

CHAPTER V

THE WORLD OF THE SOLITARY MIND

PHILOSOPHERS as a rule take fright at the bare mention of solipsism. Immediately it comes in sight they shy to one side like a horse frightened of a piece of paper. It is common to read in their writings arguments such as the following: 'Such and such a line of thought will lead us into solipsism. *Therefore* we must avoid that line of thought since it must be wrong.' And with that unphilosophical attitude they are satisfied, never calmly facing the issue. They think that to admit that the solipsist position must be the initial position of the mind is an admission which will get them into difficulties. They *dislike* the idea. It arouses, perhaps, unpleasant feelings of loneliness and futility. Their objections are not based on any rational thought, but upon this emotional dislike or fear. Here, for example, is a passage from a lecture by Mr. C. C. J. Webb on *Our Knowledge of One Another* which has recently been issued.

I have a recollection of hearing the late Lord Balfour remark in the course of a philosophical discussion that he found it very difficult to deny 'solipsism' to be our original condition, but no less difficult to see how, if it were so, we could ever get out of it. The second difficulty appears to me insuperable, but as to the former I cannot believe that solipsism is a position that any one was ever really in.

'Found it very difficult to deny' are tell-tale words. They plainly indicate that there is a desire to deny it. In other words the question is not being viewed in the dry light of reason, but the wishes and feelings of the thinker are being allowed to dictate the conclusion. Lord Balfour felt *forced* to admit that the initial position of the mind is solipsism, but *feared* nevertheless to look the thought in the face. And Mr. Webb assumes without any argument that it cannot be accepted, and seems to think that the fact that one does not like the idea is a sufficient reason for its rejection.

But philosophy, as I understand it, necessitates our following reason *to the end*. And if one is going to be frightened of the conclusions to which reason points, if one is going to philosophize half-way, and only so long as one likes the results, one might as well give up philosophizing altogether. Why not, then, rest in 'common sense' or in 'primitive belief' or in blind prejudice, and so sleep in peace untroubled by philosophic doubts?

It seems to me that we ought to take philosophy seriously, loyally following wherever she leads. And I believe that any one who is prepared to follow reason absolutely, with no reservations, will be compelled to accept the philosophy to be developed in the next two chapters. I claim that it alone is the true rationalism. But as human nature is such that men will not follow reason, I predict that in fact very few will accept it, and that most will comfort themselves with some vain delusion imposed upon them, not by their reason, but by their hopes or fears. But for my part I shall proceed uncompromisingly to the end.

It is evident that, however we may wish otherwise, we cannot, if we are honest, escape the conclusion that the initial position of every mind must be solipsistic. By this I do not mean that I shall remain in the belief that I alone exist. I think on the contrary that there is very good reason to believe in the existence of other minds. That is a question which I shall discuss in Chapter VIII. But in the meanwhile I assert that each of us must *begin* from within his own consciousness. Belief in other minds is not a datum.

That I am, to start with, only aware of *my own* thoughts and experiences, appears to be self-evident. Since it is the true beginning, it is clear that it cannot be an inference from anterior data, since in that case those anterior data would themselves constitute the beginning. We cannot *prove* the solipsist position in the sense of deducing it from some other position. But we can establish it by pointing out the given facts which *constitute* the position. This we have already to a large extent done, and nothing

more is necessary here except once more to summarize those facts. They are as follows.

I cannot experience anything except *my own* experience. I can see my red, but I can never see yours. I can feel a pain in my leg. But I can never feel the pain in your leg. I can feel my emotion, but not yours. Even if your anger infects me, so that I feel it in sympathy with you, it is yet, in so far as I feel it, *my* anger, not yours. I can never be you, nor you me. I cannot see through your eyes, nor you through mine. Even if you can telepathically transfer a mental state, say an image, from your mind to mine, yet, when I become aware of it it is then *my* image and not yours. Even if, as some think, I can directly perceive your mind, without having to infer it from your body, still this perception of your mind will then be to me *my* perception, *my* experience.

All knowledge, all philosophy, must be based upon experience. And from whose experience can I begin except from my own? Whatever belief I hold on whatever subject must be either a datum of *my* consciousness or else an inference or mental construction which *I* base upon *my* data. If I accept a scientific belief on your authority, this belief must be an inference which *I* make from the sounds (words) I hear you utter, and from *my* belief in your repute as a scientific authority. Whatever I believe rests in the end upon the data of my own consciousness. Therefore all knowledge must have had its beginning in my own self-enclosed personal experience. This original solipsism is utterly unescapable except by prejudice or by refusing to see it. Philosophers blink the fact or gloss it over. But we shall begin here and loyally accept whatever results may follow.

We shall have to make further study of the world of the solipsistic or solitary mind, the world which the mind would inhabit but for its acquired communication with other minds. For it must be remembered that the solitary mind is no mere legend of a consciousness which may or may not have existed in remote past ages. It is true that we look upon it as, in a sense already explained, an historical

as well as a logical beginning. But the solitary mind is also a present fact. For it is the mind of every one of us stripped of all accretions of knowledge, and pushed back upon its absolute foundation. The mind which is here described, and whose world is here discussed, exists here and now embedded in the consciousness of every one of us. It is true that the mind of every one of us contains, and is, *much more than this*. But this it is at least. This is the underground foundation of the building. And the foundation is not abolished or rendered a legend by the building of the upper stories. It is still there. So, too, the world of the solitary mind is not an unreal or imaginary world. It is the world which every one of us inhabits even now, though we have *added* many riches of existence to it.

In the concepts of the given the mind revealed the first activity of its thought. They were the first advance of the mind beyond the bare given. They were definitely *thought*, as distinguished from mere awareness or receptiveness. But these concepts could never lead the solitary mind out of itself, out of the grotto of its private phantasms, into the public world of external things. The mind might go on living alone, in its world of insubstantial colour patches and sounds, without any consciousness of the outward world of real things. The concepts of the given could never help it. They would enable it to recognize 'red', to distinguish 'red' from 'blue', to group colours under a different head from sounds, and so forth. But that is all. To get from this stage to that of consciousness of the real external world will clearly require some quite new activity of the mind. And it must be our aim to discover that activity.

