it must be understood correctly (insofar as it can be) before in the next chapter we start talking about aspects of being.

Perhaps I can be a bit clearer if I try to relate this to Plato’s epistemology. In my view, the aspect of greenness is not exactly “in” the grass; it is really *the fact that the grass as existence is analogous to the existence which is the emerald*; that is, it is the grass *insofar* as it is similar to emeralds.

And what that amounts to is that it is a *mode of finiteness* of the

## 8: Aspects

existence which I call “grass”; it is only *one* of the modes of the finiteness of this existence (that it is vegetable is another, that it is small a third); but there is only (in some sense), the one existence there.

What I am getting at here is that the “greenness” cannot be *separated* from the existence of the grass; and yet it is not exactly identical with the existence, because “greenness” is “in” other existences also—“in” emeralds and go lights, and so on. And it is discovered *through* the relation *between* these objects, and is known as independent of the objects it is “in”; because they can stop being green and other objects can become green.

Plato, however, misinterpreted this “hook” that the object has for the particular relationship as being *a reality* in its own right. And his notion that the aspect was the reality of the object (and not the other way round) was reinforced by the equation of “truth” with “reality” at the time; and of course it is *true* that the grass *is* (i.e. exists as) green.

That sounds as if you are saying that the existence of the grass is the aspect “greenness”; which is true, in a sense—in the sense that in the concrete, the essence *is* the existence, because it is the existence *as* finite.

But Plato stood this on its head. He assumed that the *essence* was the reality, and the existence “partook” of it. Because “greenness” as such wasn’t tied down to any definite object (I can, after all, “reawaken” any number of green images), and because the aspect was *understood* and not *perceived* (and *as* understood it is precisely not changing and individual and so on), then he took this as the “real reality,” and the individual object (which changed and did all sorts of vulgar things like that, even to going out of existence) was not “really real,” and was “infected with” non-reality.

Now of course, individual objects *are*, as finite, “infected” with

non-existence; and in this Plato was right. But what he did was mistake the *finiteness* for the existence and make it a more “noble” existence than the individual one, because it was understood by the mind, while the other one was just perceived by the (changing) senses.

Hence, he made the aspects into a kind of invisible, spiritual world of their own, and talked about the “participation” of individual bodies in them. Aristotle made a similar mistake with matter, when he considered the aspect an act of the matter, limiting the (otherwise unlimited) matter to being a “this.” But what Aristotle was referring to by “matter” was just abstract *limitation*, which as such, of course is not limited to being any particular limitation; and the form of existence (the aspect) doesn’t really limit *it*, *it* is the (quantitative) limitation of a given type of existence.

But that just goes to show how easy it is to fall into the trap Plato fell into; because Aristotle saw through the mistake Plato made, and said that instead of “seeing” the Aspects (with a capital A) by the mind, as if they were something distinct from the objects, we “abstracted” (“pulled out”) the aspects from the objects by comparing them and finding out what they had in common—which was how their *acts* were similar. This is basically my position, although I think mine is a little more refined, and doesn’t involve any real “pulling” of anything “out.” It is just that the relationship is recognized as “hooking into” each object in a definite way, and so the object *insofar as it is* related becomes the aspect.

But more of this, as I say, when we look at understanding as an act. What I want to do now is notice that the truth-relation itself can be looked at another way.

## 8: Aspects

## Chapter 9

### Ideals

**W**e come now to a very controversial part of Blairianism. Why is it that the judgment has to be brought into agreement with the facts? Things can change, and so why can't I bring the facts into agreement with my judgment of them? That is, if you have not yet finished reading this book, it is a mistake to think of yourself as having finished; but you don't have to give up and quit reading and say, "I was mistaken; I haven't come to the end"; you can go on and *come* to the end and thus make the judgment true by changing the *facts*.

This is a trivial example, perhaps, but whenever we set a goal for ourselves, what are we doing? We are making an *imagination-based* act of understanding (because as a goal it obviously isn't derived from the way things now are), and expecting that the *facts will conform to it*.

And this has to be true of any ideal we conceive. An ideal *can't* be learned from the facts, because as ideal any actual object necessarily will fall short of it; it is stripped, somehow, of all the shortcomings of the actual objects that cause our knowledge. Hence, it must be got from within.

And of course, that means that stored perceptions are recombined; and as we recombine them, we chop off the "messy" bits and leave only those aspects which we for some reason find

desirable; and we add on any nice things from information about other objects which were stored. Thus, if I consider my ideal for my physical self, I would remove the lines and wrinkles that have formed, and resurrect what I looked like at age 25 or so; I would shave a little off the width of my nose, and I would definitely borrow the height and musculature of some athletes I have seen—and so on and so on. I have something of an idea of what I would look like; and it would be recognizable as George Blair, but just barely.

Now what is the difference between an ideal and just an exercise of creative imagination? If I were to imagine what I would look like as a humpback, I could reconstruct an image like that; but I wouldn't call it an *ideal*, because I wouldn't want it to have any relation to what I factually would be.

Hence *an ideal* is a mental construct against which *the facts* are judged.

*Evaluation* is the judgment of whether the facts conform to the ideal or not.

In other words, evaluation is *the opposite* of the judgment of *understanding*, where the concept must conform to the facts; in evaluation, the facts must conform to the *understanding*—of what they “ought” to be.

Since in this case the understanding is the standard to which the facts must conform, the ideal becomes “more real than real,” because the facts will generally fall short of it.

Previous philosophers who have held a realist epistemology have all thought that these ideals were somehow either themselves real or derived from reality. It was not until Kant, in fact, who dared to “build” the “real world” from within that ideals were thought to be constructed by the mind. He thought that the generic “unifying drive” he called “reason” *created* these ideals (what in all cases except

## 9: Ideals

one he called “ideas”) of the “total unification of experience” to keep us uniting more and more of our experience into larger wholes; and reason fooled us into thinking that these impossible ideals “really existed” or we’d see what it was up to and just give up. Unfortunately, precisely because they were ideals and mental constructs, you got into various self-contradictory positions if you tried to prove either that they really existed or that they couldn’t exist.

But before Kant, Plato and Plotinus thought that the ideals actually existed as Aspects “seen” by the mind in their purity, while the visible objects only partially shared in them. I tried to show how this was a mistake. Christians who followed Plotinus tended to hold that the ideals were “in God’s mind,” somehow; *he* knows me “as I really should be,” and because of my many sins, I fall short of his idea of me.

Unfortunately, if this is God’s idea of the “real” George Blair, then—since I never existed this way and never will—the “real” George Blair is not real, and God’s idea of me is *mistaken*. That saint that I am not has nothing to do with the *real* George Blair; it is a pure possibility that in principle *could* have been realized, but wasn’t.

And of course if God can’t be affected by me, and if he is absolutely simple, then his idea of me as identical with his existence *is* his act as causing me to exist; in which case, his idea of the “real true” George Blair is the one which exists. But that is the non-saint. So his idea of the “real George Blair” must necessarily be the one that exists, because *nothing*, as we saw, can prevent him from doing just exactly what he wants.

And this allows us to draw the following conclusion:

**Conclusion 8: God has no ideals.**

What he knows as the “real true” world is and must be *exactly the world which exists*, with all its flaws from our point of view. He is absolutely satisfied with absolutely everything that happens, because he *actively causes* it to happen, and nothing can prevent him from doing just exactly what he wants.

Other realist philosophers, like Aristotle, who didn’t think the ideals as such existed in some kind of Platonic world divorced from the material world, nevertheless thought that ideals were “abstracted” from objects by leaving out the limitations and defects of the individual objects and leaving the “pure, simple essence.”

