

CHAPTER VIII

THE DISCOVERY OF OTHER MINDS

THE word discovery is used advisedly in the chapter heading. For other minds are *found* existing. They are not invented or constructed by my mind. Their existence is factual, not constructive. To this point, which is of fundamental importance in the theory, I shall return at the end of this chapter.

One point which emerged very clearly from our past discussion was that our belief in the existence of a public independent external world depends absolutely on our belief in the existence of other minds. The former belief would be impossible unless we had first acquired the latter. The external world is a social product. The solitary mind, unaware of the existence of minds other than itself, is a mind necessarily confined to a world of private phantasms. But it suited the convenience of exposition to take up first for investigation that belief which is really second in logical order, namely, belief in an external world. We had therefore to take the discovery of other minds for granted. We assumed that it somehow takes place, promising to explain *how* it takes place on a later page. The time to redeem our promise has now come. And the problem which we have to solve is this: how does the solitary mind become aware of the existence of other minds?

Let me say at once that, though I hope to exhibit this topic in something of a new light, I have no essentially novel theory to put forward. For the number of possible views is very limited, and they are well known. They reduce themselves in fact to two main types, both of which have been well represented in philosophical literature, though both admit, of course, of variations of detail in the manner of their presentment. The two possible types of theory are the following. It may be thought either (1) that we have direct and immediate knowledge of other minds, or (2) that our knowledge of them is indirect, being an inference based upon the bodily behaviour of the

organisms to which we attribute minds. This latter view may be briefly put thus. I feel my own anger. I am directly aware of my own volitions. I am conscious of my own perceptions. But I cannot feel your anger, see your volitions, or perceive your percepts. I cannot see your red, or feel your anger, any more than I can feel the pain in your leg when it is cut off. I am thus not directly aware of your mind or its contents. I am only directly aware of the existence of your body and its behaviour. I perceive these with my senses, and I infer from them both the existence of your mind and the nature of its particular states. I see your face flush and your brows frown. I infer that this bodily behaviour is probably caused by the fact that you are a conscious being like myself, and that you are angry. I see you smile and conclude that you are pleased. I see you avoid a snake on the path. I explain this behaviour by the assumption that you perceived the snake. I infer generally that the actions of your body are due to your being a conscious mind, and that they are not the result of clockwork or other blind mechanism.

This second type of view is that which was almost universally held by philosophers until a comparatively recent date. The first theory, that of direct awareness, has grown up as a reaction against it, and is now held, in one form or another, by Professor Alexander, Professor C. C. J. Webb, Professor A. E. Taylor, and others.

Before discussing the details of the question at issue I must point out that it makes no essential difference to our theory of knowledge and existence which of the two views is adopted. All that is essential to our theory is to believe that other minds do actually exist, and that we do, in one way or another, come to attain a knowledge of them and enter into communication with them. Provided this is allowed, the construction of the external world as outlined in Chapter VI becomes possible. So long as the solitary mind *somehow* succeeds in getting into communication with other minds, it and they can then co-operate in building up the external world in the manner there described. Now it is admitted by the partisans of both the rival

theories on this subject that other minds do exist, that we do come to have knowledge of them, and that we do communicate with them. Strictly speaking, that should be enough for us. However this knowledge is attained, whether directly or by inference, the fact that it *is* attained would be sufficient for our theory of the construction of the external world. We might therefore take this as granted by all philosophical schools and proceed with our investigations on that basis.

Nevertheless it does not seem right to leave the matter in that way. The problem is important for its own sake. Moreover it clearly lies directly in our path. We began with the solitary mind faced with its private world of colour patches, sounds, and the like, self-enclosed amid its private phantasms. We undertook to show how it passes out of that state, how it comes to have knowledge of external things and other minds. To explain by what means we come to acquire knowledge of foreign minds is clearly an integral part of that undertaking, and must not therefore be shirked. I am, however, anxious to make it clear that even if a different view be taken to that which I shall here adopt, this need not affect the rest of our theory of knowledge. That theory does not stand or fall by our solution of this particular problem.

It is true that the theory of inferential knowledge seems to fit in more easily with our philosophy than does that of direct knowledge. For the exponents of the latter view very often deny that our original state was solipsism. Some of them urge that our knowledge of other minds is actually prior to our self-consciousness, or at least prior to any full development of it. And this is out of keeping with a philosophy which, like ours, starts from the solipsism of the solitary mind. Nevertheless the theory of the direct perception of foreign minds is not in itself inconsistent with our philosophy, and could quite easily be combined with it. For the view that our consciousness of others is prior to our self-consciousness is not at all essential to the theory of direct knowledge. It might equally be held by the exponents of that theory that we are first aware of our

own minds, and then reach a direct acquaintance with other minds just as we have a direct acquaintance with sense-data. And such a view would be quite consistent with our philosophy. From the point of view adopted in this book mind begins as solitary. It then becomes aware of other minds and of the parallelism which exists between its own world and theirs. Whether this awareness is direct or inferred, the mind will in either case proceed to enter into communication with other minds and to build up along with them a public external world. Our philosophy does not, therefore, commit us to the adoption of either of the rival views, and we may claim to be quite impartial as between them.

Turning now to the actual problem before us we must point out that the wording in which it is usually presented is ambiguous. How do I know that other minds exist? This may mean (1) what logical reasons have I for believing it, or in other words, how can I prove that it is true? Or it may mean (2) what psychological processes have led me to the belief? Writers on the subject do not as a rule distinguish between the logical and the psychological aspects of the problem, and I cannot help thinking that the recent reaction in favour of the theory of direct knowledge is largely due to confusion of the two points of view.

