

THE IMPLICATIONS OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS. 1

THE present paper is an effort to set forth in brief some of the evidence for an idealistic interpretation of the nature of reality. My argument is in its essential features identical with the one presented in a chapter on "The Possibility of Error" in my book called "The Religious Aspect of Philosophy," published in 1885. Another statement of the same considerations is to be found, in a summary form, on pages 368-380 of my recently published study entitled "The Spirit of Modern Philosophy." In the latter book I have also given an extended account of the historical relations of this line of argument, — especially of its relations to Kant's "Deduction of the Categories," and to the philosophical development from Kant to Hegel. That these relations are intimate, needs here no further express declaration. The discussion in my chapter on "The Possibility of Error" was criticised in some detail by two French writers, — by M. Paulhan, in the "Revue Philosophique" for September, 1885; and by M. Renouvier, in "La Critique Philosophique," for 1888, pp. 85-120. To both these distinguished critics I owe a hearty acknowledgment, and I have tried to profit by their objections, though I cannot here consider them.

What is it to be conscious? What does self-consciousness imply? Such are the questions with which philosophical idealism begins. It is by examining these questions that a philosophical idealist hopes to get a clearer notion of the world in which he finds himself, and of his relation to this world. A successful estimate of such a doctrine can never be made unless one comprehends how it has been reached. It is the road that here determines the result. In vain does one, as philosopher, try to pass the gates of this heaven of theory, and to get the beatific insight for which the idealist hopes, unless one has first followed the strait and narrow path of thorough-going self-critical reflection. Whoever has approached his idealism by this road will no longer imagine, like the critic cited by Professor C. B. Upton ("The New World" for March, p. 142), that the God of idealism "may be safely treated as 'une quantité négligeable.'" The careful student of the path will have learned, as he went, the worth of the goal. His own insight may be still very incomplete, but he will know that the truth with which he deals is not "négligeable" merely because, like the earth in Browning's poem, it "keeps up its terrible composure," and declines to have a market value, or to show itself in the precise guises which tradition had led us to expect it to wear. For the idealist whose mind is as I think it ought to be, the Infinite is unquestionably a Person, and this Person is as unquestionably a world-possessor. The finite does not vanish in him; but he appears to us, although very imperfectly, through and by means of the finite. Yet what it is and means to be a Person, and to be also infinite, and to be the world-possessor, only a successful philosophical analysis can hope to make in general terms clear. It is useless to approach such problems with only our accidental and traditional prejudices concerning what personality may mean.

It sometimes seems to me that to many minds the word "person" has come primarily to mean one who can and perhaps will on occasion strike back at you if you first hit him; and doubtless the notion in question does in fact reveal a certain aspect of the ultimate truth. The world is indeed a moral order, and the moral law is a hard master, and hard masters do strike down rebels; and to many, who would reject very scornfully the crude language that I have just used, the idea of God and of his personality is, in fact, based upon an unconscious elaboration of just such simple cate-

gories as these. I do not question the relative value of such categories. We have in childhood to get our theology in these terms, and we never ought altogether to forget our childhood, or to ignore the sinewy and healthy truths then impressed upon us by tradition. Only such truths should not pretend to be ultimate. Imagery of this kind does not reveal the inmost meaning of the word "personality." Ideas of this sort ought not to be treated as final tests of all philosophical definitions of God. It is perfectly true that in our immediate inner experience, in our uncriticised finite self-consciousness, fragmentary as it is, we mortals learn at the outset, in a first rude example, what personality means, and it is by reflection upon this rude example that we have to proceed. But we need not wonder to find that the deeper meaning of the word "personality" is only to be got at by a long study of the significance of the rude facts themselves. For, as a very little analysis shows, we are none of us at the outset able to answer sharp questions concerning the true extent, or the nature, or the limitations, or the significance, of this familiar reality which we call our self-consciousness. In other words, we are self-conscious, but very imperfectly so. The question, "Who am I?" is not easily answerable, yet no question is more obviously a fair one. The problem, "What is a person?" is, then, not to be solved by a mere glance within.

In seeking after God, there are many who do indeed begin by asking the question, "Who am I?" but who thence proceed by offering some facile answer, such as the well-known one, "I am a thinking substance," or the still more familiar one, "I am a being possessed of free choice and volition," and on such a basis a theology is quickly built up. This theology will therefore, indeed, take a comparatively naïve shape. I am a person. God, of course, is another. For I have free volition. That constitutes the essence of me, and so of any person you please; and this fact is obvious, and for reflection nearly if not quite ultimate. Now, in the exercise of my free volition, I meet resistance from without. This resistance indicates a world of outer objects. But obviously only a will can resist a will. Hence there is will, and so personality, outside of me. The unity of law in the world of my objects, the cleverness of the manifold contrivances of nature, or, better still, the extent and the wisdom of plan which I see exemplified in the facts of organic life and of evolution, — all these things assure me that, in knowing the physical world, I am dealing with the doings of one great Person, whose creation is this natural order. He is free, and so am I. He limits me; and,

so far as I am free, I limit him. We are two; and hence the world is a moral order. Any more monistic interpretation would be immoral, for I should not fear God unless he were another person; nor regard him as my Father unless I felt his resistance whenever, in the exercise of my free volition, I push against his reality. After all, it is the muscular sense that, from such a point of view, becomes the chief revealer of the divine personality to us finite beings; and hence those who insist upon these categories love to exalt their "dynamic" character.