But before describing the detailed steps by which the mind passes outwards to a belief in a public external world it will be well to see more clearly where it at present stands, and to measure the distance which it has to travel in that passage. What is the distance between our starting-point and our goal? Our starting-point is the given, along with its special and elementary concepts. And the given means

for each individual his own given. My given is not your given. Nor am I yet aware of your given or even of your existence. The existence of other minds is not itself part of the given. It is a later discovery. And therefore each mind must be, at its starting-point, completely solitary. It is aware of its colour patches, its sounds, scents, and tastes. These are its aboriginal world. They come and go like the images in a dream. It is unaware of anything else. It has no knowledge of the existence of any other mind. It has no knowledge of the existence of external objects in so far as these differ from mere presentations.

In what respects external objects differ from mere presentations is precisely the point upon which it is now desired to fix attention. For the world from which we start is a world of mere presentations. Yet we all of us come to believe in a world of external objects or 'things'. Before we attempt in the next chapter to ascertain how the mind reaches that belief, we had better first settle what the belief involves. How does a public external world of real objects differ from a world of mere presentations?

The distinguishing characters of such a world appear to be three. Objects such as tables and chairs and mountains differ from mere presentations in the following respects: (1) They have an *independent* existence. And by this use of the word independent I mean that they are believed to exist even when they are not presented to any consciousness. And (2) they are not private to my personal consciousness but are parts of a common world of knowledge which is shared by a multitude of minds. Finally (3) they exist for more than one of the senses. The *same* thing may be seen, touched, smelt, tasted, and heard. Mere presentations belong only to one sense. For example, the visual presentation, obviously, can only be seen.

The world of the original solitary mind differs from the world of 'things' in every one of these respects. (1) The solitary mind has no reason to think that its presentations go on existing after they have ceased to appear to itself. The mind sees a green patch. When that disappears it will seem that it has ceased to exist. That it should go on

existing when it is no longer being perceived is a belief which would never occur to the solitary mind, because it would be a quite unnecessary hypothesis, not needed to account for any of the experiences of that mind. It is a belief which belongs essentially to the stage of the knowledge of 'things'. It may seem self-evident to *us*, sophisticated and advanced in knowledge as we are, that the table on which I am writing will not go out of existence when I turn my back on it. But as a matter of fact it is not self-evident at all. We have come to think of it as self-evident because it has been firmly fixed in our minds as a belief for possibly hundreds of thousands of years. Just as Euclid's axiom of parallels, which is not self-evident, yet seemed so to many people out of long custom in believing it. A mere presentation flickers and goes out and ceases to exist. The natural belief, which the mind would take for granted unless it had special reason to think otherwise, would be that anything ceases to exist when it is not being perceived. We shall show as we proceed that the mind comes to have special reason to think otherwise as soon as it gets into communication with other minds and attempts to co-operate with them in establishing a common world. But the solitary mind, of course, has not reached that stage. For it, therefore, there exist only presentations which go out of existence as soon as they pass out of perception. Hence belief in the persistence of 'things' and their independence of being perceived is the first essential mark of our belief in an external world of objects, and distinguishes it from the world of the solitary mind.

The world of the solitary mind is (2) not public property. For the solitary mind is not even aware of the existence of other minds. Other people exist for it, if at all, merely as moving colour patches among other similar colour patches. Awareness of these patches does not involve awareness of the existence of the minds which we afterwards come to think of as existing behind them. But belief in an external world of things involves essentially that we think that what is there for me is there for other minds too. This table is there. I regard it as a real object.

This means that I believe that other minds can also see the table there. If I saw the table and no one else could see it, if it was thus private to my consciousness, I should conclude that it was an hallucination or in some way unreal. This shows that the belief that objects are *public*, not private, is an essential part of our belief in an external world. And this is the second way in which it differs from the world of the solitary mind.

Finally (3) the world of the solitary mind differs from the public world of objects in that it has not yet identified the objects of the different senses. I see the table and I also touch it. For the solitary mind at the beginning of its career the touch sensation and the sight sensation have nothing to do with one another, exist in wholly distinct universes. For the developed mind which believes in an external public world they have become conjoined as two presentations or 'qualities' of the same object. If I saw a table but could get no touch sense of it, if when I put out my hand to feel the table my hand went through it, I should conclude that I was dreaming or insane. And this shows once more that the identification of the objects of the different senses is an essential characteristic of our belief in the existence of an external world, a characteristic which is missing from the world-view of the solitary mind.

Thus, to recapitulate, the solitary mind is in the beginning confronted with its own given. It alone exists, solitary and solipsist in its world of presentations. This world of presentations is wavering, unsolid, and impermanent. The colour patches of which it largely consists come and go, flicker and fade. It is true that the mind has learnt to recognize similar presentations when they recur. It recognizes a red colour as red. It distinguishes it from other colours. It distinguishes colours from sounds. But in spite of this, nothing is permanent in its world. And above all it has no idea that anything goes on existing when it is not being perceived.

It is necessary to insist repeatedly upon this latter point. Let us imagine that what *we* know to be a green book is passed before the eyes of the solitary mind. To that mind

this event will present itself simply as the appearance and disappearance of a green patch. When once it has gone out of sight the solitary mind has no reason whatever for supposing that it still continues in existence. While it is being perceived the only reason for believing in its existence is the fact of its being perceived. When that reason is removed why should its continued existence be contemplated? Even if the book is brought back into view a second time, this will be explained by the solitary mind as the appearance of *another* green patch similar to the first. It is not necessary, in order to explain the facts, to introduce the hypothesis of the *identity* of the two patches and their continued existence between appearances. This, as we shall see, becomes necessary as soon as a society of minds attempts to establish a common world. But it is quite unnecessary now when there is only one mind in the world. The view that nothing exists except what is actually being perceived and while it is being perceived, and that if what *we* should call the 'same' things reappear, this is due to the appearance of different but similar colour patches, is quite sufficient to explain all the facts in the world of the solitary mind. Hence it is evident that the solitary mind has no idea that anything exists unperceived by it.