The theory which bases our knowledge of other minds on an inference by analogy from bodily behaviour is primarily an attempt to solve the logical problem. It tries to show the logical grounds of our belief. And it leaves the question open whether we actually, as a matter of psychology, reach our belief by way of logic, or by some other way such as that of instinct. Yet Professor Alexander criticizes it on the ground that 'it is flatly at variance with the history of our minds',¹ a criticism which is entirely wide of the mark, since it assumes that the argument criticized is concerned with the historical order and psychological origin of our belief. Professor C. C. J.

¹ *Space, Time, and Deity*, vol. ii, p. 31.

Webb, again, in his paper on 'Our Knowledge of One Another', falls into the same confusion. He 'cannot believe' that solipsism is a position 'that any one was really ever in'. And he makes much of the contention that we may be aware of other minds before we become fully aware of our own. It may very well be true that no one was ever a solipsist, and that we know other minds before we know our own (though personally I cannot accept the latter statement). But all this has no bearing at all on the question of the logical foundations of our belief.

If the question at issue is how as a matter of psychological fact we come to believe in the existence of other minds, then there may be many possible alternative replies. For there are many different ways by which differently constituted minds arrive at any given belief. Every one knows that some minds may reach a certain religious tenet by logic, other minds may reach the same belief by way of moral intuition, and yet others by means of some kind of mystic insight. Perhaps we come to believe in the existence of other minds, as Professor Alexander suggests, through the operation of 'social instinct'. Perhaps it is a matter of 'instinctive belief' or 'faith'; or perhaps it is a mystical revelation. A truth of any kind may come to be known in any number of ways. How do I become aware of the truth that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides? I may have come to believe this as a result of my practical experience in measuring land. I may have measured the sides of a great many right-angled triangles, then hit upon the relation of their squares by chance, and finally guessed that what I have found so often to hold true is a universal rule. Or I may, on the other hand, have arrived at a knowledge of this truth by way of authority. My teacher may have told me that the proposition is true, and I may have believed him without understanding any of the reasons. For all I know there may even be a 'geometrical instinct' which teaches some people such truths. We have certainly heard of mathematicians who seem to divine the solutions of their

problems by intuition. But all this has no bearing at all upon the question of the *logical* foundations of the belief, and the problem of how to prove it true. The only answer to that question is the one discovered by Pythagoras. The logical foundation of this truth can only be found by going back to the axioms.

It could make no difference to this if it were shown that historically the truth of the theorem of Pythagoras was known first, and that the axioms on which it depends were discovered afterwards. The truth of the theorem would still logically depend on the axioms. Similarly, even if it be proved that knowledge of other minds is historically prior to consciousness of self, this can make no difference to the contention that our belief in other minds logically depends on analogical inferences from behaviour.

It is difficult to believe that we have any direct apprehension of other minds. If we see a man lying on his bed with glassy eyes, absolutely motionless and with expressionless face, we do not know whether he is alive or dead. We have to ascertain whether he is warm or cold, whether his heart beats, whether he breathes. It may be that he is fully conscious all the while and is pretending to be dead. If we have any power of directly apprehending other minds without regard to their bodily behaviour, how is it that we do not detect the presence of a man's mind in such a case? How is it that we may be deceived and believe that his consciousness has gone out of existence? How is it that we have to examine his body to find out the truth?

I will leave that question to be answered as best it may, and will pass on to other points of view. It is said that we possess direct knowledge of the existence of other minds. What is meant here by the 'existence of minds'? Or more briefly, what is meant by 'minds'?

The object of this question is to clear the ground by getting rid of at least one possible misconception. By the existence of minds in this context we do *not* mean the existence of a transcendental ego, of a spiritual unity, or of a 'thinking substance'. The man in the street believes

that both he and his fellows possess minds. But he has no knowledge of transcendental unities or thinking substances. He has never heard of these matters. Now what we are engaged in trying to find out is not how philosophers arrive at their metaphysical conceptions of the nature of personality. What we are trying to ascertain is how ordinary men and women know that their fellows have minds. The belief in the existence of foreign minds which we are studying is the ordinary everyday belief of plain men. And this has nothing to do with metaphysical theories of personality.

When Smith says that he believes that Jones possesses a mind substantially similar to his own, what is it that he actually means? Not that Jones is a transcendental ego, but simply that Jones thinks, perceives, feels, and wills. The belief in the existence of other minds, which is the subject of our discussion, means then simply the belief that other men—and animals too—have thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and volitions. It is, in short, belief in the empirical content of minds.

It follows that the question whether we can have direct knowledge of other minds means: can we have direct knowledge that other people perceive, feel, will, and think? And I can see no difference between this and the further question: can we directly perceive the thoughts, feelings, volitions, and percepts of other people? And the answer to this question is axiomatic. We cannot. I cannot see your red, feel your pain, or perceive the thought in your mind. My consciousness is absolutely cut off from your consciousness, and there is no view from one to the other. I have already stressed this so much in previous chapters that I need surely not labour it again.

Direct knowledge of other minds must surely mean either knowledge of them as transcendental unities and metaphysical essences or knowledge of their empirical contents. These alternatives are, so far as I know, exhaustive. The former, as we have seen, is not in question; and if it were, no one surely, save a very bemuddled mystic, could possibly assert that we have a direct perception of

other people's transcendental egos. The latter alternative is equally impossible, since no one can assert that we can directly perceive the contents of other minds.

Even telepathy, if it be a proven fact, shows nothing to the contrary. If *A* thinks of the number 5 and *B* thereupon sees the image of the figure 5 rise within his mind, he is still just as far as ever from having direct knowledge of the contents of *A*'s mind. For it is within his own mind that *B* sees it rise, not within *A*'s. And the image of 5 which *B* sees is his own image, not *A*'s. Presumably the receiver of a telepathic message may even be unaware that the idea which he receives has emanated from another mind, and may think that it has arisen spontaneously in his own mind. And apart from all this, will any one allege that our ordinary knowledge that other people have minds is based on telepathy?