All such brief sketches of the views of opponents have of course to be inadequate, and therefore in a measure unjust. It is only to show in what direction I myself should look for more light that I make this brief hint of the unreflective nature of all these notions of a good deal of current theology. They are derived from a very simple inspection, so I must insist, of the world of the inner life. They have their relative truth, but they need deeper criticism. "Conscious of free choice," "conscious of outer objects resisting my free choice," "conscious of dynamic principles beneath all reality," — how profoundly problematic are the categories contained in each one of these phrases! What is it to have free choice? What is it not only to have but also to know one's own free choice? What is it to know outer objects? What is it to know one's Self? Yes, what is it to be conscious at all? What is a Self? All these are just the questions of philosophy. Whoever says, "But I *do* know all these things, and there is the end of it, — no matter about the *how*," — such a person is perfectly welcome to his assurance, but he is not philosophizing. It is precisely the *how* that concerns one in philosophy.

So much, then, for an indication of the reason why the idealist, knowing at the outset something of his own bit of finite self-consciousness, but longing to know more, declines to state *à priori* his notion either of Personality, or of the world, or of free will, or of the nature of knowledge, but aims to get at the true ideas of these things by means of a better analysis of the implications of self-consciousness themselves.

II.

Our questions, then, are no doubt fundamental, and worthy of scrutiny. They promise rich fruit. Yet, in approaching them, we must, in the present paper, limit our undertaking pretty carefully. Amidst the wealth of these problems we must choose what most directly concerns us in getting a general notion of the nature of the idealistic doctrine. Let our choice be as follows.

Idealism of the post-Kantian type is distinguished by two especially noteworthy features. It first involves a criticism of the inner nature of finite self-consciousness. I, the finite thinker, it says, must be in far more organic and deep and wide relations to my own true selfhood than my ordinary consciousness easily makes clear to me. In essence, then, I am much more of a self than my immediate consciousness, as it exists under human limitations, ever lets me directly know. The true Self is at all events far more than the "empirical" self of ordinary consciousness. This is sure because, upon examination, one finds that the flickering and limited self-consciousness of any moment of my life logically implies far more than it directly contains. I am never fully aware of the content or of the meaning of my present self. Unless, then, I am in deeper truth far more of a self than I now know myself to be, I am not even as much of a self as I now suppose myself to be. In other words, it is of the essence of finite consciousness to be, in its logical implications, transcendent of the limited character of its momentary inner contents. This is the first assertion of idealism. Put negatively it runs: Finite self-consciousness never directly shows me how much of a self I am. Therefore finite self-consciousness never directly reveals to me the true nature, or extent, or limitations, or relations of my own personality.

The second feature of our idealistic doctrine appears in its theory of the relation of any finite self to what we call the "external world." The idealistic view here is, that if on the one hand the self of finite consciousness is in any case, by implication, far more than it can directly know itself to be, on the other hand this self, in order to be in true relation to the outer objects which it actually thinks about, must be, by implication, so related to these outer objects that they are in reality, although external to this finite self, still not external to the true and complete Self of which this finite self is an organic part. If the analysis of consciousness has first shown me that my true Self is and must be far more in its essential nature than I can now directly know it to be, the analysis of the definition of "my world of objects" shows that, in order to be *my objects*, in order to be external, as they are, to my finite thoughts about them, "my objects" must be such as my true Self already possesses, — objects which it is aware of because they are its immediate objects, and which it knows to be mine because it includes both my meaning and their inner essence.

Uniting these two features we have, as our idealistic metaphysic, this result: The self of finite consciousness is not yet the whole

true Self. And the true Self is inclusive of the whole world of objects. Or, in other words, the result is, that there is and can be but one complete Self, and that all finite selves, and their objects, are organically related to this Self, are moments of its completeness, thoughts in its thought.

I begin here at once with the first of these two considerations. It is a familiar assertion ever since Descartes, yes, in fact, ever since St. Augustine, that, whatever else I am doubtful of, I am at least directly sure of my own existence. I am I. What truth, so people say, could be clearer? I exist, and I exist for my own thought; for I doubt, I wonder, I inquire, — in short, I think. And in my thinking I find myself, not as a possible dream of somebody else, or as a fiction, or as an hypothesis, or as a matter of doubt, but I find myself existent for myself. Such is one familiar way of stating the initial assurance of human thought.

A popular misunderstanding of the nature of idealism in philosophy supposes that, beginning thus with his own individual existence as somehow a thing very much clearer in nature and in definition than the existence of anything besides himself, every idealist as such must proceed, in a solipsistic sort of way, first to reduce all objective reality to his own ideas, and then to find, amongst these ideas of his, certain ones which dispose him, on purely subjective grounds, to assume the existence of outer objects. It is historically true, of course, that such methods have been followed by certain students of philosophy. It is also a fact that such methods have a value as means of philosophical analysis, and as preparations for deeper insight. As such I myself have made use of them more than once for purposes of preliminary instruction: not that they constitute the essential portion of the teachings of a metaphysical idealism, of the sort which the post-Kantian thought in Germany developed (for they do not), but merely because they are pedagogically useful devices for introducing us to the true issues of metaphysics.

