



Objective Idealism

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Idea and Reality must, then, possess elements that are common to both of them. On the other hand, as we saw, this mere community is wholly inadequate to the tasks of defining what makes the object belong, as object, to a given idea. For, if you view any idea and its supposed object, merely as one might be imagined viewing them from without, it is wholly impossible to determine what degree of correspondence between them is required either to make the reality that precise object sought by the idea, or to render the idea the true representative of the object to which it is said to refer. A true idea, as Spinoza said, must indeed resemble its ideate. But on the other hand, a mere resemblance of idea and ideate is not enough. Nor does the absence of any specific degree of resemblance necessarily involve an error. It is intended resemblance which counts in estimating the truth of ideas. If in fact you suppose, as an ideal case, two human beings, say twins, absolutely to resemble each other, not only in body, but in experience and in thought, so that every idea which one of these beings at any moment had was precisely duplicated by a thought which at the same instant, and in the same fashion, arose in the other being's life,—if, I say, you suppose this perfect resemblance in the twin minds, you could still, without inconsistency, suppose these twins separated from infancy, living apart, although of course under perfectly similar physical conditions, and in our human sense what we men call absolute strangers to each other, so that neither of them, viewed merely as this human being, ever consciously thought of the other, or conceived of the other's existence. In that case, the mere resemblance would not so far constitute the one of these twin minds the object of which the other mind thought, or the being concerning whom the ideas of the other were true.

The resemblance of idea and object, viewed as a mere fact for an external observer, is, therefore, never by itself enough to constitute the truth of the idea. Nor is the absence of any externally predetermined resemblances, such as you from without may choose to demand of the idea, enough to constitute any specific sort of error. Moreover, when you merely assert that in the world of Being there is to be found an object which resembles your idea, you have so far only mentioned two beings, namely, your idea and its object, and have asserted their resemblance. But you have not yet in the least defined wherein the Being of either of these objects consists. This, then, is the outcome so long as you view idea and object as sundered facts agreeing or disagreeing with each other. Neither truth nor Being is thus to be defined. The result so far is conclusive as against the adequacy, not only of Realism, and of Mysticism, but also, as we saw, of even the Third Conception of Being.

For if one asserts, as his account of the nature of Being, that certain ideas of possibilities of experience are valid, he is so far left with a world of objects upon his hands whose only character, so far as he yet defines the Being of these objects, is that these objects are in agreement with his ideas. Such a definition of Being constituted the whole outcome of the Third Conception. The mathematician's ideas, as present to himself, take the form of observed symbols and diagrams. These, so far as they are observed, are contents of experience fulfilling purpose. They so far conform to our definition of what constitutes an idea, for they have internal meaning. But the existent objects concerning which the

mathematician endeavors to teach us, are, by hypothesis, not the symbols, and not the diagrams, but valid truths to which these diagrams and symbols—these mathematician's ideas—correspond. The existences of the mathematician's realm are other than his mere finite ideas. Now that such objects have their place in reality, I myself thoroughly believe. But I point out that their reality, the true Being of these objects, is in no wise defined when you merely speak of the ideas as nothing but valid, because the assertion of validity is so far merely the assertion of a correspondence between a presupposed idea and its assumed object, without any account as yet either of the object, or of the truth of the idea. And bare correspondence, the mere possession of common characters in idea and in object not only fails to define, but, as we now see, can never lead us to define, the Being of either idea or object, and in no sense shows or explains to us the relation whereby the idea means, selects, and is in just this way true of just this one object.

The relation of correspondence between idea and object is, therefore, wholly subordinate to another and far deeper relation; and so to say, "My idea has reference to a real Being," is to say, "My idea imperfectly expresses, in my present consciousness, an intention, a meaning, a purpose; and just this specific meaning is carried out, is fulfilled, is expressed, by my object." For correspondence to its object, and intentional selection of both the object and the sort of correspondence, constitute the two possible relations of idea and object. If the bare correspondence determines neither Being nor truth, the intention must determine both Being and truth. In other words, the Being to which any idea refers is simply the will of the idea more determinately, and also more completely, expressed. Once admit this definition of the nature of Being, and you will accomplish the end which all the various prior definitions of Being actually sought.

For, first, with the realist, you will now assert that the object is not only Other than the finite idea, but is something that is authoritative over against the finite idea. The realist gave an abstract expression to this authority of the object when he said that the object is independent of the idea. The abstraction was false; but it was already a suggestion of the true meaning. The finite idea does seek its own Other. It consciously means this Other. And it can seek only what it consciously means to seek. But it consciously means to seek precisely that determination of its own will to singleness and finality of expression which shall leave it no Other yet beyond, and still to seek. To its own plan, to its own not here fully determined purpose, the idea at this instant must needs submit. Its very present conscious will is its submission. Yet the idea submits to no external meaning that is not the development of its own internal meaning. Moreover, the finite idea is a merely general idea. But what it means, its object, is an Individual. So you will all agree with the realist that whether or no the idea just now embodies its own object of search as nearly with present truth as the narrow limits of our consciousness permit, it must still seek other fulfilment than is now present, and must submissively accept this fulfilment as its own authoritative truth. But you will reject the realistic isolation of the idea from the object, and of the object from the idea.

If one attempts in some way to modify his Realism by declaring the object not wholly, but only partially, independent of the ideas which refer to it, still such a modified realism would only the more have to face, as we ourselves have been trying to face, the problem as to how the idea and its object are positively related. And if idea and object are left in the end in any way as two separate existent facts, isolated from each other, then one can find no further relation between the isolated idea and object except the relation of greater or less correspondence, and by this relation of mere external correspondence, taken alone, one would be able to define neither the Being of any object, nor the truth of any idea. Or, in other words, a world where ideas and objects merely correspond, as isolated facts, and where no other and deeper relation links knowledge and Being, is a world where there is so far neither any knowledge nor any Being at all.

