THE REALITY OF THE MIND AND BODY

Here we see emphasized the relation to the body which has been mentioned above. If we ask the psychologist how he knows that the body he is talking about is a real body, and not merely an imagined one, he has to fall back upon the test which is common to us all. A real hand is one which we see with the eyes open, and which we touch with the other hand. If our experiences of our own body had not the setting which marks all sensory experiences, we could never say: I perceive that my body is near the desk. When we call our body real, as contrasted with things imaginary, we recognize that this group of experiences belongs to the class described; it is given in sensation, and is not merely thought of.

It will be observed that, in distinguishing between sensations and things imaginary, we never go beyond the circle of our experiences. We do not reach out to a something beyond or behind experiences, and say: When such a reality is present, we may affirm that we have a sensation, and when it is not, we may call the experience imaginary. If there were such a reality as this, it would do us little good, for since it is not supposed to be perceived directly, we should have to depend upon the sensations to prove the presence of the reality, and could not turn to the reality and ask it whether we were or were not experiencing a sensation.

The distinction between sensations and what is imaginary is an observed distinction. It can be proved that some experiences are sensory and that some are not. This means that, in drawing the distinction, we remain within the circle of our experiences. There has been much unnecessary mystification touching this supposed reality behind experiences. In the next chapter we shall see in what senses the word "reality" may properly be used, and in what sense it may not.

There is a danger in using it loosely and vaguely. MAY WE CALL "THINGS" GROUPS OF SENSATIONS?— Now, the external world seems to the plain man to be directly given in his sense experiences. He is willing to admit that the table in the next room, of which he is merely thinking, is known at one remove, so to speak. But this desk here before him: is it not known directly?

Not the mental image, the mere representative, but the desk itself, a something that is physical and not mental? And the psychologist, whatever his theory of the relation between the mind and the world, seems to support him, at least, in so far as to maintain that in sensation the external world is known as directly as it is possible for the external world to be known, and that one can get no more of it than is presented in sensation. If a sense is lacking, an aspect of the world as given is also lacking; if a sense is defective, as in the color-blind, the defect is reflected in the world upon which one gazes. Such considerations, especially when taken together with what has been said at the close of the last section about the futility of looking for a reality behind our sensations, may easily suggest rather a startling possibility.

May it not be, if we really are shut up to the circle of our experiences, that the physical things, which we have been accustomed to look upon as non-mental, are nothing more than complexes of sensations? Granted that there seems to be presented in our experience a material world as well as a mind, may it not be that this material world is a mental thing of a certain kind—a mental thing contrasted with other mental things, such as imaginary things? This question has always been answered in the affirmative by the idealists, who claim that all existence must be regarded as psychical existence.

Their doctrine we shall consider later .It will be noticed that we seem to be back again with Professor Pearson in the last chapter. To this question I make the following answer: In the first place, I remark that even the plain man distinguishes somehow between his sensations and external things. He thinks that he has reason to believe that things do not cease to exist when he no longer has sensations. Moreover, he believes that things do not always appear to his senses as they really are.

If we tell him that his sensations are the things, it shocks his common sense. He answers: Do you mean to tell me that complexes of sensation can be on a shelf or in a drawer? can be cut with a knife or broken with the hands? He feels that there must be some real distinction between sensations and the things without him.

Now, the notions of the plain man on such matters as these are not very clear, and what he says about sensations and things is not always edifying. But it is clear that he feels strongly that the man who would identify them is obliterating a distinction to which his experience testifies unequivocally. We must not hastily disregard his protest. He is sometimes right in his feeling that things are not identical, even when he cannot prove it. In the second place, I remark that, in this instance, the plain man is in the right, and can be shown to be in the right. "Things" are not groups of sensations. The distinction between them will be explained in the next section.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN SENSATIONS AND "THINGS"— Suppose that I stand in my study and look at the fire in the grate. I am experiencing sensations, and am not busied merely with an imaginary fire. But may my whole experience of the fire be summed up as an experience of sensations and their changes? Let us see. If I shut my eyes, the fire disappears. Does any one suppose that the fire has been annihilated? No. We say, I no longer see it, but nothing has happened to the fire. Again, I may keep my eyes open, and simply turn my head. The fire disappears once more. Does any one suppose that my turning my head has done anything to the fire? We say unhesitatingly, my sensations have changed, but the fire has remained as it was.