But all this, the supporters of the theory of direct knowledge will say, is not what they mean. We have not rightly understood them. They do not mean that we can directly perceive either the metaphysical egos or the empirical contents of other minds. What, then, do they mean?

I cannot be expected in the space at my disposal to ransack the whole literature of the subject in order to ascertain what every supporter of the theory has intended to convey. I shall content myself with a brief examination of the views of the most eminent present-day exponent of the theory, Professor Alexander.

Professor Alexander has carefully guarded himself against being supposed to contend that we have direct knowledge of the actual empirical contents of other minds. Such knowledge, he admits, must be gathered from bodily behaviour.

'I am not aware of *B*'s mind as I am aware of his body, so that I should be able to inspect it and say what it is. Yet experience assures me that he has a mind. What sort of a mind it is, how the other mind feels in a given situation' [this means, I presume, what the empirical content of the mind is], 'I am left to divine sympathetically on the basis largely of analogy with my own. But that a

mind is there, is assurance. It is not invented by inference or analogy, but is an act of faith forced on us by a peculiar sort of experience.¹

The appeal in a philosophical treatise to an 'act of faith' should be sufficient to bring us up with a jolt, and to arouse our suspicions of the whole argument. But of that later.

If I rightly understand the position taken up in this passage, it is this. We cannot be directly aware of the contents of other minds—that would be too absurd to be contended—but we can be directly aware of their bare existence. This implies that we might be aware of the bare existence of a mind while not being aware of any of its qualities, characters, or details.

Now suppose a philosopher were to put forward a parallel assertion regarding a material object. Suppose he said, 'There is present to my consciousness an object. I directly perceive the object. But I cannot perceive its colour, its shape, its size, its texture, its smell, its taste, or any single quality of it. All I can perceive is its bare existence.' Should we not reply that such a statement has no meaning? Bare contentless existence is an abstraction which may perhaps be conceived (although even that is very doubtful), but which certainly cannot be perceived. I am looking at a red pillar-box. I perceive that it is red, cylindrical, upright, hard, and so on. To perceive its existence is only possible by perceiving its qualities. Its existence *is* its qualities. And not to perceive any of the qualities is not to perceive the existence.

Will not exactly the same argument apply to minds? Just as the pillar-box exists only in its redness and other qualities, so the mind exists—apart from transcendental essences—only in its thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and volitions. The existence of the mind *is* the existence of this content. And it would be impossible to perceive the existence without perceiving the content. This is in itself obvious, and is also implied in the point already made by us, namely that the belief in the existence of other minds

¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 37.

with which we are concerned is the belief that other men think, feel, perceive, and will.

If any one doubts this, let him ask himself how he is aware of his own mind. By being aware of his own mind does he not mean simply being aware of his thoughts, feelings, and volitions? And supposing that he ceased to be aware of these, supposing that he ceased to be aware of any mental acts, could he be aware of himself? Would not his state be one of blank unconsciousness of anything, or at any rate a total absence of *self*-consciousness?

It may be alleged, however, that we can have a knowledge of the existence of things without a detailed knowledge of their characters. I know that there exists another side to the moon. But I do not know what colour it is, whether it possesses any mountains, or, if it does, what shape or height they are, or indeed anything in detail about it. I know that there exist many men in China of whose personal characteristics I am totally ignorant.

But this does not touch our point. Knowledge of the kind mentioned is always indirect or inferred. The point is that direct perception of an object must always consist in perception of at least some of its qualities, and that to speak of perceiving a bare existence is meaningless.

It is true, of course, that perception may be of only a few of the characters of the object. In fact this is always the case. I may perceive only the redness and shape of the pillar-box. It actually possesses innumerable qualities which I do not perceive. Perception of a few significant qualities is sufficient for recognition. And if Professor Alexander means that we perceive some very small minimum of the empirical contents of other minds and are thereby assured of their existence, then in that case he can be acquitted of the absurdity of supposing that we perceive the abstraction of a bare contentless existence.

But in the first place it is clear that this is not what he means. I need not argue the point at length. There is no trace of such a view in his pages, and it would, I think, be quite inconsistent with the passage already quoted. And in the second place, if he did mean this, he would

only land himself in fresh difficulties. For then he would be back in the untenable position of arguing that we can directly perceive thoughts, feelings, and volitions in the minds of others. It clearly would not help his case to urge that only a small portion of such mental content is directly perceptible. On what principle could the distinction be made between what can be perceived and what cannot? Where could the line be drawn? And would not the adoption of such a position be similar to that of the lady who excused herself for having an illegitimate baby on the ground that it was only a small one?

Now in point of fact I do not think that Professor Alexander really means any of the untenable things which we have been discussing. It has been necessary to discuss them because it is necessary to eliminate all possible alternatives. We have to consider, not only what Professor Alexander means, but, so far as our space allows, the various possible meanings which might be attached to the doctrine of direct knowledge. And certainly that which interprets it as a species of perception is such a meaning.

But returning to Professor Alexander, let us ask ourselves again what it is that he does mean. The following seems to be a clue. I have so far assumed that his theory asserts the direct *perception* of one mind by another. But as far as I can remember, without too meticulously combing through his pages, he does not use the word 'perception' in this connexion. He always speaks of the direct 'knowledge' of one mind by another. Now knowledge is a very much wider term than perception.

To me it appears that direct knowledge of anything, as distinguished from inferred knowledge, *must* be some kind of perception, and cannot be anything else. Either the thing known is 'there', is immediately *present* to consciousness, in which case the thing is perceived; or it is absent from consciousness, and in that case my knowledge of it must be inferred. Immediate perception of a present object need not in all cases be held to be sensuous. It might be supersensuous, like the mystic's alleged intuition of God. I do not assert that such a thing as a supersensuous

perception actually exists. It certainly is not a common experience, and it may be doubted whether it is not a subjective illusion. But what I do mean to assert is that if such a mystical intuition actually exists, and if it is—as it is usually alleged to be by those who claim to experience it—an actual immediate presence of the object to the mind, then it must be a species of perception. The object must either be present to the mind or absent from it. In the former case we have perception; in the latter case we have inference if we have any knowledge at all.