This implies that for the solitary mind the *esse* of things which we afterwards regard as belonging to the external world is identical with their *percipi*, or if we prefer to translate this jargon into English, that their very existence is constituted by the fact of being perceived. Not that the solitary mind is capable of consciously making such an identification. For in order to make an identification of the two terms their difference must first have been realized. And the mind has not so far realized the difference. The differentiation of *esse* and *percipi* results from holding the beliefs that what is perceived persists in existence when we are not perceiving it, and that it exists for other minds. But neither of these insights has as yet dawned upon the solitary mind. Both are constructions which belong to a later stage of knowledge. Hence the identity of existence

with being perceived is for the solitary mind primary and implicit.

I am afraid we cannot escape being dragged by these statements into the arena of the famous idealism versus realism controversy. Our final attitude to that controversy cannot be defined at this stage of our inquiry. But certain preliminary conclusions may be reached. The question, however, presents itself to us in a somewhat different form to that in which it is usually agitated by idealists and realists. They ask whether the completed 'thing', the chair, the table, or what not, is real or ideal. But for us the 'thing' is a mental construction still to be reached in the future. We have before us no completed objects but only the fitting presentations of the solitary mind. And the question for us is concerning the status of these original data of the mind. And it is surely here that the question ought to be asked, here in the factory of the mind where the raw materials of what is to become the external world are on view, not later when that complicated product, the object, has been constructed.

I will first endeavour to state in a brief form the preliminary conclusions which I shall reach in this chapter, and I will then discuss and defend them. The conclusions which I shall reach in this chapter are the following:

(1) The solitary mind, or in other words the mind of every one of us when stripped of all the knowledge it has acquired, is confronted with a phantasmagoria of private presentations. It cannot be aware that these presentations continue to exist when it is not perceiving them. This knowledge is not a datum, and is impossible until the solitary mind gets into touch with other minds and begins in collaboration with them to construct a common or public world.

(2) The solitary mind, further, cannot be aware of any distinction between the *esse* and the *percipi* of its presentations. It cannot, for example, draw any distinction between 'blue' and 'awareness of blue'. This distinction is not a datum, but a later construction.

(3) The solitary mind cannot be aware of the existence of any permanent object beyond or behind the presentations. For example, when a penny is rotated in a certain way, it appears circular at one angle, then becomes more and more elliptical, and lastly appears as a narrow rectangular band. The solitary mind is aware of these various presentations or 'sensa', as they have been called, but not of the one unchanging 'real' penny which is supposed to lie behind them or in them. Such knowledge of permanent objects is not a datum but a later construction.

(4) Later knowledge of all the points referred to in the last three paragraphs is a *result* of the construction of a common world by a society of minds. One of the first steps in this construction consists in inventing the fiction that a presentation can persist in existence when it is not being perceived. We shall see in the sequel why and how this assumption is made, and we shall see that it is no unusual procedure for the mind to invent fictions of this kind, but that it is of a piece with the whole procedure of knowledge and science. For the moment our point is that as soon as this assumption of the continued persistence of presentations after perception of them has ceased has been made, it then becomes necessary to distinguish between *esse* and *percipi*, since it is clear that the *esse* of an unperceived presentation cannot consist in its *percipi*. This distinction once made is afterwards extended from unperceived presentations to perceived ones, so that we have *now* come to think even when we are looking at a blue patch that the 'blue' is something different from the 'awareness of blue'.

(5) To the question whether the presentation is 'mental' or 'non-mental' we shall reply that this question is itself meaningless, and that the dispute which is supposed to centre round it is a mere quarrel over words.

(6) It may be asked whether the presentation is dependent or independent on *perception*. I shall answer that the only sense in which a presentation can be independent of perception is when it exists unperceived. But an unperceived presentation, for example a green colour when

no one is looking at it, is not a datum, and is unknown to the solitary mind. It is a later construction. In the pure presentation as such the *esse* is identical with the *percipi*. In this identity there is no room either for the relation of dependence or for that of independence.

(7) It may be asked whether the presentation is dependent or independent on *mind*. The presentation is part of the passive not-I, and is therefore distinct from the mind, which consists in the activities of thought, attention, &c. Since they are not identical, relations of dependence or independence might possibly exist. But dependence may mean either causal dependence, or logical dependence, or the dependence of part on whole in the part-whole relation. There is no reason to regard presentations as caused by the mind, and their logical dependence cannot be satisfactorily established. And to ask whether the presentation is part of the mind would appear to have no meaning. It is identical with the question whether the presentation is 'mental', a question which has already been declared meaningless.

I would preface my detailed observations under these heads with the general remark that it is impossible to establish our position firmly until, in the next chapter, we have shown in detail how the mind constructs a public world. If we can show that, starting from a world in which there is no distinction between *esse* and *percipi*, the mind must necessarily construct a world in which that distinction exists, and if we can also show in what manner it is reasonable to suppose that this construction has occurred, this will render antecedently probable our present conclusions about the nature of the world before that construction takes place. Thus it is hoped that the conclusions of the present chapter and those of the next chapter will mutually reflect light upon one another.