Thus, for instance, humanity eliminates the problems of height, various lacks of talent, and so on; so that if it is human to be able to play the piano and some people can’t, then the ability is there in “humanity as abstracted,” while it may or may not be in some given individual. And since no individual has *all* the “human” traits (since males lack some human traits that only females have, and vice versa), abstract humanity *surpasses* the “limitations due to matter,” and is an “objective ideal,” and is the “true essence of the human *as human*,” and so is a goal to shoot for.

But it is known that this abstraction can’t actually exist, and so in what sense is it an ideal? Take an analogous case: heat as such obviously abstracts from any given temperature, and therefore “surpasses” any temperature. But what does this mean? Heat as such is *hotter* than any definite temperature? Nonsense. It simply means that *any* temperature is heat, not that “heat as such” *goes beyond* every temperature.

Actually, what “heat as such” means is *how the causes of our heat-feeling-sensations are analogous*, and is the *finiteness* of the existences in question, as related in *this* way rather than *as* different from each other in how they affect our skin. But the heat can’t be separated from the existence, nor can it be separated from the

## 9: Ideals

temperature; this is just an *aspect* which is a mode of its finiteness, and is not something “really real” about the heat at all. As an aspect and a finiteness of some existence *it is precisely a nothing*, not a “something.”

There is really no such thing as the “real true essence” of something “abstracted” from that object; essences are just the *existence as finite*, and *how* I understand the existence as finite depends on *how I relate the effects it has in my consciousness, and so discover what other existences it is analogous to*.

But if I take the “ways in which existences are similar,” say as something *in itself*, I am like Plato taking the finiteness *itself* to be a “more real” reality than the existence (the finite existence, the object); and I am misinterpreting the *way I understand* reality as if it were *the reality I understand*.

That is, these aspects, we saw are as such not due to existence but to the indirect way we have of understanding existence, through its effects on our consciousness; and so to make of them the “real true essences” of things is to make the *essenceness* of the essence (the limitation, how existence “leaves off” some of itself in this case) the “true” reality and the actual, individual essence only “somewhat” real. But in my epistemology this is totally absurd.

Hence, the ideals are *constructed*, not discovered. Insofar as we get them by seeing what is “out there” and ignoring inconvenient facts about it, they have *some* basis in reality; but this basis can be very, very tenuous, because nothing is to prevent you from creating some view of humans, say, as having wings and tails, and then saying, “What a shame we’re so limited!” And I must say, from listening to some people’s view of the way the world ought to be, there’s not much about it that they could have “abstracted” this ideal from. Look at Marx’s “classless society,” if you want an example.



## Chapter 10

### Goodness

Very well, then, let us assume that we are correct, and we use our imagination to create ideals, and then in evaluative judgments compare the facts to the ideals we have created. It turns out that we don't speak of "truth" and "mistakes" in this context, because of course the facts are what they are, and if they don't meet our expectations, they're still what they are—but there's something "wrong" with them.

**Conclusion 9: The notion that something "ought" to be a certain way always comes from comparing the facts to an ideal.**

A mental construct (like my imagining myself as a humpback) that is not involved in an evaluative judgment has no "ought" connected with it; it's just different from the way things really are. It is only when we take this mental construct and *use it as a standard to which the facts are to conform* that the "ought" emerges.

This has to be the case. If things aren't what they "ought" to be, we obviously couldn't derive what they "ought" to be from what they are, and so we must get it from somewhere else. But where? From knowing what God thinks they "should" be? But that would be an ideal in God, and if it's in God, then it actually exists. From abstracting the "true essence"? But, as we saw, this means mistaking

10: Goodness

the limitation for the existence. Then where? *From making up an ideal.*

Hence,

**Conclusion 10: Since ideals are subjective, “ought” always has a subjective, not an objective, basis.**

Sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but the way things “ought” to be is *made up by each of you*, and is *not* something that is objectively true, any more than humans with wings and tails are objectively true; and if someone thinks that we “ought” to have wings and tails, he is no “more subjective” than someone who thinks that we all “ought” not to have to work for any individual, or someone who thinks we “ought” to live in a pollution-free environment, or whatever. *All* of these are subjective; *none* of them are the way things “really ought” to be. There is *no objective meaning to “This is the way things really ought to be.”*

I told you this was a controversial part of Blairianism. Here I am a realist in my epistemology; and the most important part of the world—the way it ought to exist—doesn’t have any objective reality to it at all. But that’s where the evidence leads. So be it.

We can see what this entails if we make a couple more definitions:

**An object or fact is *good* when in fact it conforms to my ideal of what it ought to be. An object or fact is *bad* or has something wrong with it when it disagrees with my ideal of what it ought to be.**

That is, evaluative judgments don’t give you “truth” and “mistakes,” as to judgments of understanding; they give you “goodness” and “badness”; and whereas in judgments of understanding it is the *judgment* that is true or mistaken, conversely

(as you would expect) in evaluative judgments, it is the *fact or object* that is good or bad.

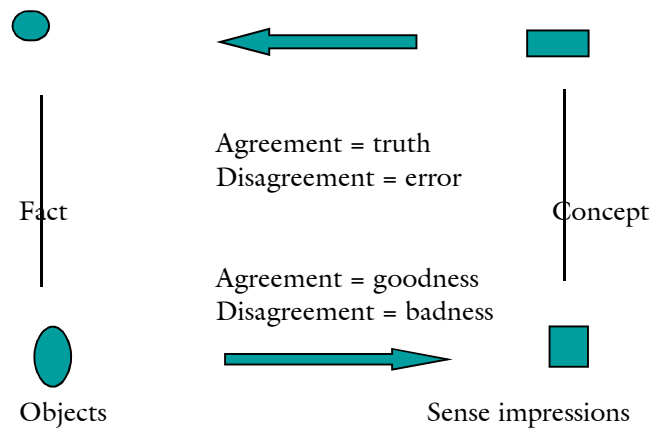
There are several things to notice here. First of all, what is called “good” or “bad” can be *either* a fact or the object that the fact “hooks onto”; thus, when we hear that someone is dying of cancer, we say, “That’s bad,” meaning that the *fact* is not what we think ought to be true of him, not that *he* is bad. We would, however, say that something is wrong *with him*, meaning that he has this unfortunate aspect of having a cancer. On the other hand, in referring to cancer itself, we might say that “Cancer is really bad,” meaning that *it* as an object (a disease) is something that is the opposite of what we think ought to *exist*.

But actually, this second sense of “badness” that refers to objects, where they are looked on as “defective things,” comes from the *fact* of their existence; we think that *that fact* is the “bad” one. We may not, by the way, think that they ought not to exist at all; it may be just that we think that they ought not to exist *in that way*; a “bad” computer that keeps giving disk errors is not something that you think should be thrown away, necessarily; you just think it should be fixed. In this case, it is the *fact of how it is finite* (that it exists with the particular kind of finiteness it “has”) that is the fact that is the “bad” one. Hence, even the goodness and badness of objects is really the goodness and badness of a fact about the object.

The second thing to notice about goodness and badness is that bad facts or objects are just mistakes looked at in reverse: they don’t agree with your concept of them. In the case of the mistake, you say, “Oh, I thought the dog was trained, but it seems he wasn’t”; in the case of the evaluative judgment, you say, “That’s a bad dog.”

Let me give you a diagram that will illustrate how goodness relates to truth:

## 10: Goodness



Thirdly, since the ideal used as the standard for the object to conform to is subjectively created, then the basis of goodness and badness is subjective, not objective. Hence, we can draw the following conclusion:

**Conclusion 11: Goodness and badness are basically subjective, even though they refer to objects; the “goodness” itself (or the “badness”) is not something objective about the object at all.**

That is, the goodness in a good object is simply *the fact that it matches your preconceived ideal for it*, and isn't any kind of a “property” or “quality” it has; it is not even its existence. Its existence, to be sure, *causes* you to *know* it as it is; but this has nothing to do with the fact that it conforms to your expectations for it. It is what it is whether you expect it to be that way or not.