But secondly, if you accept our Fourth Conception, you will also agree with Mysticism

in so far as, identifying Being with fulfilment of purpose, the mystic says, of the object of any of your ideas: *That art thou*. For the mystic means this assertion not of the imperfect self of the merely finite idea. He does not mean that this passing thrill of longing is already fully identical with the Other that this very longing seeks. For the mystic, as for the realist, Being is indeed something Other than our mere search for Being. The mystical identification of the world and the Self is meant to be true of the completed, of the fulfilled and final, or Absolute Self. Now, starting with any idea, we shall henceforth say to this idea, regarding its own object, precisely what the mystic says of the Self and the World: *That art thou*. Namely, the object is for us simply the completely embodied will of the idea. It is nothing else. But we shall henceforth differ from the mystic precisely at the point where the mystic takes refuge in mere negations. We, too, of course, shall also confess our finite ignorance. But the *Neti, Neti* of Yājñavalkya, the *nescio, nescio* of the mediaeval mystic, will express for us, not the essential nature of true Being, as the mystic declared, but merely the present inadequacy of your passing idea to its own present and conscious purpose,—a purpose known precisely so far as it is embodied at this instant. We shall say if we follow to its conclusion this our Fourth Conception, “We know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the object meant, namely, precisely when that which is perfect is truly said to be, it fulfils, and in so far by supplementing but not otherwise, it takes away that which is in part.” Our final object, the *urbs Sion unica, mansio mystica*, is for us, as for the mystic, the unique Being wherein this our finite will is fulfilled. But this one object meant, this fulfilment of our will, is not merely “founded in heaven.” Its will is done on earth, not yet in this temporal instant wholly as it is in heaven, but is still really done, in these ideas that already consciously attain a fragment of their own meaning. They are ideas precisely because they do this. The sadness of the mystical longing is now for us lighted by glimpses of the genuine and eternally present truth of the one real world. It is not merely in the mystic trance, but in every rational idea, in so far as it is already a partially embodied purpose, that we now shall in our own way and measure come upon that which is, and catch the deep pulsations of the world. Our instant is not yet the whole of eternity; but the eternal light, the *lux eterna*, shineth in our every reasonable moment, and lighteth every idea that cometh into the world.

And, thirdly, if you follow our Fourth Conception, you will now agree with the critical rationalist when he asserts that Being essentially involves what gives the validity to ideas. But you will have discovered what conditions are necessary to constitute validity. The valid finite idea is first, for whoever possess it, an observed and empirical fulfilment of purpose. But this fulfilment is also observed in this instant as something incomplete. Therefore it is that a finite idea seeks beyond itself for its own validity. And it is perfectly true to say that if the idea is valid, certain further experience of the fulfilment of the idea is possible. Leave this further experience, however, as something merely possible, and your definition of Being would so far remain fast bound in its own fatal circle. Is the idea valid or not? If it is valid, then, by hypothesis, further experience that would confirm the idea is possible. This further experience, like any object existent in the mathematician’s realm, is both known to be something Other than the idea that refers to it, and is also viewed as a fact precisely corresponding to what the idea means to define. Now so long as you call this Other, this possible experience, merely such a bare possibility, you define, as we have said, only those characters of this object which the object has in common with your merely present idea of the object. The object is so far defined as an experience, and as having this or that type or form. That is what you say when you talk of any being in Kant’s realm of *Mögliche Erfahrung*, or of any mathematical fact. All that is thus defined about the object is its mere *what*, the characters that it shares with your present ideas and experiences at the moment when you define it. What therefore you have *not* thus defined is precisely the Being of the object as Other than the very finite idea which is to regard it as an Other. If you have once

observed this defect of any assertion of a bare possibility of experience, you will have seen why the mere definition of universal types can never reach the expression of the whole nature of real Beings, and why, for that very reason, the realm of Validity is nothing unless it is more than merely valid, nothing too unless it takes an individual form as an unique fulfilment of purpose in a completed life.

But all the three former conceptions are now to be brought into synthesis in this Fourth Conception. What is, is authoritative over against finite ideas, as Realism asserted, is one with the true meaning of the idea, as Mysticism insisted, and is valid as Critical Rationalism demanded. What is, presents the fulfilment of the whole purpose of the very idea that now seeks this Being. And when I announce this as our Fourth Conception of Being, I do not mean to be understood as asserting a mere validity, but as reporting facts. I do not any longer merely say, as we said at the outset of our discussion, Being is that which, if present, would end your finite search, would answer your doubts, would fulfil your purpose. All that was the language of validity. It was a mere preliminary. Since validity has no meaning unless its general types of truth take on individual form, and unless the *what* turns into the *that*, I now say, without any reserve, What is does in itself fulfil your meaning, does express, in the completest logically possible measure, the accomplishment and embodiment of the very will now fragmentarily embodied in your finite ideas. And I say, that this embodiment means in itself precisely what your present embodiment of purpose in your rational experience means, just in so far as your purposes are not mere fragments, but are also, even in their transiency, results known as, relatively speaking, won, as possessed, as accomplished. The accomplishment of your purpose now means that your experience is viewed by you as the present and conscious expression of a plan. Well, what is, precisely in so far as it is, is in the same way a whole experience finally expressing and consciously fulfilling a plan. And the Being of the real object of which you now think means a life that expresses the fulfilment of just your present plan, in the greatest measure in which your plan itself is logically capable of fulfilment.

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