A PROPOSED RECONCILIATION OF IDEALISM AND REALISM.

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In our own time, a number of men, either themselves workers in certain special sciences, or, at any rate, men who expressly take into consideration and attempt to estimate the significance of the sciences, have been speaking in a way that appears to dissolve away the objectivity and externality of the world. They shut us up to the subjective, to sensations and ideas, and their utterances seem to give an air of unreality to what science has to tell us of the world of things. I allude, of course, to such writers as Mach, Pearson, and others. What they tell us arouses, at times, a certain irritation in those who have spent their lives in the endeavor to attain to the secrets of nature. Yet all must admit that these writers are men of clear mind, and that they are abreast of the knowledge of the day. One cannot set their doctrine aside as the product of some pre-scientific stage of human knowledge, which the modern man is not bound to take seriously.

Thus, we are anew brought face to face with the old problem of the rival claims of Realism and Idealism. I use these terms broadly, the former to cover any doctrine which accepts a material world not to be confused with what is mental, the latter to cover any doctrine which refuses to admit the existence of such. The problem is an old one, and yet, as it to-day urges itself upon our attention, it is a direct product of reflection upon human knowledge as it is.

In this paper, I propose to suggest a solution for this problem by the way of compromise. We are not concerned with prophetic utterances which neither seek nor need justification. Both realist and idealist are, in our time, supposed to make their appeal to observation and to reasonable inference. Our

everyday experience and our scientific knowledge furnish, or should furnish, a common ground under the feet of both parties to the dispute. It does not, hence, seem hopeless, on the basis of a survey of this common ground, to suggest certain reasonable concessions which may be made by each, and which may result in something like a reconciliation.

To my mind, this does not mean that either party need relinquish a certain fundamental truth which has furnished a basis for his doctrine. It means only that he is to recognize a complementary truth, upon which his opponent has laid emphasis, and which, when recognized, brings him to a better understanding of the truth upon which he himself before took his stand. The limits of this paper prevent it from being more than a program; I can only set forth briefly a series of considerations in the hope that they may furnish material for reflection to others.

I.

What, in the present state of our knowledge, does it seem reasonable for us to demand of *both* realist and idealist?

1. Both ought to discard altogether anything so cut off from observation, and legitimate inference based upon observation, as an "unknowable", or "thing-in-itself" or whatever one may choose to call what lies, by hypothesis, beyond all conceivable experience. It does not add to our knowledge to assume such a mere name. It can play no significant rôle in a system of knowledge or of reality.

2. Both ought to accept, provisionally, at least, the body of knowledge furnished in the special sciences as they are. All is not equally certain; some hypotheses may turn out not to be true; but a body of knowledge there undoubtedly is.

3. And this means that both ought to accept the facts presented in two distinct classes of sciences, the sciences which have to do with the external world of matter and motion, and the sciences which treat of mind. We may not repudiate what has been accomplished in such fields as chemistry, physics, biology. Those who labor in these fields believe that they are concerned with physical facts, not with psychical; and I suppose no one would be tempted to describe their investigations as psychological or logical. However we may be inclined to

describe the difference between the physical and the mental, we should admit that we have no right to obliterate the distinction. It is too palpable and undeniable; it is given an objective expression in the actual classification of the sciences; its consistent repudiation would result in the direst confusion. If philosophers are to differ at all on the subject of physical and mental, it should surely be only as touching the *nature* of the distinction, not as touching its *existence*.

Now, if realist and idealist will consent to confine themselves to the broad field of experience, and will be careful not to obliterate the distinctions which they find ready to hand both in common knowledge and in science, they ought, I think, to discover that the wall of separation between them is growing thin. Let us see what not unreasonable concessions on the one side and on the other may lead to its total disappearance.

II.

What should the realist stand ready to admit? Surely he should admit that any account which we can give of the world is an account of the world as revealed to our senses and to our intellect. It is an account given in terms of experiences.

For the materials of knowledge we depend ultimately upon our senses; in elaborating this material we never free ourselves from the data of sense, and it is self-evident that, in elaborating it, we must use our mental powers. A geologist without senses and without an intellect would be an absurdity. Any account of the condition of the world in past ages, which rests upon the observations of no one, and is not due to the intelligence of anyone, can certainly have no meaning for science.

Moreover, both the senses and the intellect of man are the result of a process of evolution, if there is any truth in science. And man is but one among many living creatures, whose senses are not the same, and the elaboration of whose sense-experiences, in so far as there is such an elaboration, we have reason to believe more or less different. Must not, therefore, every sensible man, whatever he may choose to call himself in the realm of philosophy, admit that the truest account that science is in a position to give of the world's past and present is in some sense a function of man as he is now constituted?

Upon this fact, which ought to be admitted, I think, by all, the idealist — the subjectivist — has laid much emphasis. Does its proper recognition compel us to become subjectivists?

III.

I think not. It still remains true that there are sciences which are not concerned with the study of sensations, ideas, or knowledge, as such, but treat directly of physical things and their properties. At the most modest estimate these sciences give us information at least as certain as that furnished by any of the mental sciences.