And since God has no ideals, we can say this:

**Conclusion 12: For God nothing is either good or bad.**

The reason for this is that God does not have “expectations” for things that things “ought” to conform to but might not; what God knows (if he knows, and he does), he knows *absolutely as it exists*, because his knowledge of it *is identical with his act causing it to exist as it exists*.

Hence, if you *want* to use “good” and “bad” with God, then, since his “idea” of something *creates* it, and the object cannot be different from his knowledge of what it is, everything is “good” for God and absolutely cannot be “bad.” But of course in that case, since for God anything’s “being bad” is absolutely out of the question, then “being good” doesn’t mean anything for him beyond simply “being.” God doesn’t think in terms of good and bad; an object simply *is* for God.

Hence,

**Conclusion 13: Goodness and badness only occur from a human point of view.**

It is because of our peculiar way of knowing things, by comparing the effects of them on our consciousness, and by our being able to store perceptions and recombine the stored perceptions into images that don’t exist that we can create forms of consciousness that aren’t directly caused by objects, and which therefore can be used as ideals against which to evaluate objects.

As far as I know, I am the first philosopher—and almost certainly the first realist philosopher—to hold that goodness is subjective. Every other one, from Plato on, has held that goodness is “out

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there,” either (as in the case of Plato and his followers) as an Aspect which exists in itself, or (as with Aristotle) as an aspect *of* the object which can be “abstracted” from it.

One of the difficulties with either of these positions is that, though everybody can agree on what “green” is, and even on what “human,” by and large, is (we can recognize humans and distinguish them from horses or apes), people don’t seem to be able to agree on what “good” is. What one person calls “good” can be the exact opposite of what another calls “good”; and one and the same object can be recognized by two different people as good and bad—and defended hotly by each side. Is an unspoiled forest, untouched by human beings good or bad? If loggers come in and trim the trees and cultivate it, are they improving it or wrecking it?

And yet, each person is convinced that he knows whether something is good or not; and this has led people like G. E. Moore to say that “good” must be an undefinable quality like “yellow” that you can’t describe in words, but you recognize when you see. The problem with Moore’s view is that, no matter how true what he says is, it’s still the case that what people “recognize when they see it” is manifestly not the same thing, while they agree on what the term “yellow” *refers to*, even though they can’t define it in words.

And of course, my view accounts for both of these difficulties. Everybody can recognize when the object agrees with his preconceived expectations for it; but since the expectations are different for different people, then what each person “recognizes” in the object is different from what the others “recognize.” Notice that goodness is recognized as *in the object*, as a *kind* of aspect of it, or fact about it; but the fact about it is the peculiar one that *in fact it does conform to my preconceived notion*.

It is this factuality that has caused the confusion; the goodness *is* in the object; but *what* its goodness is is its relation of conformity to

what is subjective. This is why anyone can recognize it when he sees it, and can say that objectively the object is good or bad; *but* why the goodness or badness is different for different people, because the relation is to different ideals.

Of course, the purely subjective idea of goodness, where it has absolutely nothing to do with what is “out there,” is invariably the result of a relativist or idealist epistemology, where truth is as subjective as goodness is.

The connection of what is good with *the end* of a process (one of the things that figures heavily in Aristotle) can’t be discussed fully until we investigate changes and processes. But I have to say a few words here, because it looks like a good candidate for something which will refute my position.

The idea of a change, where something is “headed somewhere,” involves the fact that the object in question is *now* unstable, or in (in some sense) a self-contradictory condition, which can only make sense in some future condition. Thus a growing child gives evidence that he can’t exist in his immature condition, and must exist as the adult he is “headed toward”; and so somehow the “end” is there in him “potentially,” as Aristotle would say.

What he is headed *toward*, then, *does not exist*, and (because of the instability of his present condition) *ought* to exist. Hence, the end *is* “the good.” Since everything that changes must necessarily be unstable in order to become different, then it follows from this way of looking at it that *everything that is changing is headed toward its good*, or the good is the end; and this would be a sense of “good” that is “out there” in the object itself and would contradict my view.

That is, the end of a change does not depend on what *I* expect the change to end in; the adult the child will become can turn out to be very different from the person’s expectations. And of course in science, you have to *discover* from similar instabilities and how they

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have *in fact* turned out where a given instability is headed before you can predict the end. The end is something “out there,” and is not the result of expectations at all. So the instability creates an “objective ought,” because of its self-contradictoriness which objectively is removed by end toward which it is headed. Hence, if this end is “the good” (what “ought” to exist), then goodness in *this* sense would seem to be objective, not subjective.

But consider. If the end is *good*, and the end is objective and doesn’t depend on what we would like to exist, or even what we expect will exist, then it follows that the results of *any* process will have to be *objectively better* than the initial state.

But then what do you do with reversible processes? Take water and put electrodes into it and pass a current through it. This sets up an instability in it *whose end is a separation into hydrogen and oxygen gases*. If the end is an objective good, then we can say that the separate hydrogen and oxygen is *better* than the water. But then, of course, if you mix the hydrogen and oxygen and pass a spark through *it*, you get water again—which now means that *water is better than what was better than the mixture of hydrogen and oxygen*.

Now of course, you could say that being hydrogen and oxygen is “better” than being *unstable* water; and being stable water is better than being unstable hydrogen and oxygen; and so the end isn’t better than the condition *before* the instability, it’s better than the *unstable* condition, because it’s the unstable condition that’s the objective contradiction (the effect whose “final cause” is the end, or which has the “objective ought” connected with it).

There is no question about this “objective necessity” of getting to the end; the question is whether this necessity should be *called* an “ought” in the *evaluative* sense, so that the end deserves to be called *good* and forms an objective basis for *evaluative judgments*.

And it doesn’t seem that this will work. Even if you make the



move that the “ought” doesn’t occur in the state before the instability but in the instability itself, you find that many instabilities lead right back to the condition the object was in *before* it got to be unstable: the reaction to the light falling on the grass and making the molecules super-energetic is the “getting rid” of the excess energy and returning to their “ground state,” and so the end is the *beginning*. And when you get to living bodies, this tendency to remain the same and return to the previous condition is even more marked. Most of the injuries we receive (making us unstable) are repaired by our bodies; and so it is clear that (a) our bodies don’t “want” to be unstable, and (b) when they become unstable, they “want” just to get rid of the instability and return to their original condition.

That is, living bodies, when *certain* instabilities are set up in them and certain processes begin, *set up reverse processes that have the exact opposite goal*. Viruses trigger antibodies; diseases trigger fevers whose purpose is to kill the disease. If the end is what is good, why does the body itself seem to regard the end as *bad* and try to get back to the initial state (because that’s the purpose of the antibodies and the fever, after all)?

In other words, if the end of the instability is “the good,” why do we fight the virus that makes us unstable in such a way that we will die? Why do we eat to avoid the weakness and eventual death that come from the instability due to having too little internal energy? Since our bodies as alive are at every moment existing at so high an energy level that we are unstable physically and chemically, why don’t we rejoice in this tendency toward death and decay as our “good”?

Further, if a child gets a crippling disease, then the end of *this* instability is, of course, the crippled adult—and this is *better* than even a non-crippled child? It is *better objectively* that we die of AIDS or cancer or whatever than that we live forever? It is *better* that we

## 10: Goodness

gradually lose our powers as we get older and decay by degrees than that we keep going “from strength to strength,” as the psalmist says? If the “end” is always “the good,” then obviously *nothing* can be called “bad” except not being at the end yet; *everything* you turn into is better than before.

There is obviously something very peculiar in saying that the end of a process is by definition what is *good for the body that is in that process*. This would automatically mean that there are no *destructive* processes; and yet many of them in fact make the body cease to exist. How can it be “objectively better” *for this body* not to exist as this body than to exist as this body?