As a fact, however, before one could undertake, in a serious fashion, to be even provisionally and hypothetically a "solipsist" in his metaphysical teaching, it would be needful to define the Self, the *Ipsa*, whose solitude in the world of knowledge the "solipsistic" doctrine is supposed to maintain. The reason why in the end our post-Kantian idealism is not in the least identical with "solipsism," either in spirit or in content or in outcome, is that the definition of the Self, the answer to the question, "Who am I?" is logically prior to the metaphysical assertion that a

being called "I" is better known than is any being called "Not-I." This assertion itself may be true. But in vain does a doctrine declare that a being called by any name, x or y , mind or matter, not-self or Self, obviously and with absolute assurance is known to exist, and is more immediately known to exist than is any other being, unless the doctrine first defines what being is meant under this name. Self-consciousness can only reveal my own substantial existence with absolute or even with merely exceptional clearness, in case self-consciousness first reveals to me what I mean by myself who am said thus so certainly to exist.

Idealism, then, has no more right than has any other doctrine to fire its absolute assurances "out of a pistol." That I exist is at the outset only known to me in the sense that this thinking, this consciousness, of mine, is no unreality. What reality it is, I shall not know until I shall have reflected long and with success. First, then, to say, "I clearly know myself, but I know not certainly anything beyond myself," and then by analysis to reduce the outer world to "my Idea," and then to say, "Beyond my ideas I can never certainly go," — all this method of provisional and halting reflection, which assumes "the Ego" as something perfectly transparent, may be useful enough as a propædæutic to philosophy. It is not yet thoroughgoing self-criticism. Nor is it upon such imperfect reflection that the idealistic doctrines of modern philosophy have been built up. Fichte, who is popularly supposed to have done his work in just this way, actually made the Self the central assurance of philosophy only in so far as he also made it the central problem of philosophy. Its very existence is, for him, of the most problematic kind, so that, in the first form of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, the true Self is never realized at all, and exists only as the goal of an *unendliches Streben*, an endless travail for self-consciousness. No sooner has Fichte declared at the outset that it exists — this Self — than he finds the very assertion essentially paradoxical, in such wise that, unrevised, it would become absurd. Moreover, as Fichte insists, the natural consciousness is far from a real self-awareness. "Most men," declares Fichte (*Werke*, vol. i. p. 175, note), "could be more easily brought to believe themselves a piece of lava in the moon than to regard themselves as a Self." In such a philosophy the *cogito ergo sum* no longer means that I, the thinker, as *res cogitans*, am from the very beginning an obviously definite entity, while all else is doubtful. The first word of such a doctrine is rather the inquiry, *Who, then, am I?* It is the Self which needs winning, and

which requires definition, and which is so far unknown, just because it is the object of our reflection.

Beginning thus our consideration, — asking, What is the Self whose existence is to appear to a wise reflection as the fact surely involved in our consciousness? — we find of course at once that the larger empirical Ego of the world of common sense is by no means this Self whose truth is to be thus directly certified by the thinking and doubting with which philosophy is to be initiated. *I exist* cannot mean, at the beginning of our reflection, “I, — Caius or Titus, — I, this person of the world of common sense, calling myself by this name, living this life, possessed of these years of experience, — *I think*, and so I am immediately known to exist.” For the Self of the world of common sense is inextricably linked with numberless so called non-Egos. He exists as neighbor amongst neighbors, as owner of these books or of this house, as father of these children, as related in countless ways to other finite beings. As such a creature, self-consciousness does not at first immediately reveal him. As such a being amongst other beings, reflective philosophy, at the outset, must ignore him. His existence is no more immediately obvious at any one moment, at the outset of our philosophical reflection, than is the “lava in the moon.” When Fichte’s opponents accused him of teaching that Prof. Johann Gottlieb Fichte was the only person or reality in existence, and that his own students, and even the Frau Professorin, were only ideas that Johann Gottlieb was pleased to create, — such critics forgot that *das Ich* at the outset of the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not named Johann Gottlieb, and at this point of the system could not be, and that the beginning of Fichte’s philosophy ignores the German professor named Johann Gottlieb as absolutely and mercilessly as it does the castles on the Rhine, or the natives of Patagonia, and knows as yet of nothing but the necessity that a certain pressing and inexorable problem of consciousness, called *das Ich*, must be fathomed, since every possible assertion is found to involve the positing of this as yet unfathomed Self.

The Self which constitutes our present problem is, therefore, like Fichte’s *Ich* at the beginning of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, a still unknown quantity. Its existence we know only in the sense that, in dealing with it, we are dealing with no unreality, but with a central problem and principle of knowledge.

How much of a Self, then, is clearly to be known to our most direct reflection? If we look a little closer, we next feel disposed to answer that if the Ego, as directly known in consciousness, is

not as yet the whole empirical Ego of common sense called in case of any one of us by his proper name, and involved in these external social and personal relationships, then the best account one can give of the immediate subject of the *cogito ergo sum* is, that it is *the knowing Self of this moment*. Here, in fact, is a definition that has become comparatively frequent in philosophy. I myself cannot accept this definition without modification. But it is necessary for us to examine it ere we proceed further. I know directly, so it has often been said, nothing but what is *now* in my consciousness. And now in my consciousness are these current ideas, feelings, thoughts, judgments, and, in so far as I choose to reflect, here am I myself, the subject in whom and for whom are these momentary thoughts. This is what I can directly know. To all else I conclude with greater or less probability; or, again, the rest of reality is an object of my faith, or of my practical postulates. As for myself, I know myself just as the knower of these current thoughts of this moment. Thus, then, is our question to be answered.