Still, again, I may withdraw from the fire. Its heat seems to be diminished. Has the fire really grown less hot? And if I could withdraw to a sufficient distance, I know that the fire would appear to me smaller and less bright. Could I get far enough away to make it seem the faintest speck in the field of vision, would I be tempted to claim that the fire shrunk and grew faint merely because I walked away from it? Surely not. Now, suppose that I stand on the same spot and look at the fire without turning my head. The stick at which I am gazing catches the flame, blazes up, turns red, and finally falls together, a little mass of gray ashes. Shall I describe this by saying that my sensations have changed, or may I say that the fire itself has changed?

The plain man and the philosopher alike use the latter expression in such a case as this. Let us take another illustration. I walk towards the distant house on the plain before me. What I see as my goal seems to grow larger and brighter. It does not occur to me to maintain that the house changes as I advance. But, at a given instant, changes of a different sort make their appearance. Smoke arises, and flames burst from the roof. Now I have no hesitation in saying that changes are taking place in the house. It would seem foolish to describe the occurrence as a mere change in my sensations. Before it was my sensations that changed; now it is the house itself.

We are drawing this distinction between changes in our sensations and changes in things at every hour in the day. I cannot move without making things appear and disappear. If I wag my head, the furniture seems to dance, and I regard it as a mere seeming. I count on the clock's going when I no longer look upon its face. It would be absurd to hold that the distinction is a mere blunder, and has no foundation in our experience. The rôle it plays is too important for that. If we obliterate it, the real world of material things which seems to be revealed in our experience melts into a chaos of fantastic experiences whose appearances and disappearances seem to be subject to no law.

And it is worthy of remark that it is not merely in common life that the distinction is drawn. Every man of science must give heed to it. The psychologist does, it is true, pay much attention to sensations; but even he distinguishes between the sensations which he is studying and the material things to which he relates them, such as brains and sense-organs.

And those who cultivate the physical sciences strive, when they give an account of things and their behavior, to lay before us a history of changes analogous to the burning of the stick and of the house, excluding mere changes in sensations. There is no physicist or botanist or zoölogist who has not our common experience that things as perceived by us—our experiences of things—appear or disappear or change their character when we open or shut our eyes or move about. But nothing of all this appears in their books.

What they are concerned with is things and their changes, and they do not consider such matters as these as falling within their province. If a botanist could not distinguish between the changes which take place in a plant, and the changes which take place in his sensations as he is occupied in studying the plant, but should tell us that the plant grows smaller as one recedes from it, we should set him down as weak-minded. That the distinction is everywhere drawn, and that we must not obliterate it, is very evident. But we are in the presence of what has seemed to many men a grave difficulty.

Are not things presented in our experience only as we have sensations? what is it to perceive a thing? is it not to have sensations? how, then, can we distinguish between sensations and things? We certainly do so all the time, in spite of the protest of the philosopher; but many of us do so with a haunting sense that our behavior can scarcely be justified by the reason. Our difficulty, however, springs out of an error of our own. Grasping imperfectly the full significance of the word "sensation," we extend its use beyond what is legitimate, and we call by that name experiences which are not sensations at all. Thus the external world comes to seem to us to be not really a something contrasted with the mental, but a part of the mental world. We accord to it the attributes of the latter, and rob it of those distinguishing attributes which belong to it by right.

When we have done this, we may feel impelled to say, as did Professor Pearson, that things are not really "outside" of us, as they seem to be, but are merely "projected" outside—thought of as if they were "outside." All this I must explain at length. Let us come back to the first of the illustrations given above, the case of the fire in my study. As I stand and look at it, what shall I call the red glow which I observe? Shall I call it a quality of a thing, or shall I call it a sensation? To this I answer: I may call it either the one or the other, according to its setting among other experiences. We have seen that sensations and things merely imaginary are distinguished from one another by their setting.