The more you examine trying to call the end “the good,” the more you see that, however plausible it looks at first, there is no way you can make sense out of using the term “good” to refer to *the objective end of a process* or unstable condition. As reversible processes show, if you call the end “good,” you can’t mean that the state *before* the instability was the “bad” one, or the reverse process contradicts itself. But if the instability itself is what is “bad” and *its* future state is what is “good” for the body, *then the body would never fight it*, and most bodies, even inanimate ones, *do* in fact fight a great number of instabilities—from the elastic restoration of a ball that’s deformed by hitting it to the elaborate mechanisms the living body uses to defend itself against all sorts of instabilities.

And so what those who would defend Aristotle are reduced to saying is that “good” is *just another term that means “the end of a process” and has no evaluative force at all*. That is, for a true Aristotelian, “better” means simply “not the same as,” and if a process is destructive of the body, this is better for it—not in the sense that the body is better off being destroyed, but simply in the sense that afterwards, there’s no body.

But nobody uses the terms “good” and “better” in that way. If

something is “good” and there is *no evaluation* connected with the meaning of “good,” then *what term are you going to use to evaluate the object?* That is, these people who call “the end” by definition “the good” have preempted the only term we have for evaluation and stripped it of all evaluative force, and left us no term to use for evaluating. And, of course, they have a perfectly good term, “the end,” which of itself *has* no evaluative force, which they can use and everybody will understand them; whereas if they use “the good” to replace it, everybody who isn’t in on the secret will think that they are *evaluating* the end as superior to what went before it.

What I am saying, then, is that if you are an Aristotelian, and say that the end is “the good,” you are either adding an evaluative tone to the end of every process or you aren’t. If you are, you are involved in all the contradictions involved in reversible processes and in fighting instabilities with counter-instabilities. If you aren’t, you are taking a term which you don’t need and using it in a sense *you* want to give it which is *not* the sense anyone else uses it in; because all the rest of us use “good” and “bad” for evaluation.

I rest my case.

But what Aristotle did was a noble effort. The end, since it doesn’t exist *yet* and can be “seen in” the instability, is the most promising candidate for a goodness that is “out there” and yet is a kind of “objective ideal to be realized” by the unstable object. What I tried to show is that no matter how good a try (no pun intended) it was, it won’t work in practice.

Hence, goodness isn’t “out there” at all; it is simply the fact that the object lives up to our expectations for it; and our expectations form the ideal, not something “out there.” In this respect, Kant was right and Aristotle was just wrong. And, of course, *if you want* the unstable object to be at the end it is headed toward, *this* end is now good in my sense of the term—such that if the process were

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sidetracked along the way, this would be bad. Thus, for instance, a student is in the process of obtaining a degree, and so clearly *having* one is both the “end” in the sense of what stops the process and “the good,” for him, because it is the ideal that he is working toward. So it would be bad if, for example, he did not have enough money for tuition and had to quit in the middle.

## Chapter 11

### Rightness and wrongness

One of the reasons the subjectivity of goodness and badness is fought by most realist philosophers (as well as by large numbers of people of good will) is that it sounds as if this makes morality and immorality just a matter of personal taste.

This cannot be, however, as is shown by the fact that those who hold the position that there is no objective morality become very angry when others interfere with their exercise of their “personal morality.” This is perhaps most evident today in the “pro choice” side of the abortion question; they want the “pro lifers” stopped from interfering with women who are exercising their choice—on the grounds that *no one must force anyone else to conform to the forcer’s moral standards*.

But of course, since they would *prevent* the pro-lifers from—as the pro-life people say—“protecting the unborn,” which the pro-lifers think their conscience *forces* them to do, then the “pro-choice” people are *forcing the pro-life side to conform to their moral standard of non-interference*, which the pro-lifers obviously don’t agree with.

I have never seen any advocate of morality as purely personal who has not in practice advocated non-interference as something that applies to *everyone*. But non-interference is, of course, a *moral* imperative, which, if it applies to everyone, means that the one advocating it believes that there *are* moral standards that at least

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*ought* to apply to everyone—which contradicts his position.

Hence, the contradictoriness in practice of the position that says that morality is not objective indicates that there must be something objective about it.

What is the cause of this effect?

**Conclusion 14: Moral rightness and wrongness have in themselves nothing to do with goodness and badness.**

If you examine what people are talking about when they consider something to be morally wrong, they are referring to an *act* someone performs *which contradicts the one acting* in some way.

For instance, the reason “non-interference” is in practice a moral imperative among those who hold that morality is personal is that it is *inconsistent* with morality’s being a personal matter to expect anyone else to behave according to your personal standards.

To discuss this at any length would be to open up the whole field of ethics, which is going to have to wait until toward the end of this treatise. But let me merely say that what I have asserted above is true in all cases, and the reader can test it for himself. What is regarded as “morally evil” by someone *always* involves what can be called “hypocrisy” or “dishonesty”: a deliberate attempt to act as if things aren’t as they really are. The differences in actual moral codes come from different *understandings* of what things “really are” (specifically, of what that person’s definition of “to be human” is) in the sense of different understandings of which acts are *in fact* inconsistent with the real situation of the agent.

For instance, pro-life people regard the fetus as *in fact* “as much” (as far as rights go) a human being as any other human being, and *do not deny* the “pro-choice” claim that “a woman has a right to do what she wants with her own body.” It’s just that they say that when

she has an abortion, she's *in fact* killing someone else. "Pro-choice" people simply do not believe that they're killing someone else, because they don't think it's all right to kill your ten-year-old, but it's okay to kill your fetus as long as he's inside you. The difference between the two sides is on *facts*, not values. Values, really, have nothing to do with it.

But if moral rightness or wrongness are just the fact of consistency or inconsistency, then why do so many people refer to acts they think are morally wrong (dishonest or hypocritical) as *bad*? It is almost universally true that the *primary* meaning of "badness" is "immorality."

The answer is simple. It would be fantastic to assume that people would *not* expect other people (and themselves, for that matter) to act consistently with themselves; how could anyone *expect* people to pretend that they aren't what they are? But to fail to live up to expectations is by definition "bad"; and so it is inevitable that moral wrongness should be regarded as bad.

If we add to this the fact that people generally make a distinction between "doing wrong but not realizing it was wrong," which they consider unfortunate but not morally evil, and "deliberately doing what you know is wrong," which they consider evil ("really bad"), then the view above is strengthened.

That is, we can't really *expect* people to avoid something if they have no idea it should be avoided; and so our expectations (and consequently, "badness" as applied to the act) don't attach to indeliberate acts. This is confirmed by the fact that if someone does something noble (i.e. consistent with being human but difficult) by accident, or while intending to do something wrong (as, accidentally scaring a person into overcoming a paralysis in the course of trying to rob him), we don't call the agent morally "good."

Let me, then, make some definitions which can clear the matter

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up.

An *act* is *morally right* if it is in fact consistent with the agent. The *act* is *morally wrong* if it in fact contradicts the agent in some way.

The *choice* to perform an act is *moral* if the act to be chosen is thought to be consistent with the agent. The *choice* to perform an act is *immoral* if the agent has any evidence which would indicate that the act is morally wrong.

An act or a choice is *morally good* if it lives up to the ideal a person has for human activities or human choices. An act or a choice is *morally bad or evil* if it fails to live up to the evaluator's ideal for human activities.

**Conclusion 15:** Moral rightness and wrongness are simply facts about the act in its relation to the agent. Moral rightness and wrongness are totally objective, and depend on no one's standards or even knowledge.

Thus, an act may be in fact morally wrong *and no one may be aware of this*. The act is *in fact* inconsistent with the agent who performs it; but as yet no one has discovered the inconsistency. I think, for instance, that I can make out a very strong case that it is morally wrong for a physician to make himself rich from his service; but very, very few people see the inconsistency here, and I am certainly not accusing most physicians of being dishonest or immoral or bad people. Nevertheless, if my analysis of the difference between values and necessities (which will come much later) is correct, then *what they are doing* is objectively wrong.