Yet once more, is this new answer quite clear? For *how much* does the present Self, the self of this moment, immediately know? And does that which the self of this moment knows belong wholly to this moment? As soon as we try to answer these questions, we enter upon a labyrinth of theoretical problems as familiar, in some sense, as it is intricate. I should not venture to weary the reader with even a passing mention of these subtleties were not the outcome of the necessarily tedious investigation of such importance.

I am to know, then, "this moment," and I am to exist for myself here as "the knower of this moment." Very well, then, shall I, taking this point of view, say that I know immediately the past in time? No, apparently not. I have a present idea of what I now call past time. That must be all that I "immediately know" of that so-called past. Do I immediately know the future? No, again; I have a present idea of what I now call future time. I am limited, then, in "immediate knowledge," to the present in time. This moment is of course, as the present moment, to be cut off from past and future. Very well, then, how large a moment is it, and how long? Is it quite instantaneous, wholly without duration? No, for I must surely be supposed immediately to know, in this moment, a passing of time. My psychological present is a "specious present." It looks backward and forward. It lasts a little, and then insensibly glides over into the next

moment. Such at least seems to be the definition that this doctrine of the "present moment" must accept as a good account of what the "present" is.

But, alas! the present, as thus defined, is only the more left undefined. This gliding "specious present," when does it cease to be present? When does it become past? Where are the boundaries? How much is there of it? For, remember, I am looking for the immediately certain truth. I wanted to know who I am, as an immediately sure reflection shall find or define me. The answer to my inquiry was, "I am the knower of this moment." So much I am to be quite surely aware of about myself. Well, I have tried to define this assurance, and of course, if it is immediate assurance, I must be able to give at once its content, *i. e.* to define just what is contained in this moment. But unfortunately I at once find myself baffled. And as an actual fact, if I look a little closer, I shall always find that, despite the assumption that I do know only the "present moment," I cannot tell reflectively the precise content of my present moment, but can only answer certain reflective questions about the consciousness which is no longer quite my own, because, before I can reflect upon it, it has already become a past moment. As a fact, then, the assumption just made about my knowing fully the content of the "immediately present moment" turns out to be an error. For I know *not* now in full what it is that is present to me, nor who I myself am to whom this is present. And I find out that I do not thus fully know myself at any present moment, just because, when I try to tell what I know, what I tell about is no longer my present, but is already my past knowledge.

This problem about the definition of the "present moment" is one of the most characteristic of the problems of self-consciousness. Let us give some examples of its curious complications. Let the present moment, for instance, be a moment of a judgment. I judge that the paper before me appears extended. This, as it would seem, I just now know immediately, since I chance to notice it. But extension even now already involves, for my consciousness, all sorts of consequences, which will begin to appear upon reflection. If extended, the paper is divisible. In so far as it appears to me as what I call paper, I already begin to think of it as something that I could fold or tear. Yes, upon reflection, I perceive that, even while I saw and felt it as extended, I all the while "sub-consciously" perceived it to be smooth to my hand as I wrote, and also saw it to be white, and knew it to be partially

covered by my handwriting, and knew to some extent what letters I was writing, and had furthermore in my mind the train of my more abstract thoughts. All this mass of "mind-stuff" was in me in a more or less latent form. What portion of it was immediately present to me at any moment during the writing of the foregoing half-dozen sentences? Yes, *how much of it all is even now immediately present to my consciousness?* I cannot tell. I know not. "This moment" has ceased to be "this" before I have observed its content, or written down its name. I know all the while that there just now was a present moment; and all the while also I am just coming to know this now flying moment. That is the actual situation. My "immediate knowing" ceases to be immediate in becoming knowledge, and the knowledge that I now have crumbles forever as it passes over into my immediately present state of feeling. I judge what just was my feeling, and feel what may straightway become an object for my judgment.

Enough; I shall never thus define in any precise way who I am. It is here I who ceaselessly fly from myself. My moments as such have no power to define in any sharp fashion their own content. I can therefore only say they must actually have such fleeting content as a perfectly clear and just Reflection would judge them to have. That alone is what I seem to be sure of. For they have *some* content. What it is, however, I can endlessly inquire; but I can never fully and at the same time immediately know. Unless I am an organic part of a Self that can reflect with justice and clearness upon the contents of my moments, these moments contain a great deal that exists *in* me, but *for* nobody. So much, then, for the first result of our inquiry. So much for the effort to define the "Ego" apart from the "external world."

Have I learned anything about myself by this weary and baffling process of reflection? Yes, one thing I have learned. It is the thing that I just stated. It is a difference which I inevitably find myself making between myself as I really am, and myself as I haltingly take myself to be from moment to moment. I am twofold. I have a true Self which endlessly escapes my observation, and a seeking self which as endlessly pursues its fellow. What I really am, even in any given moment, I never find out in that moment itself. I can, therefore, only define my true Self in terms of an ideally just reflection upon the contents of my moment; a reflection of an exhaustive character, such as in fact I in my momentary capacity never succeed in making. I must exist,

to be sure, for myself; and as I really am I must exist for myself only. With that consideration one begins in our present inquiry. It is reflection that is to find me. It is my consciousness that is to discover me, if I am ever to be discovered. But the Self for whom I am what I am is not the self of this moment, but is thus far an ideal Self, never present in any one moment. To repeat, then by way of summary: The Self is never *merely* the self of this moment, since the self of this moment never fully knows who he even now is. It is of his very essence to appeal beyond the moment to a justly reflective Self who shall discover and so reflectively determine who he is, and so who I am. For I am he.