Perception, however, can only operate by the perceiving of the actual characters of the object. Direct knowledge of an object, therefore, can only consist in direct knowledge of such characters. Even if you refuse to use the word perception, will not the result be the same? How can there be any direct knowledge of an object which is not a direct knowledge of its qualities and characters? How can there be a direct knowledge of bare existence?

For my part I cannot admit or even conceive of any kind of direct knowledge of anything except some kind of sensuous or supersensuous perception. But I think it is possible that Professor Alexander is attempting to conceive of a direct knowledge which is not perception. Let us examine the means by which, according to him, we attain to direct knowledge of other minds. The experience on which that knowledge rests, he says, 'is a very simple and familiar one, the experience of sociality. . . . Our fellow human beings excite in us the social or gregarious instinct, and to feel socially towards another being is to be assured that it is something like ourselves.'¹

Here then we have the solution of the riddle. Our direct knowledge does not rest upon a perception at all, but upon an *instinct*.

In order to attempt an appraisal of this contention we must go back once more to the distinction between the logical and the psychological aspects of the problem. In which sense is it that Professor Alexander purports to be solving the problem? If it is merely the psychological

¹ *Op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 32.

aspect that he has in view, then there may be much to be said for his solution. To say that our belief in the existence of other minds is more or less instinctive and unreflective, and that the instinct is aroused as soon as we mix with our fellows, seems innocuous and may very likely be true. I do not think it could be accepted as a final analysis. For it is still possible to ask how the instinctive belief arose. And it is still possible to argue that it may arise from some subconscious inference similar to that which we employ when we judge the distance of a visual object. That judgement, be it noted, is in essence reasoned, but now appears in the upper levels of consciousness as instinctive.

Waiving that contention for the present, however, I must point out that a solution which relies on instincts is useless for the purposes of a theory of knowledge. Even if our knowledge originated historically in social instinct, this has nothing to do with its logical grounds. It is mere psychology. It throws no light on the logical foundation of our belief in other minds, nor upon the validity of our knowledge of them. For can it possibly be contended that an instinct is a good logical ground for a judgement of the intellect?

It is true that there is at the present day a large body of thought which tends to regard all logic and all reason as a mere cork tossed about on the vast ocean of instinct and desire. Our reasoned beliefs are represented as in reality the outcome of our desires, the rational element in them being merely our excuses for believing as we wish. Why the mind should, if reason has no regulative or compelling force, wish to have any excuses, why it should wish to appear reasonable to itself—that is a question which these thinkers never ask themselves and never answer. If they did, they would perceive the inconsistency of their position. But it is perhaps sufficient for us here to point out that as epistemologists we are concerned to study the validity of knowledge, and that the kind of view which we are discussing can only have as its logical culmination the denial of any validity to knowledge. But I cannot go further into that question here.

It is not clear whether Professor Alexander intends his teaching to be a solution of the logical as well as of the psychological problem. But it is not safe to assume that he does not. And we have therefore to inquire whether it can be said that in the social instinct we can find in any sense a good logical ground for believing in the existence of other minds.

Such a view may have, so far as I can see, two possible meanings. It may mean (1) that the existence of an instinct in an organism is usually proof that the means of satisfying the instinct exists; and that the existence of a social instinct is accordingly good reason for thinking that other minds exist to satisfy it. Or it may mean (2) that the instinct itself *is* knowledge of other minds, rudimentary knowledge perhaps, but real.

I do not think that the first of these two views can be what Professor Alexander intends to teach us. For it is clear that knowledge of other minds gained in this way would not be direct knowledge, but an inference. The major premiss would be the supposed empirical generalization that instincts in men and animals do not occur unless there also exist the means to satisfy them. The minor premiss would point out that we have a social instinct. And the conclusion that other minds exist to satisfy the instinct might be supposed to follow.

As this is clearly a mediate inference, it cannot be what Professor Alexander has in mind when he speaks of our 'direct knowledge' of other minds. And it is, in any case, an argument so weak-kneed and feeble that it would surely not be put forward by a philosopher of repute. The empirical generalization which is the major premiss has never received the detailed investigation and widespread observation which would be necessary to establish even its probability. It is the kind of reasoning put forward by theologians who are hard pressed to find an argument for immortality, and with whom the wish, being father to the thought, prompts empty generalizations of this kind. And even if it were true, would it follow that minds exist? The argument only purports to prove the

existence of whatever will satisfy the instinct, no more. But the social or gregarious instinct would be quite satisfied by warm, soft, moving, speaking, responding, but mindless automata. Hence it would be satisfied without the existence of minds. In any case it will not be seriously contended that our knowledge of the existence of other minds has either its psychological origin or its logical premisses in this weak argument.

I am driven to the conclusion that when Professor Alexander speaks of our direct knowledge arising through social instinct he must mean us to understand, not that we infer our knowledge from the instinct, but that the instinct itself *is* knowledge. It is always a dangerous proceeding to attempt to interpret the meaning of a philosopher in a form and in words which he has not authorized. And I may have misunderstood his contention. But this meaning seems to be the only one left after eliminating all possible alternatives.

It is not easy to criticize such a view logically, because it seems to be an attempt to transcend the confines of logic. But for that very reason it is to be profoundly distrusted. We used to be told that there is no knowledge in the mind which has not come to us by way of the senses. Now we are to be told that we can find knowledge in our instincts. Such a suggestion is a wholly new departure in philosophy, and appears to be an offshoot of that general irrationalism which is one of the most marked features of our age. And I think on every ground it is to be viewed with the utmost suspicion.