The point here is that moral rightness and wrongness, far from being values and therefore subjective, are even *more* objective than



truth is; because they are simple facts and are what they are whether they are ever *known* as facts or not. Truth only occurs when the fact is known to be what it is; but the act is right even if no one ever knows it to be. Moral rightness and wrongness, then, are “sitting out there waiting to be discovered.”

Morality and immorality, on the other hand, are objective in the sense that truth is. Since (as we will see later, in studying life and choice) the choice depends only on *the judgments of understanding* which you have (the *factual* knowledge) about the relation of consistency or inconsistency between the act and yourself, then *this knowledge is either true or mistaken*.

Interestingly enough, however, if the knowledge is mistaken, this does *not* necessarily absolve you from immorality. *If you (mistakenly) judge that the act is morally wrong (inconsistent), your choice to do it is immoral.*

Hence, there is a certain *fallibility* connected with morality and immorality, rather than a subjectivity strictly so-called. You cannot *declare* a known wrong act to be right and make a moral choice to perform it; if *you think* it is wrong, then (whether you are mistaken or not), your choice to do it will be immoral; and if you think there is nothing wrong with it, your choice will be moral. But the point here is that it is your *judgment of what the objective facts are* that determines the morality or immorality of your choice.

Finally, moral goodness and badness are, of course, subjective; all moral *values* are subjective, because “values” are the results of *evaluative* judgments, not judgments of understanding.

And, in fact many morally wrong acts are evaluated as *good* by people (even, in a sense, *morally* good) who may even recognize that there is something wrong about them. Who has not heard people defending lying when to tell the truth causes pain and a lie can prevent it? Who has not heard prostitutes or drug pushers defend

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themselves on the grounds that they are performing a service?

It is this “utilitarian” calculus of “assessing the greater good that comes from the act” that has made such a shambles of morality—and which has led, as my theory would predict it necessarily must lead—to complete moral relativism.

Utilitarianism tries to base morals on goodness and badness, not on the fact of consistency or inconsistency. Moral goodness and badness, since they depend on *ideals*, will *necessarily* be subjective; and one person’s ideal of the “morally good” or “morally noble” act will only *by coincidence* agree with anyone else’s. This was perhaps not so much of a problem in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, when people “taught” standards as if they were in fact something objective, and so people, having learned “what was really good,” tended to agree.

But once the objectivity of goodness was called into question, then—since goodness in fact is *not* objective—Pandora’s box was opened; and now there is no way at all to come to a consensus on what is good, morally speaking. So we have enshrined and are proceeding to enforce the subjectivity of morals.

But since moral rightness and wrongness *are* objective and people can’t help recognizing that dishonesty and hypocrisy are wrong, we are in that really stupid position of saying that it is *wrong* to try to make people avoid doing what is wrong—because we think that “wrong” means “bad.” But since this position means that the *only* wrong act is “interference with moral freedom,” we are watching helplessly as people do all sorts of horrible things and destroy themselves and others (we have since 1972 killed more than 30 million helpless human beings in the most hideous and painful way in this country in the name of “non-interference with choice”). We know that there’s something very wrong here; but we don’t know what or how to prevent it.

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Exactly. There is something very *wrong* here. Not very bad, very wrong. That is an objective fact. And the source is the confusion between right/wrong, moral/immoral, and good/bad. And I think this view unmixes what has been mixed ever since the beginning of philosophy; and I predict that if my view ever gets disseminated, we will be able to straighten out the mess—and not before. As long as morality is thought of in terms of “good” and “bad,” which are only incidental evaluative adjuncts to it, there is no hope for a solution. Values simply won’t work to right what is wrong.

Thus, the controversial Blairian issue of the subjectivity of goodness and badness does not reinforce moral relativism; it reestablishes the objectivity of morality, while at the same time recognizing the *truth* of the subjectivity of value judgments. This just goes to show that if you are to be a philosopher, you must not be afraid to go where the facts lead you, on the grounds that you might reach a conclusion that you don’t like. If you reach a conclusion that is *false*, then clearly there is something wrong with the theory, and you scrap it—as I have done several times, not least with the traditional Scholastic ethics I had to give up (based on the Aristotelian equation of “the good” with “the end”) because it didn’t seem consistent with the facts, however noble the search for the “possession of God as infinite happiness” was.

Now that we have got a reasonable notion of morality, let us look at God, and see if we can say anything about his morality. First of all, since God is infinite activity, *no* act he performs can be inconsistent with him as agent (because an inconsistent act, if you analyze it—as we will much later—would be an act which pretends to surpass the *limits* that the agent has on his actions). To be infinitely active obviously means to do anything “doable.” The only acts God couldn’t perform would be some act which absolutely wasn’t what it was—something that wasn’t an effect, but a complete contradiction.

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There's no such thing as such an "act," and so "it" couldn't be done.

Interestingly, we can formulate such an act, and make God seem incapable of doing something: For instance, God can't make a human being who is inhuman in the respect in which he is human. But anybody who knows the Principle of Contradiction knows that such a "human" is just nonsense, and not something that "could" be made if only God were "powerful enough."

Hence,

**Conclusion 16: Every act of God is morally right.**

I am speaking here of "every act" as if God performed more than one act, which, of course he does not. But God's creative activity results in more than one finite existence; and so we can take into consideration the possibility of the act's being a kind of "multiple reduplication" of itself as "causing this" and "causing that."

But even in this case, since these many "reduplications" of the act are in fact one and the same act, and if God knows his act (as he must, as we will see much later), then obviously "they" are one and the same with his act knowing all of "them," in which case God knows what he is doing and that it is necessarily morally right. Hence,

**Conclusion 17: Every act of God is moral.**

God obviously can't deliberately do anything that is inconsistent with himself, because there isn't anything that is inconsistent with himself—even if he were to destroy by torturing all the beings he has created. If it is *possible* to do this, then it is not inconsistent with an infinite being to do it, any more than it is inconsistent with me to delete the file that contains these words once having written them.

Can the clay talk back to the potter?

However,

**Conclusion 18: It is not necessarily the case that God or his acts are good.**

What? God can be bad? Even *morally* bad? Yes. And in fact, there are many people who consider God to be bad—though they generally end up not believing in a God at all, because they can't "believe that a totally good God could do such a thing to me" or to the world. Albert Camus was a very honest person who held something like this.

But how could God, who is infinite, fall *short* of what people would expect of him? Very easily. The "intensity of internal energy" is not necessarily what people look to in *evaluating* whether something is good or not. People's preconceived notions about any object can be based on anything.

It is quite possible, for instance, to reason this way: "A morally good human person will not bring damage on another person; but God, who crippled me at age two by that earthquake which he could have prevented but which involved no fault of mine or any other human being, did not do what the most minimally moral human being would have done—especially since it would have cost him no trouble at all to prevent the earthquake. And he knew what he was doing. Therefore, he is evil; he deliberately did harm. —Or put it this way; if you can prove that *technically*, what he did was moral, I will have none of that. He *should* have left me intact; he is *evil* for not doing so."

Dmitri Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* reasons exactly this way; even if the suffering of the little girl locked in the closet brings about enormous good, *it is not worth the price*. His evaluation of the

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act is that it is *bad*, and that therefore God, who “allowed” it, is *evil*, even if he allowed it “that greater good come from it.”

Then is he mistaken? No. Ideals are subjective, and obviously he has ideal of what God “ought” to be which does not correspond to the God that exists.