Our first position is one which has already been explained, and is merely repeated here in order to give a complete list of our preliminary conclusions. The solitary mind has no reason to think that its presentations exist

when they are not perceived by it. When the green book is passed before the eyes, and then taken away, the disappearance of the green patch will be for the solitary mind its ceasing to exist. Even when the green book is again placed before the eyes, the mind will have no reason to think that the green patch has continued in existence in the interval between its two appearances. The natural and obvious explanation of the facts will be that there have been two different green patches, alike no doubt in colour and shape, but none the less not identical, and that in the blank interval between the two appearances there had been no green patch in existence. The identification of the two appearances as the 'same', and the supposition that the existence of this one thing was continuous between them, is a position which is certainly not self-evident, and cannot be a datum for the mind in its original contact with the world. It is a position which must have been in some way 'arrived at' after starting from the beginning. We shall find that, as it cannot be regarded as an inference from any datum, it must be considered a construction.

It is only when two or more minds meet and begin to compare notes that they will enter upon this construction together. The first glimpse of it begins to appear when we find that another mind continues to perceive the green patch after we ourselves have ceased to do so. How do we know that any object exists when we are not perceiving it? Surely the first step towards this knowledge is obviously taken when we make the discovery that some other mind was perceiving that object while we ourselves were not. The detailed steps of this development will be set out in the next chapter. But this much I have anticipated in order to make clearer the view here adopted that the solitary mind could have no reason to believe in the continued existence of its presentations after perception of them has ceased. It only begins to have reason for doing so when it attempts to establish, along with other minds, a public external world.

Any other view seems to me quite impossible. I, as a sophisticated mind, believe that the green patch goes on

existing when I am not perceiving it. This belief must be either a datum, or an inference, or a mental construction. It is clearly not an inference, for there is nothing from which it could be validly inferred. From the existence of a green patch *now* (which I know because I see it) I cannot possibly infer the existence of the green patch yesterday or to-morrow. Such an argument would be a simple *non sequitur*, a fallacy into which no one could fall who clearly understood the steps, or rather lack of steps, of the argument.

My view, therefore, is that the belief is a construction. The only other possible alternative is that it is a datum. If it is asserted that this belief could be known to the solitary mind, i.e. to the mind before any construction takes place, this can only mean that the belief is a datum. It must be supposed that the mind in some way *directly perceives* that the presentation goes on existing when no one is perceiving it. This, however, is an absurdity. The green patch appears to me, and then disappears. At which moment is it that I perceive that it goes on existing after it has disappeared? Do I perceive this while it is still appearing to me? If so, this means that I *now* directly perceive the *future*, i.e. that I perceive what is not there to be perceived. Or do I perceive it after the green patch has disappeared? This means that while no green patch is appearing to me I yet perceive the existence of the green patch. Whichever alternative you choose will be equally absurd. The whole position that the belief which we are discussing is a datum is affected by a contradiction. For it implies that it is possible to perceive an existence which is by hypothesis unperceived.

We must conclude, then, that our belief in unperceived existence is not a datum, is not an inference, and must be a mental construction. It does not belong to the aboriginal state of the mind. It was not 'always there'. It has somehow been arrived at. It was unknown to the solitary mind.

Our second position is that for the solitary mind the *esse* of a presentation is its *percipi*, and that such a mind

could not be aware of the distinction between *esse* and *percipi*. This means, of course, that even for us the pure presentation, if we strip it of all the accretions with which thought has enriched it, if we strip it of all that has been acquired during the development of mind, does not contain within itself the distinction which we are discussing. It means that even for us there is no distinction between 'blue' and 'awareness of blue', except such distinction as we ourselves have introduced by means of our mental constructions. It means, in fine, that the distinction is not given, nor immediately perceived, and cannot be explained as the object of a 'primitive belief'.

Prima facie this follows from our previous position that the solitary mind cannot know that its presentations continue in existence when not perceived. For such a mind *esse* and *percipi* are simultaneous and coterminous. The existence of the presentation begins at the moment its perception begins. And existence and perception also end at the same moment. So that existence and perception are like two straight lines the two ends of which coincide. Two such lines are identical and there is no distinction between them. And *esse* and *percipi* are likewise identical and without distinction. There is no existence without being perceived and no being perceived without existence. *Esse* and *percipi* completely coincide, and why then should the mind distinguish between them? It is different for us as sophisticated minds. For us *esse* and *percipi* do *not* coincide, since we believe that our presentations continue existing unperceived, and it is precisely because of this discrepancy that we are compelled to distinguish between the two. We have come to believe that things exist when no one is perceiving them. But obviously such an existence, which lies altogether outside perception, cannot be the same as being perceived. If my office desk exists during the night when no one is conscious of it, its *esse* cannot at *that* time be its *percipi*, since it has no *percipi*. We therefore have a reason for distinguishing *esse* from *percipi*. But the solitary mind has no reason whatever to do so. When it says 'This green patch exists', it can mean

nothing except 'This green patch is being perceived by me'. The two expressions will have *for it* no difference of meaning.

If this is not admitted then we shall have to suppose that the distinction between *esse* and *percipi* exists intrinsically and primordially in the presentation itself, that the distinction is *given* from the beginning. For it must be either given, inferred, or constructed. It is generally admitted that it cannot be inferred. For from what could it be inferred? My view is that it is a construction. But if we do not admit this, we must suppose that it is given. And in that case our knowledge of it must be a direct perception. In other words it must be possible to look at the green patch and distinguish its *esse* from its *percipi* just as one may by simple inspection distinguish its shape from its colour.

But nothing can be plainer than that no such 'existence' can be perceived. When I look at the green patch, what do I perceive about it? I can perceive that it is green, that it has a certain shape, possibly that it moves or changes in some other way. These are characters which I actually *see*. But apart from these can I *see* its existence? Can I perceive an existence which is distinct from its greenness, its motion, its shape, its other visible qualities? Such an existence is a pure abstraction. It may be for some purposes a legitimate abstraction. But as an abstraction it cannot be perceptible to the senses, it cannot be given.

A number of arguments have been urged against the view here adopted. It has been widely asserted that in the experience of 'awareness of green' we distinguish between the awareness and the green. The awareness is an activity of our minds. It is 'mental'. The green is not.