With open eyes we see things; with our eyes closed we can imagine them: we see what is before us; we imagine what lies behind our backs. If we confine our attention to the bit of experience itself, we have no means of determining whether it is sensory or imaginary. Only its setting can decide that point. Here, we have come to another distinction of much the same sort. That red glow, that bit of experience, taken by itself and abstracted from all other experiences, cannot be called either a sensation or the quality of a thing. Only its context can give us the right to call it the one or the other. This ought to become clear when we reflect upon the illustration of the fire.

We have seen that one whole series of changes has been unhesitatingly described as a series of changes in my sensations. Why was this? Because it was observed to depend upon changes in the relations of my body, my senses (a certain group of experiences), to the bit of experience I call the fire. Another series was described as a series of changes in the fire. Why? Because, the relation to my senses remaining unchanged, changes still took place, and had to be accounted for in other ways. It is a matter of common knowledge that they can be accounted for in other ways. This is not a discovery of the philosopher. He can only invite us to think over the matter and see what the unlearned and the learned are doing at every moment.

Sometimes they are noticing that experiences change as they turn their heads or walk toward or away from objects; sometimes they abstract from this, and consider the series of changes that take place independently of this. That bit of experience, that red glow, is not related only to my body. Such experiences are related also to each other; they stand in a vast independent system of relations, which, as we have seen, the man of science can study without troubling himself to consider sensations at all. This system is the external world—the external world as known or as knowable, the only external world that it means anything for us to talk about. As having its place in this system, a bit of experience is not a sensation, but is a quality or aspect of a thing. Sensations, then, to be sensations, must be bits of experience considered in their relation to some organ of sense.

They should never be confused with qualities of things, which are experiences in a different setting. It is as unpardonable to confound the two as it is to confound sensations with things imaginary. We may not, therefore, say that "things" are groups of sensations. We may, if we please, describe them as complexes of qualities. And we may not say that the "things" we perceive are really "inside" of us and are merely "projected outside." What can "inside" and "outside" mean? Only this. We recognize in our experience two distinct orders, the objective order, the system of phenomena which constitutes the material world, and the subjective order, the order of things mental, to which belong sensations and "ideas."

That is "outside" which belongs to the objective order. The word has no other meaning when used in this connection. That is "inside" which belongs to the subjective order, and is contrasted with the former. If we deny that there is an objective order, an external world, and say that everything is "inside," we lose our distinction, and even the word "inside" becomes meaningless. It indicates no contrast. When men fall into the error of talking in this way, what they do is to keep the external world and gain the distinction, and at the same time to deny the existence of the world which has furnished it. In other words, they put the clerk into a telephone exchange, and then tell us that the exchange does not really exist. He is inside—of what? He is inside of nothing.

Then, can he really be inside? We see,that the plain man and the man of science are quite right in accepting the external world. The objective order is known as directly as is the subjective order. Both are orders of experiences; they are open to observation, and we have, in general, little difficulty in distinguishing between them, as the illustrations given above amply prove.

THE EXISTENCE OF MATERIAL THINGS.—difficulty seems to remain and to call for a solution. We all believe that material things exist when we no longer perceive them. We believe that they existed before they came within the field of our observation. In these positions the man of science supports us. The astronomer has no hesitation in saying that the comet, which has sailed away through space, exists, and will return. The geologist describes for us the world as it was in past ages, when no eye was opened upon it.

But has it not been stated above that the material world is an order of experiences? and can there be such a thing as an experience that is not experienced by somebody? In other words, can the world exist, except as it is perceived to exist? This seeming difficulty has occasioned much trouble to philosophers in the past. said, "To exist is to be perceived." There are those who agree with him at the present day. Their difficulty would have disappeared had they examined with sufficient care the meaning of the word "exist." We have no right to pass over the actual uses of such words, and to give them a meaning of our own. If one thing seems as certain as any other, it is that material things exist when we do not perceive them.