## Chapter 12

### The problem of evil

This, of course, really answers the vexed “problem of evil” which has so plagued philosophy for so long. This is the only really serious argument *against* God’s existence (as opposed to arguments that either say, “You haven’t proved that God does exist” or “There’s no effect, and so no need for a God”). It is called the Problem of Evil. It isn’t necessarily of itself an argument against the existence of something infinite, but of a being which is (a) all-powerful, (b) all-knowing, and (c) all-good. The argument goes,

In itself, the argument is simple. It says, “If God is all-knowing, he knows that there is evil in this world of ours (harm, immorality, suffering); if he is all-powerful, he can prevent it if he doesn’t want it to happen; and if he’s all-good, then he doesn’t want it to happen. So if God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good, there is no evil in the world.

“Therefore, given that there *is* evil in the world, then there is no God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good.”

Now of course, this argument can be easily “refuted” if God doesn’t have at least one of these properties, or has one only in a limited way. If, for instance, he doesn’t know about the evil in the world, he wouldn’t try to stop it; or if he’s not all-powerful, he might not be able to stop it even if he knows about it and wants to; and if he’s not all-good, he might not care.

But that’s just a debater’s way of getting out of the question, since the infinite being we argued to turns out to know what’s going on in the world, and he is certainly powerful enough to stop any act in the world that he doesn’t want to find there; and he is in *some* sense infinitely good and loving.

Obviously, I think my notion of “good” and “bad” solves the problem I

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should, however, mention that there are “refutations” of God’s existence that rest on “*How* could a being with Property X be the cause of something with Property Y”-type arguments, which deal with the *causality* of the cause, which in general is a mystery to us, no matter what the cause.<sup>56</sup> “Refutations,” therefore based on “I can’t see how” are invalid provided you have conclusively proved that there *must* be a being with Property X, and you know that its effect does in fact have Property Y. The fact that you don’t know *how* the X-being can manage the explanation of Y-beings is no argument of itself that there *is no* X-being. If so, then the Y-beings remain a contradiction (an effect without a cause), which is absurd.

But that way out doesn’t look terribly promising. The argument at least looks as if you can *predict* from the properties of the infinite being that the world would *have to be* different from what it actually is. And what that means is that it’s not just a question of *how* God can cause a world with evil in it, it’s that he *wouldn’t*. And of course, what *that* means is that there’s something wrong with the argument for the existence of such a being; such a being couldn’t exist.

Let me here give some other “refutations” of the Problem of Evil that don’t really refute it.

First, there is the argument that God only allows evil for the sake of a greater good that comes from it. The idea is that if God created another world without evil in it, it would be worse than the one he created; and so he’s good, because this, while not a perfect world, is the best *possible* world. A better world than this couldn’t actually exist.

But that’s nonsense. Supposing God to be infinite, then God + the world is no greater than God alone (just as the set of numbers {1, 2, 3, ... n, n+1 ...} is not greater if you add 0 to the set). So if God wanted a world with no evil in it, all he had to do was not create anything and be alone. Then what exists would be *better* than God + a world with evil; and so what actually exists (God

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<sup>56</sup>For example, even in something as simple as one billiard ball hitting another and moving it, we don’t really know *how* it does it (though we can put a name to it: force); you don’t even know how you manage to make your arm move when you decide to move it



+ a world with evil) is not the best possible situation. So this doesn't have to be the "best possible world" based on something that is true of God.

There's the argument that, since evil is just a lack of something, God didn't create evil. But that doesn't solve the problem, because we're supposing that an all-good God doesn't want "lacks" in things when the "lacks" are against their nature (as blindness or maiming is). So even if blindness is the inability to see, it is the inability to see in something reason says *can* in some sense see (how else would it be curable?); and so a good God, it would seem, would be *positively unwilling* to see his creatures deprived of what is due them.

There's the notion that suffering and so on are a *punishment* for human sins. But this has several defects. First of all, why were animals punished before ever there were any human beings to sin? If you say that the dinosaurs didn't suffer, then what do you mean, if they sank into quicksand and drowned? You have to stretch things to say that this fate was *good* for them—and what sense would it make to say that this was a "punishment" unless it was in *some* sense bad? But then you have a punishment (a) before the crime was committed (b) on something that had no part in the commission of the crime. In what sense could a *good* God justify this?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Actually, if you take into account God's eternity, then there is a possibility that, for a believer, this might be valid. If we assume that the first man (the first animal that evolved to have a spiritual soul) had, not only the choice of what his body would be like (his genetics), but also the choice of what the world he was capable of affecting would be like (because he was created to change the world as he saw fit). Supposing also that there were limits put on his choices by God (such as he had to be a mammal, and so on), and he chose to reject those limits and try to make himself over into an impossibility, then God might punish him by letting his own body be out of his control to some extent, and eventually die. And, consistent with this, the world "retroactively" would have been created to evolve in such a way that there was harm and suffering in *it* also. Since God is, as we will see, not in time, and as prophesy shows, future events can be the causes of past ones, then this is consistent with what we know (and will find out) about God. So *all* destruction and harm depend on the first man's sin, and evolution would have occurred differently (i.e. without the harm) if he hadn't sinned.

There's no contradiction here; but it's a lot to swallow. I personally think it's true,

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Second, why weren't human beings created incapable of sinning? "Because then they wouldn't be free." But our freedom even now is not totally unrestricted (you can't transform yourself into an alligator), and so why not make beings free to choose only among *legitimate* options? They'd still be free, but not absolutely free. But we're not absolutely free now.

"Well, but God saw that it was better this way." But that's the "best of all possible worlds" argument again; and that argument is invalid.

Finally, there's the argument, "Yes, but God's goodness is not the same as human goodness." But it sure looks as if God's goodness is not only not the *same* as human goodness, in many cases it would have to be the same as what we would call horrendous *evil*. That is, we wouldn't simply say that a man who blew up a building and killed a hundred people in it was just "less good than we'd like him to be," we'd say that he was a positively evil man. He'd be evil even if he knew the building was going to blow up and could stop it (or warn the people) and chose simply to let it happen. But God either causes volcanoes to blow up hundreds of his beloved creatures, or allows it to happen when he could prevent it. Does it mean *anything* to say that somebody like that is good in *any* sense?

Now we can see that God has to be "infinitely powerful," and that he can in fact prevent from happening anything that he doesn't want to happen. But if my view of goodness and badness is true, God is only "infinitely good" if God acts *as you expect him to act*.

Obviously, the person who finds evil in the world an argument against God has expectations of God's behavior that God doesn't "measure up to"; and so for him God is evil. So there is a God, but he is not infinitely good.

But this doesn't argue to a "defect" in *God*; it simply means that

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and I will give evidence that could lead to that conclusion later—though this treatise is not really the place to develop it, since it mainly deals with a "loving" God *as Christianity* teaches, not the philosophical, abstract God that we have argued to. They are the same God, of course; but the point is that the believer holds that God has attributes that are *beyond* what reason can argue to from God's effects in the world. If we are to know these attributes, God has to tell us, somehow.

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the evaluator's standards are not realistic. So what? *No* standards are realistic, really, because they are *ideals* that are subjectively created.<sup>58</sup>

That is, when you are talking about good and bad, you are not *just* describing how things are, you are relating them to a *standard*. And where do we get this standard? It comes from the fact that we can *imagine* situations as different from the way they are, and can then compare the actual state of affairs (the facts as perceived and understood) with the situation as we imagine it; and based on this comparison we can say that the actual state of affairs is *good* if it matches the imagined one (the *ideal*) and *bad* if it falls short of the imagined one.

So our ability to evaluate and to think in terms of good and bad is part of our ability to understand. But in ordinary understanding, (which gives us *truth* and *mistakes*), the *facts* are taken as the "independent variable," as it were, and *understanding* is what has to "bring itself into conformity with" the facts in order for understanding not to be mistaken and truth to occur.