It is quite true that we do make this distinction between our awareness and that of which we are aware. But in my view this distinction is itself the result of the mental construction of the external world. Because the belief that there is an external world independent of mind, and that this external world is composed of independent objects which are green, hard, spatial, and so on, is ingrained in

us, has become part of our very blood, we think of green as something distinct from our awareness of it. I do not assert that to think this is erroneous. On the contrary I shall assert that it is true. But this is because truth itself is largely composed of mental constructions. The view that the distinction which we are discussing is a mental construction does not imply that it is false. But if it is asserted that the distinction exists apart from mental construction, that it is primordial and essential to consciousness as such, then this assertion is false. For it is equivalent to the view that the distinction is given. And we have seen that it cannot be given.

If we can in imagination withdraw ourselves back into the world of the solitary mind, if we can think of ourselves as each, where he must have logically started, shut up within his own private world, we shall see that in such a world no distinction between green and awareness of green could ever have arisen. It has evidently arisen as a result of the belief that green goes on existing when I do not perceive it. Because I believe that the green tree is there when no one is looking at it, I am compelled to think that the green tree is not the same as my awareness of it. But I came to believe that it goes on existing when I am not aware of it as a result of a train of thinking the details of which will be explained in the next chapter. One of the first steps in this train of thinking is the discovery that other minds are seeing the tree when I am not. Because *you* see it while I am asleep I am forced to the view that it exists when I do not perceive it. This is one of the first steps in the building up of the construction of an independent existence. This construct is therefore dependent upon my awareness of the existence of other minds. But the solitary mind in its private world is not aware of the existence of other minds. And therefore it cannot be aware of the independence of its objects, or of the distinction between green and awareness of green which that independence implies. In other words the distinction is not intrinsic to the presentation as such.

Realist writers on this point seem to put the cart before

the horse. They think that the independence or 'non-mental' character (whatever that may mean) of the object can be deduced from the existence of the distinction between green and the awareness of green. The truth is that this distinction is made as a result of the mental construction of the independence of the object. We first construct that independence, and then argue 'Because green is to be regarded as existing apart from, and therefore independently of, my awareness, therefore the green and the awareness must be thought of as distinct from one another'. Consequently it is illicit thereafter to deduce the independence of the object from the existence of the distinction, a proceeding which is nevertheless a hot favourite among realists.

Those who think that the distinction is not constructed, but primordial or given, may urge in favour of their view that the awareness is an *activity* of the mind, whereas the green of which we are aware is a pure passivity. I think the former of these two statements is mistaken. Pure awareness is not an activity. The mind, when it is active, *does* something to the object. For example, the acts of abstraction and conception—genuine mental acts these—alter the object by cutting away a part of it and considering only the other part. The act of comparison between two objects involves distinguishing between them while at the same time linking them together. The act of attention *selects*. But pure awareness as such appears to me to be wholly lacking in activity. It is purely passive. That is why, if you stare blankly at one object for a long time, eschewing thought, and avoiding the activity involved in shifting the attention backwards and forwards from one point to another, you will rapidly become unconscious. Pure awareness, without any of the characteristic activities of mind added to it, is equivalent to unawareness, unconsciousness. It is, of course, an abstraction similar to pure sensation. It cannot exist by itself. So that just because the mind when it approaches to pure awareness ceases to be active, it at the same time ceases to be conscious. For the essence of mind, the essence of the 'mental', is activity.

The impression that awareness is an activity which can therefore be distinguished from that of which the mind is aware is probably the result of confusing attention with awareness. In all ordinary sense perception we select our object and concentrate attention on it. Hence awareness is always accompanied by attention. If the attention wholly ceased it is probable that the mind would lapse into unconsciousness at once. Attention is a mental activity. Hence the confusion to which I have referred is not an unnatural one. When we introspectively examine any particular piece of awareness we invariably find the mind active in it. We *feel* this activity within ourselves very strongly. We fail to see that this is not the activity of awareness, but of the attention which always accompanies it. And we are therefore apt to dismiss as absurd the suggestion that awareness is not a mental activity. To this confusion I attribute the famous assertion of the realists that the distinction between green and awareness of green is intrinsic and primordial.

No doubt it follows from the position which I am here adopting that awareness is not a part of mind at all, but is in some way 'non-mental', which will no doubt appear at first as a curious result. Nevertheless I accept it, except that I am of opinion that the adjective 'non-mental' is misleading and inappropriate. As has already been pointed out, the mind distinguishes between itself as active in attention, conception, abstraction, inference, and thought generally, and on the other side the pure passivity of the presentation. This is the only real basis for any distinction between the I and the not-I, the 'mental' and the 'non-mental'. Now if we say that the awareness of the presentation *is* the presentation, that there is no intrinsic distinction between green and awareness of green, then of course it follows that the awareness (which is only another word for the presentation itself) is part of the not-I, is 'non-mental'.

Thus our point of view agrees with realism to this extent, that it abolishes any intermediary 'idea' between the mind and its object. The mind, for us as for the

realists, sees its object, or rather sees its presentation, direct. It stands face to face with it. And this is a profoundly important point of contact.

No doubt it appears strange to speak of an awareness as if it were not part of the mind at all, but rather of the external world. But the reader has perhaps by now forgotten that it is not *we* who speak thus, but rather the solitary mind. For *us*, sophisticated as we are, there *is* a distinction between awareness and that of which we are aware. And when, as a result of our mental construction of an independent external world, we have made that distinction, we then begin to regard that of which we are aware, the presentation, as belonging to the independent world, and the awareness as belonging to us, to our consciousness. That has become our natural point of view. And bearing in mind that, since 'truth' includes not only the aboriginal given but also all that has been added on to it by means of legitimate mental constructions, it will be seen that it is the 'true' point of view. And it is therefore natural that when we penetrate back into the dim pre-history of the mind, when we speak from the point of view of the solitary mind as we are now doing, there should result turns of expression, modes of viewing things, which are apt to strike *us* now, as sophisticated minds, with a kind of shock owing to their essential strangeness. It is thus that we experience a sense of strangeness when we hear that for the solitary mind awareness is not a part of consciousness, but of the not-I.