What is an instinct? It is at any rate, if I understand it rightly, some species of *feeling*. And it is understood to be specially marked by the absence of reflective thought. Most instincts, if not all, are concerned with practical activities, and have the production of such activities as their essential function. They are feelings which prompt the organism to some reaction, for example, the instinct of the bee to hive. Presumably such practical instincts exist psychically as blind impulses or desires to act in a given way without there being present to the mind any

idea of the end at which the activity aims. How can such a blind impulse, feeling, or desire to act be described as knowledge? It seems not to be cognitive at all. And surely to describe it as knowledge is at least to use that word in a most unaccustomed sense, and—what is more important—in a sense quite different from that in which it is ordinarily said that we know that other minds exist.

Will it be said that in addition to instincts to act there are also instincts to believe this or that, cognitive instincts as we might call them? Such an assertion appears to me to involve a most questionable psychology. It seems rather to be true that no true instincts exist save those which are directed to action. But even if we granted the existence of such instincts directed towards knowledge, the application of that point of view to the present problem seems open to two criticisms. Firstly, the social instinct is *not* such a cognitive instinct, for it is definitely an instinct to act. Secondly, even if cognitive instincts exist, and even if the social instinct is one of them, yet to place any confidence in such feelings as grounds for our beliefs is in the highest degree dangerous; for such feelings cannot constitute a good logical ground for holding our beliefs.

As regards the first point, the social instinct clearly has behaviour for its end. It is an impulse to herd together, to act in co-operation, to enjoy the feelings of warmth and comfort which flow from the proximity and responsiveness of our fellows. Its function is to bring about that behaviour, not to bring knowledge into existence. Why should it bring knowledge into existence, seeing that the essential meaning of an instinct is an impulse which produces the necessary reactions of the organism *without* knowledge, without intellectual activity of any kind? Why should it bring knowledge into existence even as a by-product? And if that question seems unanswerable, how much more impossible is it to accept a doctrine which asserts, not that the instinct produces knowledge as a by-product, but that the instinct itself *is* knowledge?

Secondly, we cannot safely take our feelings and in-

instincts as guides to truth, much less as themselves constituting a knowledge of the truth. To do so is to fall into a vicious mysticism which is the negation of philosophy. A theosophist once told me that his reason for believing in the doctrine of reincarnation was that 'he felt in his inmost being that it is true'. And it seemed to me that this was a very bad reason. Many religious persons of some other creed which does not happen to accept reincarnation would no doubt 'feel in their inmost beings that it is false'. They cannot both be right, and yet the 'inmost feelings' of one are as much entitled to respect and belief as the 'inmost feelings' of the other. And, as a social being desiring to herd with other organisms resembling myself and to rub my body against other bodies of the same general appearance and outline, I might possess very 'deep feelings' to the effect that other minds must exist. And yet this might well be false. How then does the mere existence of such a feeling, without any attempt at a rational justification of it, constitute knowledge?

An instinct is not good evidence of anything beyond itself. And if such irrational grounds are to be admitted as valid premisses for our beliefs about what is external to us, we may as well abandon logic, science, and philosophy. We may as well give up thinking, become mystics, and wallow in the mire of subjective feelings, visions, intuitions, ecstasies, and irrationalism generally.

I have previously commented on the weakness of giving as the grounds of our knowledge primitive beliefs and acts of animal faith. Such beliefs, as we saw, cannot be accounted more than mere prejudices. But they are a thousand times better than beliefs based on instincts. A prejudice is at least a cognitive act, and has a good chance of being the result of subconscious reasoning and so of being true and justifiable on logical grounds. It may have reason at its core. It may be one of the children of reason which has forgotten its parentage. But an instinct is nothing but a blind irrational urge. It is the negation of reason. Its *raison d'être* is to avoid and do without reason or thought or intelligence, to carry on the essential work

and reactions of the organism without them. It has never at any time had any reason in it. And what are we to think of a philosophy which traces back our knowledge to such a source, which in fact goes farther and declares that such instincts not merely give rise to knowledge but *are* knowledge?

Whether social instinct is or is not knowledge is, after all, a question on which empirical evidence is relevant. Let me therefore place on record that the social instinct of at least one witness, namely myself, *is not knowledge*. I can distinguish clearly between my desire to associate with my fellows, which is a *feeling*, and my knowledge that they have minds, which is a *judgement*. No doubt the judgement and the feeling are intertwined, as are all elements of our mental states, will with feeling, feeling with thought. But they are nevertheless distinguishable and different. The feeling is not the judgement.

Thus the attempt to give 'direct knowledge' as the basis of our knowledge of one another breaks down. If by direct knowledge is meant any kind of sensuous or super-sensuous perception, then it is clear that we have no such perception of the thoughts, feelings, and volitions of other people, and that only such perception of actual contents could constitute knowledge of other minds. If by direct knowledge perception is not meant, then the believer in such direct knowledge is forced to rely upon subjective feelings, and in general upon the irrational parts of our nature. This is likely to be true, I think, not only of the theory of Professor Alexander, but of all theories of this type. They cannot, without fairly obvious absurdities, rely on any kind of perception. And they are therefore forced to appeal either to instincts or to some kind of mystical assurance. We can accept neither.

We shall be forced back, therefore, upon some form of the theory of indirect or inferential knowledge. To see how it works out, we must go back to the beginning, to the solitary mind with which we started.