Here, however, as, I said, we have *the same relation*, only we are considering it *the opposite way round*. We have formed a *pre-conceived judgment* about things (this ideal we have constructed in our

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<sup>58</sup>I realize that it goes against the grain to say that God can be evil; but in fact many people don't believe in God because "a good God couldn't have done this to me! What have I done to deserve it?" That is, if in fact there is a God, and if he did this to me (i.e. caused it to happen to me or didn't prevent it), then God is an evil God. But this rests on the expectation that God would not limit a creature to an extent beyond what the creature wanted to be limited as; but my discussion here establishes, I think, that this expectation has no solid objective foundation. So yes, God can be evil, if he doesn't live up to your expectations of him. To correct this, of course, you have to see that "the clay can't talk back to the potter" and *anything* God does to you is something he can do, and so this is not inconsistent with his reality. You have no objective claim on God. Thus, your expectations are not realistic.

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imagination), and *we expect the facts to live up to (to match) it*. If they do, then this (which would be the same as “truth,” since the understanding and the facts match), is what we call “good”; and when they don’t (i.e. when the relation corresponds to a mistake), instead of “blaming” our understanding and trying to correct it, we hold on to our preconceived idea and “blame” the facts and call them “bad.”

That is, in both evil and a mistake, there is a discrepancy between the idea I have of the way the world is and the way the world actually is. When I consider the *facts* as the standard, I consider that I have made a mistake; but when I am in the evaluative mode of thinking, I hang on to the ideal as the way I think “things *ought* to be,” and I then say that the situation is bad and “ought not to be that way.”

So, for instance, I make the generalization that human beings can see just because they are human beings. I see a blind man. Now I don’t want to give up the generalization that “all human beings can see,” and so I say, “That’s a defective case of a human being,” or “There’s something wrong with him,” or “He ought to be able to see.” There is a kind of contradiction in him: he’s a human being, and all human beings can see (and therefore he can see), but he can’t see—so he’s a kind of sub-human human.

It is this apparently contradictory situation that is what evil consists in. Notice that *this* apparent contradiction isn’t an *effect* exactly, because if you say, “Well, he can’t see because his optic nerve is atrophied,” you’ve given the cause of his blindness; but you haven’t satisfied the person who’s making the evaluative judgment, because he simply counters with, “What difference does it make why he can’t see? Humans ought to have functioning optic nerves. Why have them at all, if they don’t work?” That is, even if you explain why the evil situation exists, this doesn’t alter the fact that according to the evaluation it *ought* not to exist.

The first thing to remember here is that the standard (the ideal) as such has no factual basis. You got it from using your imagination and just manipulating what was stored there into a form that satisfied you, for some reason. Now granted, you might have *reasons for formulating* the ideal; for instance, in the case of blindness, not only can “practically every” human being see, it also doesn’t make sense to have eyes that are not functional, since “practically every” organ of “practically every” living thing has a function; and the function of the eyes in “practically everyone” is to see.

But the point is that the fact that “practically every” human being can see is no reason for saying that “therefore, absolutely every human being can see.” But that’s what the ideal is actually saying. Because practically every human being can see, then you make the leap and say that every human being *ought* to be able to see. You now set this up, in other words as your idea of the “real true” human being, whether that being exists or not.

And in doing so, what have you done? *You form an ideal by mentally removing limitations from the limited cases you observe.* That is, each human being (because he is an energy-bundle) is a *limited case* of “what it is to be human” (that form of existence); and so the *ideal* human being is the human being who doesn’t have any of these particular limitations that some people have and other people don’t.

But it’s not quite that. Not everyone can play basketball like Michael Jordan; in fact, very, very few can. So these extraordinary talents don’t (generally) form part of the *ideal* human being that most of us formulate for evaluating whether something is a good example of a human being or “there’s something wrong with him.” The evaluative ideal generally excludes the limitations *that only a few* have, and so it becomes a kind of “zero” at the bottom of “normality”; and we say that any limitation *below* this is too great a limitation, and ought not to be there.

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In the same way, we say that any temperature below freezing is “badness” as far as heat is concerned, and we don’t call it “very little heat,” (which it is) we call it the opposite of heat, *cold*. That is, we (arbitrarily) set the zero of heat at the freezing point, and then call temperatures below that (which are still objectively cases of heat) “too limited,” and therefore “negative heat.”

Therefore,

***Ontological evil is limitation greater than the lowest limitation that we consider “normal.”***

But the point I am stressing is twofold: (a) Where you place the zero is *arbitrary*, and has no objective basis—as can be seen from the fact that the freezing point of water is zero on the Celsius scale, but that same temperature is 32E *above* zero on the Fahrenheit scale. And neither is “right,” objectively; it all depends on how you *want* to look at things.

Now then, there is nothing in a (limited) being itself which says that it *can’t* be limited in any way or to any degree that this being can be limited in. Obviously. That is, we say that human beings *ought* to be able to live at least seventy years; but we see that in fact human beings can live as short a time as a year and still be human beings (or ten minutes, for that matter). We see that human beings *ought* to be able to see, but we also see that there are human being who can’t see, and they are human in spite of this extra limitation they have. And so on.

So what can we conclude from this?

Since evil is always a comparison of the real situation with an ideal that does not exist, and since that ideal was subjectively created, there is no objective reason why the ideal “ought” to exist. Therefore, evil is a “problem” only for those who choose to look on things in this way.

Now this is not to deny that things can “be” evil. They are *in fact*

evil when *in fact* they do not live up to your preconceived expectations. That *relation* of discrepancy is a fact, but the *ideal* isn't. That is, evil has an objective and a subjective "pole" to the relation; you set up the subjective pole as the "real true" one (which it isn't, but you *want* reality to conform to it); and it is *this* that makes evil *basically subjective*. Things "become" evil or good simply by your changing your expectations, without their changing at all.

For instance, you doubtless don't consider it bad that you can't play basketball like Michael Jordan—because almost nobody can play basketball that well, and probably you're not interested in having that talent. But notice that Scotty Pippin might consider it bad that he isn't quite that talented (because, one supposes, he wants to be the world's greatest basketball player). Similarly, if you're blind, you can either say, "How terrible!" and complain about all the things you can't do that sighted people can do, or you can say, "Who cares what they can do? I can read braille, I can hear, I can do this, that, and the other, and I'm just not interested in doing those other things." And suddenly, being sighted becomes a kind of "talent" that other people have, like the ability to play basketball, and you don't any longer consider that there's "something wrong" with you, or that it's "bad" to be the way you are. Now I don't say that this sort of shift of the ideal is easy, but in fact it's what makes successful blind people successful; they don't "dwell on" their limitations.

The point is that you're free to make your ideal whatever you want it to be; there's nothing in reality that forces it on you. Hence evil exists or doesn't exist depending on how you choose to look at things, not because of something you *discover* "out there." In essence, evil is limitation, taken from the point of view of the fact that the limitation is "too great."

But it follows from this that, since God is absolutely unlimited existence, then it is impossible to form an ideal about him,

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conceiving the Infinite as “less limited” than he is, which would allow you to say that “there is something wrong” with him. Hence, *God is absolute ontological goodness.*

Notice that God’s *intrinsic* or *ontological* goodness says absolutely nothing about the “fact” that evil “ought” not to exist in the world; because evil “ought” not to exist simply because of our arbitrarily set ideals by which we consider some limitations as “too great.” But they are always and only *subjectively* “too great,” and there’s no sense in which the Infinite *should* cause finite beings to be *less* limited than they actually are. Just as, if your son wants you to take him to the amusement park and you don’t want to, he says you’re bad; but you’re bad only according to his standards, and why should you conform to his standards? Similarly, if you say that I am wracking your brain with this book, and I “ought” to make it simple, why should I conform to your standards? I’m making it (believe it or not) clear and intelligible; you work at trying to understand it.