III.

Another way of stating the foregoing result would, therefore, be to say that, unless I am more than the knowing and the immediately known self of this moment, I am not even as much as the self of this moment. For this moment implies more consciousness than I am now fully aware of. That which is just now in me to be known is far more than I just now know. That is the paradox, but it is also the inevitable fact, of my inner life; and thus I already begin to see how large may be the implications of self-consciousness.

But herewith our task is by no means done. We have studied the problem of the Ego viewed apart from a world of "external objects." What we have learned is, that the subject of the *cogito ergo sum* is in the beginning, strange to say, at once the best and the least known of the possessions of our knowledge. I cannot doubt its existence. But I am not yet aware how much of a self it is, nor how much it truly knows, nor whether it is or is not limited to a single series of moments of consciousness and reflection, nor how it stands related to any sort of inner or outer truth. Those who have begun philosophy by saying, "The self at least is known," have usually forgotten that the self as known is at the outset neither the empirical Ego of the world of common sense, nor yet merely the so-called "self of the one present moment." It is not the first, because philosophy has not yet at the outset come to comprehend the world of common sense. It is not the second, for the consciousness of the "present moment" can only be defined in relation to a reflection that transcends the present moment; whilst, on the other hand, no human reflection has ever yet fathomed perfectly the consciousness of even a single one of our moments. The self, then, is not yet known to us except as the

problematic truth exemplified by the still so mysterious fact of the *cogito* itself. Much less then is the relation of the Ego to outer objects as yet clear.

To this latter relation we must, however, next turn. Perhaps there we shall get a light which is refused to us so long as we confine ourselves to a merely subjective analysis of the inner life of this baffling Ego. The self undertakes to be not merely conscious of its own states, but of outer truth. Is its power in this respect indubitable? And if it is, upon what is founded our assurance that we do know a world of real objects outside the Ego? Possibly in getting a solution of this problem we shall come nearer to a true definition of the Ego itself.

The only way of answering the question about the external world lies in first asking, in a thoroughly reflective way, what is *meant* by a world of objects beyond the Ego. It is useless to try to find the philosophical evidence for the existence of a world of outer objects, unless you first define what an object beyond your consciousness is to mean for you. Amongst the numerous definitions of the meaning of the words *external object*, I may therefore choose three, which seem to me of most importance for our present purpose, and may consider each in its turn. The third will be my own.

1. "The term *outer object* means for me the known or unknown cause of my experiences, in so far as I do not refer these experiences to my own will," — such is a very common account of the nature of the external truth for the Ego. I need not expound this view at great length, since it is so familiar a notion. According to those who hold to this definition, it is somehow perfectly evident to me that my experiences need a cause, and that I myself am not the cause of all or of most of them. The Ego itself is thus definable as that which is conscious of more experiences than it causes, and which therefore looks beyond itself for the causes of most of these experiences. An "external object" means just such a cause, known or unknown.

It is strange that this, the most familiar definition of the nature and meaning of the word "object," should be the most obviously inadequate. In case of my perception of a house, or of a hot iron when I touch it, or of a wind in my face, I do indeed conceive myself as in relation to an object which is causing experiences in me. But most of the external truth that I usually think about and believe in is not truth now perceived by my senses, nor, *as* I think it, is it *now* in any causal relations to me at all. I at present believe

in it because I "trust the validity of memory," or "have confidence in the testimony of mankind," or follow some other such well-known criterion of common-sense opinion. When I read my daily newspaper, light-waves are causing retinal disturbances in my eye; but as for me, I am thinking, not about these causes of my experience, but about the news from Europe, about the Russian famine, about the next Presidential canvass, and about other such "external objects," all of which objects I believe in, not because I reflect that my present experiences need causes, but because I trust tradition, or "current opinion," or the "consensus of mankind," or my own memory, or whatever else I am accustomed to trust. The object of my belief is only in the case where I attend to immediate perception, at the same time the cause of my belief. Our "belief in the reality of an external world" is concretely definable, then, much more frequently as our belief in the validity of our memories and social traditions, than as our belief that our experiences have present causes. We all of us believe in the future of this external world of ours. There will come the time called ten years hence, or a million years hence. Something will be happening then amongst the things of the physical universe. That future event is an "external reality;" we all accept it as real, however little we know of it. But is it for us a "cause" of our present experiences? We are sure that such an event will come. Does that future event now "cause impressions" in us?