That the distinction between the awareness and the presentation itself is not made by the solitary mind, is not aboriginal, but is dependent on the discovery of other minds and the subsequent construction of a *public* world, is borne out by a circumstance to which attention has been pointedly drawn by those very writers who differ from our view. It has been pointed out that in the case of visual presentations we very easily make the distinction between the awareness and that of which we are aware; but that in the case of bodily sensations such as headache we do not make this distinction. We think that there is a green

object as well as an awareness of green. But we do not ordinarily conceive that there is a 'headachy object' as well as a feeling of headache.¹ This difference between sight and bodily sensation has been found inexplicable by those writers who have pointed it out. But it is precisely what we should expect from the point of view here advocated. For the world of sight is a public world, the world of headaches and other bodily sensations a private world. You and I believe that we both see the same green object. But we never suppose that we feel the same identical headache. Hence the world of sight comes to be regarded as an independent world which, because you are aware of it even when I am not, does not depend for its existence on *my* being aware of it. Therefore in the case of sight we distinguish green from our awareness of green. We are compelled to do so by the fact that the green which is supposed to exist when I am not aware of it must clearly be different from my awareness. This distinction then extends itself from the green of which I am not aware to the green of which I am aware. Here too I begin to suppose that there must be a distinction between the green and the awareness of the green. So in the visual world the distinction becomes universally established and taken for granted. But in the world of bodily sensations no such necessity is felt, and no such distinction established, because I never suppose that you feel the same headache as I do, much less that you feel it when I am not aware of it. Thus the difference between the visual world and the world of headaches in this respect is exactly what we should expect if, as our theory holds, the distinction between a presentation and our awareness of it is not intrinsic or primordial, but is a product of our construction of a public world.

It is also argued that we have a 'primitive faith', an 'instinctive belief', in the existence of an independent external world, and therefore in the reality of the distinction between *esse* and *percipi*. This is also sometimes called an 'animal faith'. In some form or other, explicit or tacit,

¹ See C. D. Broad's *Scientific Thought*, p. 254 et seq.

it seems to be relied on by most realists. And necessarily so. They are compelled to rely on some such weak shift. For they have to admit that the existence of an independent external world cannot be proved, i.e. that it is not a valid inference from our presentations. The various appearances of the penny as I rotate it are the only existences of which we have *direct* evidence. That these appearances go on existing after we cease to perceive them, or that they existed before we began to perceive them, can never be proved. That there exists behind the varying appearances a single unchanging 'real' penny can also never be proved. It is admitted on all hands that this is so, and that any supposed inferences to these beliefs would be fallacious. The obvious conclusion is that these beliefs are mental constructions. But as this would destroy the preconceived notions of realism, it is alleged instead that we know of the existence of the independent world by means of a 'primitive belief' or by 'faith'. Thus Dr. Broad says: 'The belief that our *sensa* are appearances of something more permanent and complex than themselves seems to be primitive, and to arise inevitably in us with the arising of the *sensa*. It is not reached by inference, and could not logically be justified by inference.'¹

Such an attitude is contrary to the rationalism, the determination to follow whither reason leads us *to the end*, to take philosophy seriously, which we in this book have adopted as our ideal. Philosophy cannot, in my opinion, accept as gospel the deliverances of primitive instinctive belief any more than it can accept the mysterious unmediated revelations of the mystic. And a 'primitive instinctive belief' is, I venture to assert, no more than a euphemism for an obstinate prejudice. We believe that there is an independent world. Granted. Is this true, and why? 'Because we have a primitive belief in it', say these philosophers. But this is only saying over again that we believe it, which we knew before. We believe it because we believe it. This is a poor position for a philosopher to take up!

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 268.

By a 'primitive belief' is meant, I presume, simply a belief which people have held for a very long time. It may have been accepted by our semi-human ancestors of a million years ago. It may have so ingrained itself into our race that a tendency to believe it has become hereditary, and has only to be awakened in each new individual by the faintest suggestions from his fellows. For it is by no means certain that we have not 'innate ideas' at least to the extent that we have inherited through hundreds of thousands of years certain *tendencies* of thought and feeling. Even though our belief in an independent world is of this kind, it does not follow that we ought to accept that fact as its sufficient justification. We might be compelled to accept on nearly similar grounds as a 'primitive belief' the view that the earth is a flat disk.

Not, of course, that we dispute the truth of the belief in an independent external world. Nor do we dispute that, as a matter of psychological fact, that belief may have become in the course of long ages practically instinctive. But it is utterly absurd to give this as the *logical* origin of the belief, or as its justification. Our point of view would appear more reasonable and philosophical. It is that as the belief in question admittedly cannot be an inference from our direct experience, it must be a mental construction. It is 'true', because, as will be proved later, truth includes mental constructions. To explain it as a 'primitive belief' is merely to give it the status of an unaccountable prejudice. I am prepared to give it a better justification than that, and to exhibit it as part of a rational scheme of knowledge founded on mental constructions which are legitimate because governed by rational laws. This point of view has, of course, to be developed and justified in the rest of this book.

The assertion that our belief in an independent world 'arises inevitably in us with the arising of the *sensa*' seems to be quite unjustified. Either it means that the belief is held by people without proper ground, as a prejudice—a statement which may be psychologically true, but is philosophically worthless. Or it means that the

belief is 'inevitable' in the sense that it is a 'necessary' truth like the axioms of geometry. But no one is likely to assert this view seriously in an age which scouts the former supposed necessity of the axioms of either Euclid or any other geometer, and which finds it difficult to accept belief in even logical necessity.