The point of this, of course, is that *the (ontological) goodness of God is quite compatible with evil in the world.* The ontological goodness of God just means that there’s no way of conceiving him as “falling short” of a greatness he “ought” to have; but that’s perfectly compatible with *finite* beings’ falling short of some ideal *you* set for them; it just happens to be a contradiction in terms to set an ideal for God higher than infinite existence.

But it’s not quite that simple, is it? I’ve been talking about *ontological evil*, the sense of “badness” in which the thing doesn’t conform to your expectations of what it *is*. But there’s also *moral evil*, which deals with the *behavior of persons*. A given person might be an extremely talented human being, but if he rapes other people, we consider his *behavior* wrong and call him an “evil” person.

**A person is *morally evil* when he acts inconsistently with the**



reality which he is.

A rapist, for instance, is using a cooperative act against the other person's will (i.e. uncooperatively); a thief is saying "What's mine is mine (because I'm a human being) and what's yours is mine (because I want it to be)."—and this is in effect saying either "I'm superhuman" or "You're subhuman" by his actions, and neither is true. So in moral evil, you are *pretending* that you aren't what you really are; you are acting *as if* you were greater than you really are.

And, of course, that's why moral evil is bad. You are, as it were, trying to act as if a subjective ideal of yourself (as, for example, superior to others) is the reality of yourself, when in fact it isn't. So you are not simply *evaluating* things according to the ideal, you are *pretending that the ideal actually exists when it doesn't*, because *unless* it actually exists, your action *contradicts* your reality.

But of course, since the ideal doesn't exist, the act *does* contradict your reality;<sup>59</sup> and so everyone else, looking at what the reality is, calls this "morally wrong," and then says that you are *morally bad*.

The point, of course, is that you can't be morally bad unless you are in some sense or other acting as if you are greater than what you really are, or (if you want to put it that way) you are *refusing to accept* the limitation you have as human, and acting as if you didn't have it.

But it immediately follows from this that *God cannot be morally bad*. No matter what God does to any finite reality, no matter what limitations he imposes on any finite being, (a) the being is capable of

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<sup>59</sup>This is not in the sense that you *can't* do it, but that the goal you set for the action can't in practice be made real. The thief can't make the stolen object belong to him by the mere act of taking it; but he *wants* it to belong to him by that act—or he wants to use it *as if* it belonged to him when he knows that it doesn't. That's why theft is wrong. The contradiction lies, not in reality, but in the self-contradictory goal of the act.

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being limited in this way and to this degree (or it couldn't exist), and (b) God is perfectly capable of doing this. So if a meteor falls down out of the sky and hits you in the head and splatters your brains all over Cincinnati, and if this is in "the providence of God," as they say, what objective complaint do you have? As Isaiah said, "Can the clay talk back to the potter?" You may not *like* the fact that you are the "earthen dish" St. Paul talks about which was made just to be smashed; but it is perfectly possible for you to exist this way; and so it is perfectly consistent with God to cause you to exist this way.

Notice that we don't even attribute moral evil to ourselves when we step on cockroaches or break sticks or uproot plants or crush rocks—because these things have no rights against us (or in other words, it isn't inconsistent with our reality to destroy them). Well obviously, it's not inconsistent with the reality of the One who causes us to be the finite being which we are to limit us in whatever way *he* pleases; It doesn't have to conform to *our* idea of what It "ought" to do to us. *So the infinite moral goodness of God is perfectly compatible with evil in the world.*

Of course, the upshot of this is that God can be said in a meaningful sense to be absolutely good, and still be a complete monster from our point of view. I don't imagine the cockroach you stepped on looks on you with grateful eyes from its place in cockroach-heaven either.

And this is what I was getting at when I said that God *can* be looked on as evil. If you have as your standard, "A being which causes destruction to another is evil," then it automatically follows that God is (to you) evil. The point is that this evaluation has no real objective basis; he is "evil" because he in fact is different from the way you expect.

But the upshot of this discussion is that, philosophically speaking, there's no real *problem* with there being evil in the world. And insofar

as it *is* a problem, a denial of God's existence doesn't make it go away. Insofar as you say that certain things ought not to exist the way they do, then they ought not to exist that way whether there's a God or not; and if the "ought" is objective, then the world contradicts itself, and nothing makes sense. How is this a more reasonable position than theism—however unpalatable the theism we've come up with looks to our evaluative judgment?

I think I should point out here that this definition of "goodness" and "badness" is not something concocted *ad hoc* to make the world compatible with the Infinite. It is based, like our definition of "existence," on the conditions under which we use the terms, and the impossibility of our actually having objective knowledge of an ideal (since the ideal would have to be something like the sideways 8 [4], a limited being without the limits). The definition also explains the empirical fact that no one has ever been able to come up with a notion of "good" that everyone agrees on. Why not, if it's something objective that can be discovered?

As to St. Augustine's definition of evil as "the privation of a due good," how do you know that the good is *due*, except that, for some reason or another, you *expect* it to be in the being in question. And that rests on a subjectively created ideal; it is not something discovered by examining the facts.

## Chapter 13

### The “transcendentals”

These discussions of truth and goodness bring up the question of the “transcendental properties of being,” which are things that can be said of any object simply because it exists (or is an object), irrespective of what *kind* of object it is (and so these “properties” “transcend” any one *category* of being).

Traditionally, it has been held that any being is one, true, good, and beautiful.

First of all, by “one” is meant “undivided in itself and divided from any other.” Now I’ll grant that a society, say, is a kind of pseudo-unit that can’t really be called *a* being; but it is sort of a being; it can certainly be *considered* as a unit. I suppose that what this “property” means is that if you’re going to know anything, then you know it in one act of understanding, which obviously (as a relation) connects it together somehow. But in this case a given “many” would have to be considered as *a* “many,” which would make it a unit. It seems to me that “unit” here is just defined in such a way that it includes its opposite within it, and so I don’t see much point in taking it in this sense.

Similarly, “ontological truth” in the sense that “being is true” would simply be “truth” in the sense of “the facts,” irrespective of their relation to any mind; because the *being* as defined in this way couldn’t be “false.” Certainly the being is what it is; and if known

correctly, judgments about it will be true. But beings can mislead; iron pyrite would make the unwary observer think that it is gold; and so isn't it false gold?

But if truth really is a characteristic of the *judgment*, why define the *being* as "true"? You can do it, in the sense in which you can define a fire as "comfortable" because it makes you comfortable; but why bother?

Also, "ontological goodness" by which "any being is good insofar as it exists" *can* have a sort of a meaning, in that any being that agrees with your preconceived idea is good, and by changing your idea, any being can agree with it. But that's a little silly, don't you think?

Further, the notion of "ontological truth" and "ontological goodness" imply that a *greater* being is "truer" and "better" than a less limited one; and in our discussion of the problem of evil, I tried to show that that view gets you into all kinds of difficulty.

Finally, since an object is beautiful if it conforms to my preconceived *esthetic* (emotion-based) ideal of what it "ought" to be, then this is just a special case of "goodness"; and like goodness, it does not follow that a less limited object is "objectively more beautiful" than a more limited one.

The case is perhaps strongest here. Some pieces of music are, by many people's standards, just incredibly beautiful; but what they *are*, objectively, are just a succession of vibrations of the air, and as such are at a much lower level of existence than a drunken disorderly human being—which means that he is objectively more beautiful than a Beethoven symphony.

Why don't we just forget about these senses of the terms? I don't see any point to stretching things to such lengths.

This, then, finishes our discussion of what you might call "being

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as such,” at least when you admit that some of the beings of our experience are limited. That is, we have treated the *fact* of limitation, which all beings except God are “infected” with. Given that, what has been said in this Part applies to all beings. In the next Part, dealing mainly with energy, we will get into different *modes* of the finite, possessed by some beings but not others.