On what ground may the philosopher combat the universal opinion, the dictum of common sense and of science? When we look into his reasonings, we find that he is influenced by the error discussed at length in the last section—he has confused the phenomena of the orders of experience. I have said that, when we concern ourselves with the objective order, we abstract or should abstract, from the relations which things bear to our senses. We account for phenomena by referring to other phenomena which we have reason to accept as their physical conditions or causes. We do not consider that a physical cause is effective only while we perceive it. When we come back to this notion of our perceiving a thing or not perceiving it, we have left the objective order and passed over to the subjective. We have left the consideration of "things" and have turned to sensations.

There is no reason why we should do this. The physical order is an independent order, as we have seen. The man of science, when he is endeavoring to discover whether some thing or quality of a thing really existed at some time in the past, is not in the least concerned to establish the fact that some one saw it. No one ever saw the primitive fire-mist from which, as we are told, the world came into being. But the scientist cares little for that. He is concerned only to prove that the phenomena he is investigating really have a place in the objective order. If he decides that they have, he is satisfied; he has proved something to exist.

To belong to the objective order is to exist as a physical thing or quality. When the plain man and the man of science maintain that a physical thing exists, they use the word in precisely the same sense. The meaning they give to it is the proper meaning of the word. It is justified by immemorial usage, and it marks a real distinction. Shall we allow the philosopher to tell us that we must not use it in this sense, but must say that only sensations and ideas exist? Surely not. This would mean that we permit him to obliterate for us the distinction between the external world and what is mental.

But is it right to use the word "experience" to indicate the phenomena which have a place in the objective order? Can an experience be anything but mental? There can be no doubt that the suggestions of the word are unfortunate—it has what we may call a subjective flavor. It suggests that, after all, the things we perceive are sensations or percepts, and must, to exist at all, exist in a mind. As we have seen, this is an error, and an error which we all avoid in actual practice. We do not take sensations for things, and we recognize clearly enough that it is one thing for a material object to exist and another for it to be perceived. Why, then, use the word "experience"? Simply because we have no better word. We must use it, and not be misled by the associations which cling to it.

The word has this great advantage: it brings out clearly the fact that all our knowledge of the external world rests ultimately upon those phenomena which, when we consider them in relation to our senses, we recognize as sensations. We cannot start out from mere imaginings to discover what the world was like in the ages past. It is this truth that is recognized by the plain man, when he maintains that, in the last resort, we can know things only in so far as we see, touch, hear, taste, and smell them; and by the psychologist, when he tells us that, in sensation, the external world is revealed as directly as it is possible that it could be revealed. But it is a travesty on this truth to say that we do not know things, but know only our sensations of sight, touch, taste, hearing, and the like. See the note on this chapter at the close of the volume.

THINGS AND THEIR APPEARANCES.—We have seen in the last chapter that there is an external world and that it is given in our experience. There is an objective order, and we are all capable of distinguishing between it and the subjective. He who says that we perceive only sensations and ideas flies in the face of the common experience of mankind. But we are not yet through with the subject. We all make a distinction between things as they appear and things as they really are. If we ask the plain man, What is the real external world? the first answer that seems to present itself to his mind is this: Whatever we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell may be regarded as belonging to the real world.

What we merely imagine does not belong to it. That this answer is not a very satisfactory one occurred to men's minds very early in the history of reflective thought. The ancient skeptic said to himself: The colors of objects vary according to the light, and according to the position and distance of the objects; can we say that any object has a real color of its own? A staff stuck into water looks bent, but feels straight to the touch; why believe the testimony of one sense rather than that of another? Such questionings led to far-reaching consequences. They resulted in a forlorn distrust of the testimony of the senses, and to a doubt as to our ability to know anything as it really is.

Now, the distinction between appearances and realities exists for us as well as for the ancient skeptic, and without being tempted to make such extravagant statements as that there is no such thing as truth, and that every appearance is as real as any other, we may admit that it is not very easy to see the full significance of the distinction, although we are referring to it constantly. For example, we look from our window and see, as we say, a tree at a distance.

What we are conscious of is a small bluish patch of color. Now, a small bluish patch of color is not, strictly speaking, a tree; but for us it represents the tree. Suppose that we walk toward the tree. Do we continue to see what we saw before? Of course, we say that we continue to see the same tree; but it is plain that what we immediately perceive, what is given in consciousness, does not remain the same as we move.