The assertion that the belief 'arises in us with the arising of the *sensa*' must mean, if it means anything, that the independence of the object is *given*, that it is directly perceived by the senses. But we have already seen clearly that this is false.

Finally our view has to meet the following argument. If green and the awareness of green are the same thing, then since awareness of green is a mental state, green must be a mental state. In that case what is green is the state of mind itself. Hence the awareness of green must be a green state of mind. The perception of a square must be a square state of mind, and so on. This, it is supposed, will embarrass us very much. For to speak of the mind itself, or of its contents, as green, square, &c., would seem to smack of materialism—indeed to commit us to a wholly materialistic view of the mind.

In reply we may point back to what has already been said on the supposed 'mental' character of our awareness of presentations. For the solitary mind the awareness is *not* mental, for no awareness of green exists apart from the green itself. The awareness is only distinguished from the green, set up as an entity on its own account, and classed as 'mental' *after*, and as a result of, the construction of a public external world. Before that construction has been made, the awareness is not a mental state. It is identical with the presentation, which is itself not a mental state, but a part of the not-I. (We shall see this more clearly when we discuss a little later in this chapter the supposed 'mental' character of the presentation.) Therefore the argument that our point of view implies the existence of a green state of mind falls to the ground. After the construction has been made, on the other hand, the distinction between the awareness and that of which it is aware comes

into being, and therefore once more the argument does not arise.

Our third and fourth positions are that the solitary mind cannot be aware of the existence of any permanent object beyond or behind the presentations, and that our belief in such objects, as also our belief in the existence of unperceived presentations and in the distinction between *esse* and *percipi*, are later mental constructions. These views have been fairly well explicated in the course of our discussion already, and it is unnecessary to say much more here. They cannot, of course, be fully established until we have shown in the next chapter how these mental constructions come to be made. But in the meanwhile we may recapitulate their essential foundations briefly as follows. It is clear that what the mind is immediately aware of is the presentations or *sensa*, and *nothing else*. It cannot perceive the supposed permanent 'real' objects which these are believed to represent. Nor can it perceive presentations existing unperceived. This is the absolute foundation of our position. The next step consists in the realization that from these immediately perceived data no logical inference of any kind can be drawn as to the existence of unperceived presentations or 'real' objects. I think this is admitted by all competent philosophers of all schools. Nor can one even suggest what kind of inference could possibly be put forward as fulfilling the necessary conditions. Therefore unless one is prepared to rely on a mysterious 'primitive belief' or 'animal faith' one is compelled to conclude that our beliefs on these subjects must have been constructed by the mind itself. Reliance on 'primitive beliefs' is totally irrational and incomprehensible, and is a mere 'chucking up the sponge' on the part of philosophy. Hence we must explore the path which seems to be opened up by the suggestion that our beliefs on these matters are mental constructions.

Our next position concerns the question whether presentations are 'mental' or not. The adjective seems to me

wholly inappropriate, and it is my conviction that those who discuss the question are not themselves clear as to what they mean by the word mental. For what can be meant by either asserting or denying that a green patch is mental?

There are apparently two possible meanings which might be attached to such language. Firstly, we have seen that the mind distinguishes its own activities from what it passively suffers, and that the activities constitute the I, the passivities the not-I. This distinction, which is made even by the solitary mind, is the only true distinction between 'mental' and 'non-mental', and in this sense it is quite clear that the green colour or other presentation is non-mental. And this is, I believe, the only intelligible sense in which the question can be asked and answered.

But this does not appear to be quite what is meant by those who agitate the problem. If they urge that the presentation is mental they appear to mean that it has that quality which causes the images of dream, hallucination, or delirium, to be regarded as mental or 'subjective'. And in distinguishing the mental from the non-mental they apparently have at the back of their minds the difference between dreams and veridical perception. A dream is a series of private presentations. The world of veridical perception is a world of common or shared presentations. The dream is popularly supposed to be in some way a 'mental' phenomenon, whereas the real world is regarded as 'non-mental'.

Now the essential differences between the presentations of dream and of veridical perception are that the former are private and in some ways lawless, while the latter are shared in common by many minds and are subject to the general laws of physics. In other words the differences are extrinsic to the presentations themselves. They consist in the relations of the presentations to each other and to other things outside themselves. There are no intrinsic differences. The dream-images cannot be discriminated because of their paler or less vivid appearance. We only know them as dreams when we cannot fit them into the common

world shared by us and by other conscious beings. It follows that when people speak of dreams as in some special way mental they must be referring to their character as private. It does not appear to be their character as lawless which is important here. For that is very much less obvious to the plain man than is their private nature. And one is led to the conclusion that 'mental', when applied to dreams and other non-veridical perceptions, really means nothing more than private, as distinguished from shared.

If mental means nothing beyond private then of course the presentations of the solitary mind are mental. But for my part I protest that this language is misleading and erroneous, and that the doctrine of the 'mental' character of our presentations is meaningless.

The mistake begins when we call dreams mental. Since there is no intrinsic difference between dream-images and those of veridical perception, therefore both are mental or else neither are. But this is not realized. The habit of calling dreams mental has sprung up because it is falsely supposed by the unphilosophical that there *is* some intrinsic difference between dreams and veridical perception. The presentations of veridical perception are (quite rightly) classed as 'real' or as belonging to the physical world. Those of dream are classed (quite rightly) as 'unreal' and as excluded from the physical world. The unreal then becomes confused with the totally different conception of 'error'. And as error is undoubtedly in some way peculiar to mind, and produced by mind, the unreal entities of the dream are then classed as mental. This seems to be something like the psychological history of the erroneous usage by which dreams are classed as mental while veridical percepts are classed as non-mental, whereas it is clear that in respect of being mental or otherwise they both stand on exactly the same footing.