Yet more, were "my object" once defined as that x which causes my inner experience, my feeling, f , then one would still have to ask, What do I mean by causation? Causation is a relation between facts. I must myself have some inner idea of such a relation before I can attribute to the outer object the character of being a cause. By hypothesis, x , the object, is outside me. Its causal relation to my feeling is therefore also, in part at least, external to me. To believe in my object, x , as the cause of my feeling, f , I must therefore first believe that my notion of causation, derived from some inner experience of mine (*e. g.* from my own consciousness of my "will" or from my exercise of "power"), does itself correspond to an objective truth beyond me, namely, the outer causation of x , as bringing to pass f . In other words, I make x my object, if all this account is true, only through *first* holding that the inner experience of a relation, called "causation" in me, corresponds to an outer truth, namely, the external causation, whose validity is needed to give me an idea of the very existence of x .

But this means that there is here at least *one* external truth, and so one "object," (viz.:—the external fact of the causation itself), which I believe in, not because it is itself the cause of my idea of the causation, but because I trust that my idea of causation is valid, and corresponds to the truth. And it is only by *first* believing in this objective truth, viz., the causation, that I come to believe in *a* the cause.

Hence it follows that even in case of immediate sense-perception, my belief in the external object is always primarily not so much a belief that my experiences need causes, called say *a*, as an assurance that certain inner beliefs of mine are as such, valid, *i. e.* that they correspond with that which is beyond them.

2. "By *object*, then, I mean that which, beyond me, reduplicates, repeats, corresponds to, certain elements or relations of my own ideas." To this definition the foregoing one, as we have now seen, must lead us, when once properly understood, and when freed from the inadequacies thus far noted.

Here is a definition of what I mean by "outer object,"—a definition which is far more true to the facts of consciousness than was the foregoing. My belief in such external objects as the space beyond Sirius, or the time before the solar system was formed out of the primitive nebula, or in the existence of Cæsar, or in the presence of monasteries in Thibet, or even in the things that I read about in the newspapers, or learn of daily in conversation,—my belief too in your existence, kind reader,—all such beliefs are assurances that subjective combinations of ideas have their correspondents beyond my private consciousness. So far then this definition appears adequate. And yet it is really not enough.

For this is not *all* that I mean by an outer object of my thought. It is not enough that beyond my thoughts there should be truths whose inner constitution and relationships resemble those of my thought. For the world of my own external objects is not merely a world which my thought does resemble, but a world which my thought, even as it is in me, intends to resemble. Here I cannot do better for my present purpose than to repeat language I have lately used in the "Spirit of Modern Philosophy," p. 370. "My object," so I had just been saying, "is surely always *the thing that I am thinking about*. And," as I continued, "this thinking about things is, after all, a very curious relation in which to stand to things. In order to think *about* a thing, it is *not* enough that I should have an idea in me that merely *resembles* that thing. This last is a very important observation. I repeat, it is *not*

enough that I should merely have an idea in me that *resembles* the thing whereof I think. I have, for instance, in me the idea of a pain. Another man has a pain just like mine. Say we both have toothache, or have both burned our finger-tips in the same way. Now my idea of pain is just like the pain in him, but I am not on that account necessarily thinking about *his* pain, merely because what I *am* thinking about, namely my own pain, resembles his pain. No, to think about an object you must not merely have an idea that resembles the object, but you must *mean* to have your idea resemble that object. Stated in other form, to think of an object you must consciously *aim at* that object, you must pick out that object, you must already in some measure possess that object enough, namely, to identify it as what you mean."

If this be what is meant by the relation of a self to an outer object, then the relation surely becomes, once more, highly problematic. Unless, namely, the self in question has already its own conscious idea of its object, it cannot formulate its belief in this object. But just in so far as it has its own conscious ideas of the object, the Ego under consideration would seem to possess only inner knowledge. It defines for itself the object of its belief. The definition is internal. The self appears as if cut off from the object. Its ideas shall be "its own." The object, as it seems, is beyond them. The only relation that can exist is so far correspondence. But, alas! this relation is not enough. Another relation is needed. If the self in question is actually thinking of the object, it is already meaning to transcend its own ideas even while it is apparently confined to its ideas. And it is actually meaning, not self-transcendence in general, but just such self-transcendence as does actually bring it into a genuine and objective relation to the particular object with which it means to have its ideas agree. Am I really thinking of the moon? then I not only have ideas that resemble the objective constitution of the moon, but I am actually trying to get my ideas into such correspondence with an external truth called the moon. In other words, whether I succeed or not in thinking rightly of the moon, still, if I am thinking of the moon at all, my thought does transcend my private experience in a fashion which no mere similarity or correspondence between my ideas and other realities can express. The true relation of thought and object needs another formulation.

Shall we attempt such a formulation? In so far as I am fully conscious of my meaning, in any thinking of mine, I am confined to my private ideas. But in so far as I am to be in any relation to an

object, I must really be meaning that object without being, in my private capacity, fully conscious that I am thus really meaning just this object. At the moment of my thought of the object, I am conscious only that I am meaning my ideas to be not merely mine, but actually related to some object beyond. Am I, however, actually thus related to a particular outer object, then my present consciousness of my meaning is so related to that which is truly, although at present unconsciously, my meaning, that, were I to become fully conscious of my meaning, the object would no longer be external to my thought, but would be at once recognized as the object that I all along had meant, and would be included in my now more completely conscious thought. Complex as is this formula, it is needed for the sake of expressing the facts.

In other words, the only way in which I can really mean an object that is now beyond me is by actually standing to that object in the relation in which I often stand to a forgotten or half-forgotten name when I seek it, or to the implied meaning of a simple and at first sight obviously comprehensible statement, when, as in studying formal logic, I have to reflect carefully before I discover this meaning. And thus we are led to the following formulation of our own definition of the phrase "my object."