The solitary mind, then, is aware of itself, i.e. of its

activities in thinking, feeling, willing, and is also aware of the group of presentations which is afterwards identified as its body. As regards the first point, the mind's awareness of itself, it has been suggested by Mr. C. C. J. Webb in the paper already quoted that the consciousness of other minds may be actually prior to self-consciousness. He omits to explain, of course, whether he refers to logical or to psychological priority. Whether there is any sense in which his view may be true as a statement regarding the psychological or historical order of our ideas I shall not inquire. It certainly has no bearing upon their logical order. For if there is one indisputable fact about our knowledge of ourselves it is that such knowledge is direct and immediate. I have an immediate view, through introspection, of my own thoughts, feelings, and volitions. They are *given*. They therefore belong, just as much as do our sense-data, to the ultimate certitudes on the basis of which we build up our knowledge. It would be palpably absurd to suggest that I can only know the contents of my own consciousness indirectly by way of inference from my knowledge of yours. We are entitled, then, to take our knowledge of ourselves as a logical starting-point, as an ultimate given fact of which we are certain.

The solitary mind is also immediately aware of the presentations which make up its own body. It is not aware of its body *as* a body. For it has not yet arrived at the stage in which it knows objects or 'things'. What it has before it is not a continuously existing independent object which could be called a body, but only a series of fleeting presentations. Among these presentations, of course, are those which afterwards go to make up its own body. My present point is only that these presentations are as certainly and immediately known to the solitary mind as are its own acts of consciousness. So that the logical beginnings from which the solitary mind starts on its journey to its knowledge of other minds are twofold: (1) its knowledge of itself, i.e. of its own acts of thinking, feeling, willing, &c.; and (2) its perception of those presentations which it afterwards separates out from other

presentations and builds up into the object which it knows as its own body.

The next necessary step is the gathering together of these latter presentations into a single group and the association of this group with the consciousness of the solitary mind. There are, strictly speaking, two steps here, but they may be taken together. For the gathering of the presentations into a group and the association of that group with the mind both arise out of one and the same experience.

It will be clear to the reader that the grouping together of the presentations and their association with a mind are not originally given. We do not start with them. We have somehow to arrive at them. For the association of my body with my mind, or in other words the discovery that my hands and feet belong to me, and are not mere indifferent parts of the landscape, is not originally given. In the logical beginning my hand is merely a pinkish colour patch among all the others. If there happens to lie adjacent to it among my presentations a green patch which is actually a tree, there is no more reason for supposing that the pinkish patch is part of me or has any special connexion with me, than for supposing that the green patch is part of, or has a special connexion with, me. Thus in the beginning I am not aware of the existence of my body at all. The presentations which compose it are merely a portion of the general world of phantasms with which I am surrounded.

I become aware of my body in the end chiefly because it insists on accompanying me wherever I go. There is a group of presentations which I can never get rid of. It accompanies me about as a group, and so becomes associated in my mind with myself, i.e. with my thinking, feeling, willing self. It is true that when the light is turned out I can no longer see my hand. But I can touch it. Or, if that language is too advanced for the stage of the solitary mind, we should rather say that when the light is extinguished I have a tactile sensation which I soon come to associate with the visual sensation which has disap-

peared. It is true again that a local anaesthetic will destroy the sense of touch in the part affected. But I can still see the part (or, I still have an associated visual sensation). So that in spite of temporary and partial obliterations of some of the presentations of the group, it is still true that on the whole this group of presentations accompanies me about wherever I go in a manner which is not characteristic of other groups. The group of presentations which composes yonder tree, even though it grows opposite my study window, is a comparatively rare visitor to my life. It visits me only for a few hours each day, and it has only done so for the last two years since I came to live in this house. I never saw it before that. It is the same with all groups of presentations except the group which is my body. They are all temporary and infrequent visitors. My body is simply that portion of my presentations which forces itself always upon me.

Taking my body as a whole, moreover, it does not change its size as I move about, whereas everything else does. As I walk forwards, what is in front of me increases in magnitude as it draws nearer; while at the same time everything behind me dwindles as it recedes. My body alone remains roughly constant. It is true that my hands and feet vary in size slightly according as I bring them nearer to my eyes or push them away. But this variation is small and is rigidly confined within certain narrow limits. My hand never vanishes altogether in the remote blue sky as does the dwindling speck of a sky-lark. It is still true to say, in spite of minor variations, that the size of my body remains roughly constant whatever movements take place relatively between it and surrounding objects. This fact also helps to pick out from among all others the group of presentations which make up my body.

There is also another set of facts which assists in the process of picking out the presentations which compose my body and setting them apart as unique. When a pin is pushed into my leg I feel pain. When my leg is stroked I feel a sensation which I may account pleasurable. But when a pin is pushed into a tree I do not feel any pain.

Nor do I receive any pleasurable sensation when the tree is stroked.

For these reasons, then, the various visual, tactile, and other presentations concerned first become thought of as a group instead of singly; and then this group becomes associated in my mind with *me* as a thinking, feeling being. It becomes 'my' body. I regularly associate the presence of the group of presentations with the presence of a mind, namely my own.

The next step is that I come to notice that there exist many groups of presentations which resemble the one which is my body. It is true that your body is unlike mine in the characteristics of which we have just been speaking. Your body does not accompany me about. It does not retain the same size whatever my movements relative to outside objects. I do not feel pain if a pin is stuck into it. But I can recognize it as like my body owing to its shape and colour, its general appearance and contour, its characteristic movements and postures, its special methods of behaviour, the sounds or cries which issue from it, and so on. These marks suffice to enable me to recognize the groups of presentations which are other people's bodies as similar to, and in the same class with, the group of presentations which is my own body.

It has been urged that primitive man, not having seen himself in a mirror, does not know the general appearance even of his own body, and therefore could not recognize other bodies as similar to it. It does not seem worth replying in detail to such a saltless argument, but I mention it since it has been put forward with apparent seriousness.¹ Apart from the existence of pools of water and other natural mirrors, it is surely obvious that we can see the whole of our bodies except our heads and back, and can explore our heads with our hands; and that in one way and another we should, even without mirrors, come to know our general appearance and its resemblance to the appearances of other persons. Will it be seriously con-

¹ For example, by Mr. C. C. J. Webb in the paper on 'Our Knowledge of One Another'.

tended that before the invention of mirrors every man went about quite unaware that his appearance resembled that of his fellows?

