

CHAPTER XVI
CONCLUSION

THE picture of the universe which is presented to us at the conclusion of our inquiries may be briefly sketched. The universe is fundamentally a colony of multitudes of minds. I hold back from saying that the ultimate stuff or reality of the universe is mind. For I do not know, or at least I have not inquired in this book, what is meant by 'ultimate' reality. Inquiries of that kind belong to the sphere of transcendental philosophy, which I have here and for the moment forsworn. Moreover, in addition to minds there are givens, floating colours and sounds, relations between these, mental states as themselves intuited and given. Each monadic mind possesses and dwells in its own self-enclosed world of givens. But to say that mind is the ultimate reality of the universe would imply, I think, that it is more real than the givens, that it is in some way more 'fundamental' than they are (whatever that may mean), that it is prior to them, perhaps even that it produces them. Any of these propositions may, for all I know, be true. But they do not result from anything that is asserted in this book. I have not inquired regarding them, because in my opinion they would take me beyond the empirical standpoint which I have adopted. They would take me into the sphere of transcendental metaphysics, into questions of the purpose and rationality of things, into the *why* of the universe.

For the same reasons I forbear to inquire whether the parallelism of private worlds, which is a fact, and which—as was noted in Chapter VII—lies at the basis of our whole theory, is evidence of a designing mind overruling the universe; or whether the universality and necessity of logical laws, the fact that they are not personal but overpersonal, does not point to some deeper universal mind of which our own minds are but individualizations or manifestations. These suggestions lie outside the scope of our limited empirical investigations. And I will only say that

there is nothing in any of these views which is inconsistent with the epistemology here advocated.

For us at the close of our inquiries all we can say is (1) that minds exist and (2) that givens exist and are perceived by minds. The minds and the givens are facts, brute facts. I do not know how or why they come into existence. To make any inquiry into this is no part of my undertaking. Nor do I inquire 'what minds are' or 'what givens are' or what the 'ultimate nature' of either of them is. I do not even know what the meaning of these questions is. For to ask 'what mind is' seems to imply that it can be described or defined in terms of something else which is not mind. And I have no idea what that something else could be. Either it must be some transcendental reality, in which case we leave it to transcendental philosophers. Or else it must be some other factual existent. The only other factual existents are the givens. And it does not seem a very hopeful line to suggest that minds are wholly explicable in terms of colour patches, sounds, odours, and the like. Moreover this solution would leave us still asking 'what the givens are'. If we do not accept them as ultimate facts, then they will have to be explained either in terms of a transcendental reality or in terms of the only other known existents, namely minds. And the process of explanation would in the latter case be obviously circular. So that, if I am asked 'what minds are' or 'what givens are', I can get no further in replying than to say that minds are minds, and givens are givens. I do not know how to answer the question 'what is the ultimate nature of a red patch?' except by saying that a red patch is a red patch. For me at this empirical standpoint minds and givens are simply ultimate facts of which no further account can be given. And it is at least questionable whether to ask for a further account of them has any real meaning.

Multitudes of minds perceiving multitudes of colour patches, sounds, tactile presentations, and other givens. These are the raw material, the ultimate constituents, of the universe. These are the only *factual* existents. These are the only pure facts. In this arena of primitive being the

givers of each mind constitute its own private universe. There are as many universes as there are minds. And each such universe is internally disconnected, full of gaps, holes, and chasms. There are gaps between the presentations of the different senses. A sight is in a different world from a sound. There are gaps in time when the mind is asleep or unconscious and when therefore its universe simply ceases to exist. There is a gap between the table (or the colour patch which later becomes the table) which I see now and the one I saw yesterday. They are not the 'same' table and between their two existences there is a dark blank in the picture. The whole of each private world is patchy and disconnected.

Such is the picture of the 'beginning of the world', the crude material out of which the universe has been constructed. It is in itself orderly, in that it contains regularities of sequence (which later become causal laws) and the parallelism of private worlds. It is not true to say, as is sometimes said, that it is mind which introduces all order into the universe. There are the rudiments of order there at the beginning. But otherwise the world in the beginning is patchy, disconnected, unsolid, a jumble of discrete scraps of private worlds and multitudinous bits of universes. All the rest of the universe as we know it, perduring through connected time, extending through a single space, solid, permanent, continuous, and independent of mind, all this has been built up by thousands of generations of minds labouring together.

It is quite conceivable that if there are other minds with which we are not in communication they may have built up worlds totally different from ours. If there are minds on Mars, their system of knowledge may be so unlike ours that language or communication between us might be now practically impossible, even if we could overcome the distance and the physical obstacles. For on the road of knowledge, as we have seen, there are many forks at which the human mind may choose between different paths. These different paths are alternative truths. At

most of these forks the human mind has chosen one route and has left the others unexplored. How are we to know that the Martian mind, or any other in the universe (if there be any), has taken the same turns as we have? Those other minds may have built up universes in which the multitude of private worlds, rather than the singleness of a public world, is the basic feature; in which there are two disconnected spaces, visual and tactile; in which visual space has only two dimensions; in which empty visual space does not exist; in which the motion of solid visual bodies is unknown; in which what we call motion is explained as simply change of colour on a flat world; in which the notions of substance, self-identity, thinghood, solidity, permanence, have no application, or are applied quite differently from the way in which we apply them. And it must be remembered that if these strange minds have taken turnings of the road different from those taken by us, they will have had to follow them out, diverging farther and farther from our route at every step, until they may have entered fields of knowledge which we cannot imagine. Suppose for example that, instead of inventing a third spatial dimension as we did, they built their world on the basis of a flat plane in which motions were explained as merely changes of colour. Thus far we can follow their proceeding. But as a result of this all their subsequent constructions, the whole of their physical science, will have to be quite different from ours. What vast adjustments and reconstructions of our knowledge would be necessary before it could come into line with theirs?

It may be that the human race is only one group of minds; that there are many groups; and that there exist as many different systems of knowledge as there are groups of minds; and that none of these groups could now in any wise understand one another if brought into contact.

These suggestions are not put forward for the sake of idle speculation about the men in Mars, or in remoter bodies, as is the case with those newspaper descriptions of the 'marvels' of 'science' at which the credulous are accustomed to be set a-gaping. I do not know whether

there actually are any other groups of minds in the universe or not. So far as I know, there is not the slightest evidence of it. And to speculate on the point is altogether beside my purpose. My purpose is to emphasize, by means of this *picture*, the fact that, owing to the existence of alternative truths, other systems of knowledge than ours are possible and would be equally 'true'.

For the building up of the world by mind, as it is conceived in our philosophy, is in no way parallel to that world-construction by Mind which was a feature of such systems as those of Kant and Hegel. For them the world was built once and for all, in some single necessary way, by some vast non-human transcendental cosmic universal Mind. But in our view it has been the work of billions of individual human and perhaps pre-human minds, working ant-like through the aeons, each contributing its morsel. It has been governed, not primarily by logical necessity, but by human, and perhaps pre-human, *needs*. And it might have been built quite differently.

Logically speaking, each individual mind might have adopted its own system of knowledge, and your world might be quite different from mine. I might have adopted one alternative truth, you another. There are never any logical grounds which compel us to adopt one rather than the other. If there were, they would not be alternative truths. The only reasons why the human race has developed a single common system of knowledge are (1) that men's minds are similar. For example, all minds will in general prefer the simpler and easier of two possible routes. And (2) they have laboured together in common, with a common end, and each mind influencing all the others. Their guiding aim has been a common world for the sake of fellowship. If we could discover some other group of minds in some other planet, we might find their system of knowledge different from ours. But it is to be expected that they would share a single common system among themselves.