3. "My object is that which I even now mean by my thoughts, although, in so far as the object is beyond my private conscious thought, I cannot at present be fully conscious of this my relation to it. Yet the relation, although just now to me unconscious, must in such wise exist, that a true reflection upon my own meaning would even now recognize the object as actually meant by me. Such a reflection would, however, be an enlargement of my own present thought, a discovery of my own truer self, a consciousness of what is now latent in my consciousness. On the other hand, as a consciousness of my meaning, if complete, could still contain only thoughts, my object, as my object, must even now be a thought of mine, only a thought of which I am not now, in my private capacity, fully aware. In other words, my world of objects, if it exists, is that which my complete self would recognize as the totality of my thoughts brought to a full consciousness of their own meaning."

To sum up both aspects of the foregoing argument, whether you consider your inner life or your supposed relation to a world of objects external to yourself, you find that, in order to be either the self of "this moment," or the being who thinks about "this world of objects," you must be organically related to a true and

complete reflective Person whom your finite consciousness logically implies, fragmentary and ignorant though this consciousness of yours is.

Thus, then, the essential nature of our idealistic view of reality begins to come into sight. I know not directly through my finite experience who I am, or how much of a personality I truly possess. If, however, I am really a self at all, as even my fragmentary finite self-consciousness implies, then my true Self is aware of its own content and of its own meaning. If directly I cannot through finite experience exhaustively know my own nature, I can examine the logical implications of my imperfect selfhood. And this content and this meaning, which, as I find, are logically implied by even my finite selfhood, must include my whole "world of objects," as well as the whole truth of my inner life. If, then, this analysis of the concept of Personality be sound, there is logically possible but one existent Person, namely, the one complete Self.

Yet perchance to the foregoing argument an answer may be suggested that will seem to some readers, at first sight, conclusive. This idealism, it will be said, is, after all, unable to give any notion of the extent, or of the content, or of the magnitude, of this world of the complete Self. What is proved is at best this, that *if* my thought is truly related to objects outside of my finite consciousness, then, in so far as this relation exists, that is, in so far as I truly think of these objects, they are in themselves objects possessed by my true or complete Self, whereof this finite consciousness is only a *moment* or organic element. But perhaps the assumption that I ever think of objects beyond my finite self is itself an error. How, at all events, can I ever do more than postulate, or hope, or believe, that it is no error? How can the way to an objective knowledge of the objective relations of my finite thought ever be opened to me? How can I ever transcend my finitude, to know that I am really thinking of objects beyond, or that I am implicitly meaning them?

It is at this point that the argument concerning the "Possibility of Error," as I developed it in my chapter so entitled, in the "Religious Aspect of Philosophy," becomes immediately important to the present discussion. If, namely, in my finitude, I am actually never meaning any objective truth beyond my finite selfhood, even when I most suppose myself to be meaning such truth, then one must accept the only alternative. I must, then, be really in error when I suppose myself to be referring, in my thoughts,

to outer objects. The objective truth about my finite consciousness must then be, that I never really refer to any objective truth at all, but am confined, in a sort of Protagorean fashion, to the world of the subjective inner life as such. I think, let us say, of the universe, of infinite space and time, of God, of an opposing philosophical doctrine concerning these things, of absolute truth, of the complete Self as he is in himself, or of what you will. Well, these are all, it may be supposed, subjective ideas of my finite self. It may be an error to regard them as more. No objects outside my finitude correspond to them. I do not really mean any outer truth by them. I only fancy that I mean outer truth by them. Could I clearly reflect on what I mean by these objects, I should see this illusion, this error, of supposing that I really have in mind outer objects. So our skeptical objector may respond to all the foregoing considerations.

But, once more, if this be true of any of my ideas, if my intent to mean outer truth by them is itself an illusion, then under what conditions, and under what only, is such an error, such an illusion, possible? I err about any specific object only if, meaning to tell the truth about that object, I am now in such a relation to it that my thought fails to conform to the object meant. I cannot be in error about any object unless I am meaning that object. If, then, when I think of infinite time, or of infinite space, or of the universe in general, or of the absolute truth, I err in supposing that there is beyond my finite self an object corresponding to any of these notions of mine, then my error can only lie in this: that whereas my finite self *means to mean* outer objects, my true Self, possessing a clear insight into what truth really exists beyond my finite self, completing the imperfect insight of my finitude, discovers that what I take to be an outer object is only an idea of mine, and that in the world of the complete insight there exists nothing corresponding to my intended meaning. But thus, after all, we surely change not the essential situation which my finite self must really occupy. For still, whatever its errors, my finite self is an organic element in the correcting insight of the true Self. My notions of time and of space, of truth and of the universe, may be as imperfect, in all specific respects, as you please. Only, in so far as they are erroneous, the complete Self, having possession of the complete truth, corrects them. And even if I do not *mean to mean* an outer truth at any one moment when I imagine myself to be in relation to such truth, even then, this paradoxical situation can only be the objective, the genuine situa-

tion, in which my finite consciousness stands, in case my truly reflective Self detects the meaninglessness of my finite point of view in just this case. For, in the case as thus supposed, I am still defined as objectively in error, just in so far as what I *mean to mean*, namely some particular kind of outer truth, is, from the point of view of the Self that knows my objectively true relations, not in correspondence with what I really mean.