From this point the inference to the existence of other minds is quite simple, and proceeds much upon the well-known lines. The group of presentations which is my body is associated with my mind; and I come to think that its movements, gestures, and behaviour generally are caused by special kinds of mental content. When I am angry I hit out. In great pain I cry out. When I am frightened I sometimes run, sometimes turn pale and stand stock still. If I know a snake in my path to be poisonous, I make a detour to avoid it, or I pick up a stick and kill it. If I am amused I produce from my throat the peculiar kind of noise known as laughter. Now I also perceive around me other groups of presentations almost exactly like the one which I associate with my own mind. These groups behave in the same way as does mine. They laugh, cry out, run, smile, avoid snakes. Their general similarity of shape and colour, and their more remarkable similarities of behaviour suggest to me by analogy that with them are associated minds like mine, and that their behaviour is caused by fear, anger, amusement, knowledge—in general by a consciousness such as I myself possess. The inference to the existence of other minds is then complete.

The only way in which this differs from the usual form of the argument is that instead of bodies I have spoken of groups of presentations. For it must be remembered that we are still, when the argument begins, in the world of the solitary mind, and that in that world there are no permanent 'things', but only fleeting presentations. My body at that stage is no more than a group of such presentations. They go out of existence from time to time when I cease to be aware of them. But this will not prevent my recognizing the group as a group, and recognizing the similarities between groups on which the argument to the existence of other minds depends. For such recognition nothing more than the concepts of the given are required;

and the concepts of the given are all within the reach of the solitary mind.

The ordinary form of the argument which bases it, not on groups of presentations, but on bodies conceived presumably in the ordinary way as permanent and independent objects, is in this respect faulty. For the recognition of a body as a permanent independent thing, as existing for example when no one is aware of it, is itself dependent, as we have abundantly shown, upon our knowledge of the existence of other minds. And therefore our knowledge of other minds cannot be an inference from our knowledge of permanent bodies. But it can be, and is, an inference from groups of presentations such as can be recognized by the solitary mind. The knowledge of other minds is logically prior to the knowledge of 'things'. Therefore the knowledge of other minds cannot be deduced from 'things'. But knowledge of other minds is not logically prior to presentations, since the latter are logical ultimates or givens. Therefore presentations may be used as premisses of the argument.

Of course these subtleties are necessary only to preserve the strict logical sequence. The logical order is as we have laid it down. Even if we assume that the actual or psychological development of our ideas has been moulded by logic, by the very argument which we have just been examining, still it is not of course necessary to think that the mind has actually followed out the argument in all these refinements. Whatever is the logical order, knowledge of the external world of things and knowledge of the existence of other minds have no doubt actually grown up together. If these facts are remembered and understood, there will be no necessity for us to continue to speak, with clumsy pedantry, of 'groups of presentations' instead of 'bodies'. We may for shortness equate our argument with the usual argument based simply upon the body and its behaviour.

What is the relation between the psychological and the logical development of our knowledge of others? Are we

to think that they are entirely disconnected, that psychologically our belief has one origin, say, in the social or some other instinct, while logically it has another and totally different foundation, namely the argument based upon bodily behaviour? Or can we suppose that the movement of the mind in its history has been actually directed by logic, or in other words that the argument by analogy from bodily behaviour has been what has led it to its belief; so that the logical and the psychological developments will have been coincident?

These are difficult questions to answer, and possibly the truth lies somewhere between the extremes. If logic has played its part in actual historical development, it must have been, of course, a subconscious logic similar to that which we found reason to think must have operated to produce belief in the existence of a public independent world. In Chapter VI we attempted to lay bare, and to make explicit, the logical foundations of the belief in an independent external world. Those foundations consisted in a series of constructions. But although this development was primarily logical and ideal, we were led to think that the actual historical development must have been in some way dictated by it. The evolving human mind must have somehow felt the logic of the situation and built its world accordingly. But the logical steps, i.e. the constructions, were only implicitly or subconsciously taken, with the result that they appeared in the upper levels of consciousness in the form of an instinctive belief or animal faith.

I do not think the case for a subconscious logical development of the belief in other minds is quite so strong as was the case for such a development of the belief in an independent external world. There is an important difference between the two. There exists no specific instinct which could reasonably be said to offer an explanation of how our belief in an independent external world arose. So there seems no course open save that of attributing it to unconscious logic. But for our belief in other minds there exists a specific instinct, namely the social instinct, on which the belief can with at least a show of

reason be fathered. I cannot see how our instinctive belief in an external world could possibly have arisen except by way of subconscious mental constructions such as we outlined in Chapter VI. I do not think that any psychologist would admit into his list of the instincts a separate instinct whose function it was to produce such a belief. For all the instincts seem, after all, to be directed to practical ends. And it makes no difference to any practical action whether or not we believe that things go on existing when they are unperceived. Nature is not likely, therefore, to have endowed us with any special instinct in the matter. An instinctive belief in such a case can scarcely mean anything except a belief which is unreflecting because its grounds are unconscious.

But with the belief in other minds the case is different. There undoubtedly *is* such a thing as a special social instinct. It is directed to various practical activities of co-operation. Animals hunt in packs. Fishes move in shoals. It would probably be absurd to say that this social instinct is the result of unconscious logic. For, in the first place, it is not an opinion or an idea, or a thought of the intellect such as would be the conclusion to an unconscious train of reasoning; it is not a cognition at all, but a mere impulse to a practical activity. And in the second place it is an impulse which is strongly developed in such low forms of organism that they can scarcely be suspected even of the glimmerings of unconscious thought.