The popular error then gets transferred from vulgar thought into philosophy. Since dreams are supposed to be mental, and since their essential distinctive character is really their privacy, hence the same word 'mental' gets attached to any presentation which is private, and there-

fore to the pure presentation as such, or, as we have called it, the presentation of the solitary mind. The presentations of every mind at the beginning, before that mind enters upon, and takes its part in, the public world, must be private. And therefore, according to the erroneous usage which we are reviewing, they must be mental. And since all presentations, even those of veridical perception, are ultimately, when isolated and taken out of their context in the public world, private to each individual, therefore all presentations may come to be represented as mental.

This confusion has, of course, been powerfully helped along by Berkeley's misuse of the word 'idea'. This word, for him, covered presentations. The word as properly understood refers to thoughts or activities of the ego of some kind. Hence if you call a presentation an idea, you tacitly imply that it is of the nature of thought, of the nature of the I, and so mental. This is of course the very opposite of the truth, since the presentation is essentially passive and belongs to the not-I. And it is probable enough that Berkeley was himself misled into this confusion by that same popular error as to the difference between dreams and veridical perception which we have just discussed.

Thus the discussion whether presentations are mental or non-mental, as this discussion is usually conducted, is simply meaningless. I see a green patch. I say that it is green, that it is circular, that it is increasing in size, that it is moving from left to right. All these terms mean something. But now if you inquire whether the green patch is mental, what do your words mean? When you are pressed as to what you mean, you will have to say one of two things. Either you mean by calling it mental that it belongs to the activities of the I, and not to the passivities of the not-I, in which case what you are saying is manifestly untrue. Or you mean that it is private as distinguished from common or public, in which case you are merely using the word 'mental' in a stupidly erroneous sense.

It is equally meaningless to inquire whether the green

patch is 'inside the mind' or 'outside' it. One can see that an object which exists unperceived might be metaphorically described as outside the mind. This is no more than a metaphor, but is unobjectionable as such. But to discuss whether the pure presentation as such, when it is being perceived, is inside or outside the mind, seems to me, so far as I can judge, the same as discussing whether it is mental or non-mental. The discussion takes for granted a distinction in kind between the presentations of veridical perception and those of dream, and supposes that the former may be outside the mind and non-mental, while the latter are inside it and mental. The one thing that is clear, however, is that the two stand on precisely the same footing. If the green patch which I see in veridical perception is outside my mind, then so is the green patch of my dream. If the green patch of my dream is inside my mind, then so is the green patch of veridical perception. The whole discussion rests on the false distinction between the supposed mental character of dreams and hallucinations and the supposed extra-mental character of veridical perception. When once it is seen that this distinction is illusory, that the difference between dreams and 'real' presentations is extrinsic, consisting in their relations with their contexts, and not intrinsic, then it must also be seen that the whole discussion is meaningless.

Our last two positions refer to the question of 'independence', and may be quite shortly expounded. The *esse* of the pure presentation is neither dependent nor independent on its *percipi*. The relations of dependence and independence involve the presence of two distinct terms to be related. But the *esse* and the *percipi* of the green patch as it exists for the solitary mind are not two things, but one. They are identical. Automobiles are not dependent on motor-cars. Nor is Jack dependent on John. Where there is identity, there is no room for relations of dependence or independence.

But this cannot be said of the relation between *esse* and mind or knowledge generally. My mind consists in my

thoughts and mental activities. It is the I. The presentation is part of the not-I, and is clearly not identical with the I. And it may therefore be asked whether the presentation is dependent, or independent, on mind. This question may have several meanings.

The questioner may be referring to *causal* dependence. If so, the plain answer to the question is that there is no ground whatever for asserting that presentations are caused by minds. The causes of a presentation seem to be always previous presentations, or at least the causes seem always to fall within the not-I. The cause of the sound of thunder is not my mind, but is the lightning. Neither my will nor my thinking has anything to do with it so far as can be seen. I cannot by willing cause a green patch to appear or to disappear. Nor will any act of thinking, inferring, conceiving, or abstracting influence the matter.

Some philosophers have asserted that the world of the not-I is in some way a *logical* consequent of mind. But mind is in that case usually thought of in a transcendental sense, as referring to a universal or cosmic mind. Discussions of such transcendental questions lie quite outside the scope and the spirit of our inquiries here. But I may hazard the remark—and it seems fair to say—that the logical dependence of presentations on mind has never been satisfactorily established.

Dependence may also mean the dependence of part on whole. To assert that presentations are dependent on minds in this sense would mean apparently that they are parts of minds. The application in a literal sense of the part-whole relation to minds seems inappropriate. But, if it is not taken in its literal sense, it seems to me that the assertion that a green patch is part of my mind can only be another way of alleging that it is 'mental'. And this view has already been discussed.

Hence I do not see any relevant sense in which it can be said that presentations are dependent on minds.

I shall only use the concept of independence in one reference. I shall call the public external world of objects 'independent', and I have already indeed made use of this

language. I have spoken of the 'independent' external world. For that world is conceived as having existed before my mind, or any particular minds, came into existence, and in general as existing whether any minds are aware of it or not. This character I shall call its independence. That *this independence on mind is itself a construction of mind* is, of course, of the essence of our philosophy. But that need not deter us from the use of the word independence in the reference explained.

Finally, it has to be understood that *esse* and *percipi*, even when for the sophisticated mind they are not identical, are always correlative. It will be a part of our thesis that no existence can be conceived except in terms of actual or possible perception. The *esse* of the presentation while it is being perceived *is* its *percipi*. The *esse* of the office table in the dark night when no one is aware of it, though it is not perceived, yet has to be thought of *as if* it were perceived. If the reader is pleased to call this invariable correlation between existence and perception a dependence of one on the other I have no objection. It is a matter of words only. Personally, though I shall speak of the independent external world in the sense explained in the last paragraph, I shall not otherwise use the concepts of dependence and independence, having, in fact, no use for them.