Or, again, to put the case once more in concrete form: I am trying to think of an outer object. I conceive of that object as existent. But I am supposed to be in error. I care not what the supposed outer object shall be, — infinite time or infinite space, or any other form of being. If I am in error, then, even now, unknown to my finite self, the objective situation is this, namely, that the world of truth as I should know it if I came to complete self-consciousness, that is, to complete awareness of what I have a right to mean, would not contain this my finite object, but would contain truth such as obviously excluded that object. In any case, then, we cannot escape from one assertion, namely, the assertion upon which the very “possibility of error” itself is based. This is the assertion that there is, even now, the existent truth, and that this exists as the object of my completely reflective Self.

But, finally, does one still object that the completely reflective Self, the possessor of my complete meaning, and of its genuine objects, the Self aware of the world of truth in its entirety, is still, after all, definable only as a possible, not as an actual, Self, namely, as the possible possessor of what I should know *if* I came to complete self-consciousness, and not as the present actual possessor of a concrete fullness of conscious insight? Then we must reply that the whole foregoing argument involves at every step the obvious reflection that, if at present a certain situation exists, which logically implies, even as it now stands, a possible experience, which would become mine if ever I came to complete self-consciousness, then the possibility thus involved is *ipso facto* no bare or empty possibility, but is a present and concrete truth, not, indeed, for me in my finite capacity but for one who knows the truth as it is. Idealism is everywhere based upon the assertion that bare possibilities are as good as unrealities, and that genuine possibilities imply genuine realities at the basis of them. A merely possible pain, which nobody actually either feels or knows, is nothing. Yet more, then, is a merely possible reflection, which nobody makes, an unreality. But the foregoing argument has been

throughout devoted to proving that the finite consciousness implies the present truth of an exhaustively complete and reflective self-consciousness which I, indeed, so far as I am merely finite, never attain, but which must be attained, just in so far as the truth is even now true.

IV.

Mere outlines are always unsatisfactory. The foregoing argument has been merely a suggestion. There has been no space to answer numerous other objections which I have all the while borne in mind, or to carry out numerous analyses which the argument has brought more or less clearly into sight. My effort has been to make a beginning, and to lead this or that metaphysically disposed fellow-student to look further if he finds himself attracted by a train of thought to which the whole of modern philosophy seems to me to lead.

Such, at all events, is the path of philosophical idealism. What, now, is the goal? What definition of the complete Self does one thus, in the end, get? I have elsewhere used the tentative definition: "The Self who knows in unity all truth." I have accordingly laid stress upon this character of the divine World-Self as a Thinker, and have labored to distinguish between this his fullness of Being, as idealism is obliged to define it, and those customary notions which define God first of all in "dynamic, rather" than in explicitly rational terms, and which, to preserve his almighty power as the director of Nature, and his exalted separateness from our weakness in so far as He is to be our moral Judge, find it necessary, first of all, to make Him other than his world of truth, and only in the second place to endow Him with a wisdom adequate to the magnitude of his "dynamic" business. All such opposed definitions I find, indeed, hopelessly defective. But in insisting upon thought as the first category of the divine Person, I myself am not at all minded to lose sight of the permanent, although, in the order of logical dependence, secondary, significance of the moral categories, or of their eternal place in the world of the completed Self. That they are thus logically secondary does not prevent them from being, in the order of spiritual worth and dignity, supreme. That evil is a real thing, that free-will has a genuine existence in this world of the Self, that we beings who live in time have ourselves a very "dynamic" business to do, that the perfection of the Self does not exclude, but rather demands, the genuineness and the utter baseness of deliberate evil-doing in our finite moral order, and that Idealism

not only must face the problems of evil and of moral choice, but, as a fact, is in possession of the only possible rational solution for these problems, — all these things I have tried elsewhere to show in a fashion which, as I hope, if not satisfactory, is at least sufficiently explicit to make clear to a careful reader that the God of the Idealist is at any rate no merely indifferent onlooker upon this our temporal world of warfare and dust and blood and sin and glory. To my mind, one of the most significant facts in the world is furnished by the thought that all this is, indeed, his fully comprehended world, and that if these dark and solemn things which cloud our finite lives with problems are in and of the universe of the crystal-clear Self, then, whatever the tragedy of our finitude, our problems are in themselves solved; while, as for our own personal destinies, they are, after all, and at the worst, part of his self-chosen destiny. For, as I have elsewhere explained, an absolute Reason does not exclude, but rather implies, an absolute choice; while such a choice does not exclude, but of necessity implies, as it includes, a finite and personal freedom in us. That this our moral and individual freedom belongs, after the fashion first indicated by Kant, not to the temporal order of our daily phenomenal world, in so far as it is merely temporal and phenomenal, but to a higher order, whereof we are a part, and not unconsciously a part, — all this does not militate either against the true unity of the Self, or against the genuineness of the moral order. Every being who is rationally conscious of time, is, by that very fact, living in part out of the world of time. For what we know we transcend. To live in time by virtue of one's physical nature, but out of time by virtue of one's very consciousness of time itself, is to share in the eternal freedom, and to be a moral agent.

JOSIAH ROYCE.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.