But although the social instinct may be something quite different from any unconscious reasoning, it does not follow that the social instinct is actually the origin out of which our knowledge of one another has grown. So far as I can see, Professor Alexander merely asserts this, or at least suggests it, but produces no evidence at all to support it. And not only is no evidence produced, but the thing itself appears to be not a little unlikely. How can an instinct grow into an intellectual opinion or thought? How can an impulse to act turn into a judgement?

I do not say that the thing is impossible, or that the questions just asked are unanswerable. But it is clear that

they involve most obscure and difficult problems of psychology. And it is also clear that we are under no necessity to answer them in this book. Our concern as epistemologists is with the structure and validity of knowledge, not with its history. The validity of knowledge depends upon its logical justification, not upon its psychological genesis. Hence both as regards belief in the external world and belief in other minds, our primary and indeed our sole essential concern is with this logical basis. Wherever possible it seems useful and interesting to show that logical and psychological development are not indifferent to one another, that logic has often been at the heart of history, and that many human beliefs, even when they may appear instinctive, are not wholly abandoned of reason, but are rather guided by an implicit logical sense. The belief in an external world appeared to be such a belief. There exists no instinct on which it can plausibly be fathered. It makes no difference to any practical activity. It does not seem likely that any blind impulses to act can have given rise to it, seeing that such impulses could perform their function and produce their correlated activities without the arising of any such belief. How then could it have arisen? The most probable answer is that it arose, not from instinct, but from thought, from the world-constructing activity of the thinking mind, the operations of which have been, however, quite unconscious.

But the case does not seem so clear as regards our belief in other minds. This may have arisen as an unconscious inference from the movements and behaviour of other bodies. Or it may have some more irrational and instinctive origin such as that suggested by Professor Alexander. For there is at least in this case a suitable instinct lying close at hand which can be suspected of having something to do with the origin of the belief. The issue seems to me to be doubtful. And I would therefore prefer to express no decided opinion, but to leave the question open for the decision of those whose proper business, after all, it is, namely the psychologists.

Our conclusions may be summed up as follows. The

logical justification of our belief in other minds can only be by way of the argument by analogy from bodily behaviour (modified in the manner shown in this chapter). It is useless to appeal to the social instinct, or to any other kind of irrational feeling, for this justification. This is really all that the strict limits of our inquiry require us to decide. The psychological origin of our belief is a totally different question. Whether the belief historically arose out of the social instinct, or whether it arose from subconscious reasoning by analogy from bodily behaviour, or whether both sources contributed a share to the belief, is a question for psychology, to settle which is no part of my task, and which I prefer to leave undecided.

To this summary of results, however, I must add my conviction that recent philosophy has failed to keep the two questions separate, has in fact confused them together; and that the attack made by so many recent writers on the older theory, which based our belief in other minds on the analogy of bodily behaviour, has been a grave error due to this confusion.

It has to be admitted, of course, that the argument from bodily behaviour—the only genuinely logical argument which exists—does not yield certainty, but gives only a probable conclusion. This, as is well known, is true of all analogical reasoning. There is no means by which I can be absolutely *certain* that any mind exists except my own. It is *possible* that in addressing this book to my readers I am the victim of a complete delusion in supposing that they exist as conscious minds. It is possible that the whole universe is a dream of mine, and that all the other people in it are dream people. The contrary of this cannot be proved with absolute certainty. The argument by analogy from bodily behaviour goes as far as is possible towards proving the real existence of other minds. But it is a probable conclusion only.

But what of it? On the probable evidence before me I am prepared to believe. I am prepared to build up my universe on this basis. And one must remember that not

only analogical, but all inductive reasoning, leads only to probability. After all, it is only probable that the sun will rise to-morrow. Yet no one ever lost a night's sleep over the uncertainty.

Whatever be the degree of probability which attaches to the reasoning by which we justify our belief in the existence of other minds, it is at any rate a genuine *inference*. The procedure of the mind which it involves is not a mental construction, but an inference. This is of the utmost importance because it is consistent with the view that the existence of other minds is factual, and not merely constructive. Other minds are facts, not inventions of mine.

The truth of this is not altered, of course, by the point that the inference is only probable, not certain. The word 'fact' in this context has reference to the nature of the existence, not to the truth or untruth of the statement that the fact exists. *If* other minds exist, the nature of that existence is factual, not constructive. The question whether our knowledge of their existence is probable or certain has no bearing at all upon this.

Other minds, then, are not a mental construction of mine. If they were, this would mean that my mind alone has factual existence, while all other minds have only constructive existence. This would be equivalent to a final and crushing solipsism from which there would be no escape. Admittedly our philosophy began in solipsism, but we do not intend it to end there. When I assert the existence of other minds I do not mean that I have invented them to explain phenomena. I mean that they actually and factually think, feel, and will. My assertion that your mind exists and thinks is not an hypothetical proposition like the existential mental construction. It does not mean 'If . . . then your mind would be perceived'. It is a categorical proposition which asserts that your mind actually thinks, feels, &c. This is not a constructive, but a factual existence.

The only kind of factual existence which we have so

far studied is that which is actually perceived. It is that whose *esse* is (or was originally for the solitary mind) *percipi*. The factual existence of the external world consists in its being known. But the factual existence of the internal world of mind consists in the fact that it is the knower. Its *esse* is not *percipi*. To say that its *esse* is *percipere* would be to use too narrow a term. We may say that its *esse* consists in the fact that it is conscious. That which neither knows nor is known, for example the unperceived table, can only have a constructive existence. But whatever either knows, e.g. the self, or is known, e.g. the table while I am looking at it, has factual existence. Constructive existence is that existence which is thought as independent of consciousness. But other minds are themselves consciousnesses. Therefore their existence is factual, and they are not mental constructions.