1. That the external world with which they deal is not a complex of sensations, an "inner" something given a false semblance of objectivity by means of a mental "projection", ought to be clear from the inherent absurdity of the argument which would establish the fact that the world of external things is thus subjective. We are told that a sensation arises when a message is conducted along a nerve to the brain; we are then told that the mind is shut up to sensations and copies of such, and that anything "beyond" our sensations must be a mere projection; that the "beyond" is only an apparent "beyond". Can the two halves of this doctrine be put together? Does it mean anything to speak of an "inside" to which there is no corresponding "outside?" It is surely inconsistent to hold to a distinction and in the same breath to deny it.

2. It is a palpable fact that both in common life and in science men find themselves perfectly capable of distinguishing between changes in their ideas and changes in things, between subjective changes and objective. A man walks across my room, and I recognize an objective change; I move my head, and the objects about me appear to dance. No one confounds such experiences, and no one is tempted to say that in each case there has been only a change in sensations. Again, the man who is watching the oscillations of a pendulum can make a change in his experiences by changing his position with respect to the pendulum. He is never tempted to believe that this implies a change in the pendulum or in its motion. Were we really unable to distinguish between subjective and objective, we should be thrown into confusion at every moment, and intelligent action would be impossible.

3. When we turn to the psychologist and ask him what is meant by a sensation, we find that his answer always includes a reference to the organs of sense and the nervous system. The chemist, the physicist, the biologist do not find it necessary to make a reference to such in their descriptions of the phenomena with which they are occupied. They are concerned to link phenomenon with phenomenon in a certain objective order. They are not compelled to dwell upon the relations of the phenomena to the senses of man.

4. When we scrutinize in detail the time, place, and relations to each other actually assigned to phenomena, we discover a world-wide difference between the objective and the subjective, between the qualities of things, and our sensations and ideas. We distinguish between the time at which an apple fell from the tree, and the time at which it was perceived to fall. The place where the apple fell is pointed out with the finger; the percept we refer, if we care to assign to it a place at all, to the brain of the spectator. Between the two classes of facts there is a great gulf fixed; no one thinks of killing a man seen in a dream with a real knife, or of driving a nail with the percept of a hammer.

5. Certain phenomena are, thus, assigned to an objective order clearly distinguishable from the subjective. As belonging to the objective order, they are not to be regarded as sensations or ideas, but as qualities of things. And it should be recognized that when the question is raised: What particular phenomena are to be assigned to the objective order, i. e., what is to be accepted as existing in the external world? The answer must be asked for from the special sciences and not from philosophy. Philosophical reflection may illuminate for us the procedure of the scientist, but its *justification* is a something wholly independant of the approval or the disapproval of the philosopher.

6. Hence, the philosopher may not, on the basis of general considerations touching the nature of experience, deny the existence of anything properly proved to exist by the methods of the sciences. The philosopher has not always observed this precaution in the past; it has been maintained that "to exist" is the same as "to be perceived," and this has resulted in the virtual denial of the objective order as such.

But, before the philosopher ventures to deny the existence of anything, it is surely incumbent upon him to determine what

the word *existence* properly means in the connection in which he proposes to use it. He may not assign to it a meaning arbitrarily; he must turn to common usage. Now, both in common life and in the sciences, we do not mean, when we speak of a physical thing or property as existing, that some one is perceiving that thing or property. It would everywhere be recognized as an abuse of language to say that things withdrawn from perception are annihilated. An analysis of actual usage reveals that, when men speak of anything as existing in the physical world, they mean that it must be given a place in the objective order of experience. This is the whole meaning of the expression; when we affirm that things are perceived, we mean something else.

7. Thus, when the man of science endeavors to give an account of the world as it was before it was perceived by man, he is quite within his right. He busies himself with the objective order of phenomena, and abstracts from all that is subjective.

"But," the idealist may here object, "remember the concessions which have been urged above upon the realist. Has he not been asked to admit that this order is, in a certain sense, a function of the senses and of the intellect of man? Is it, then, truly objective?"

To this I answer: It is objective in the only significant sense of the word. He who recognizes this order holds to an external world in the only sense in which one is demanded either by common sense or by science. A world wholly cut off from experience can mean nothing to us whatever, and we may simply leave it out of account.

On the other hand, this our external world, the world which the plain man distinguishes from his sensations and ideas, and which science endeavors to describe to us; the world to which sensations and ideas are related, and through which they are in an intelligible sense assigned a time and place by reference to certain bodies; this world is in a true sense objective and clearly to be distinguished from the subjective. Our objective order is expressed in certain terms, it is true, and when we leave the field of physical science and ask: "Why in these particular terms?" we are compelled to take into consideration the constitution of man. We recognize that the objective order might conceivably be expressed in other terms, and yet fulfill much the same function. But this does not invalidate the fact that it actually does

fulfill a given function, that it is what it is, and that our accounts of it are to be regarded as true or false according as they may be approved or condemned by the rules of inductive and deductive inquiry. Of the objective order as expressed in other terms we have at least a hint in the experience of the world which we believe other creatures to have. It is the world as we know it that serves as a stepping-stone to our faint conceptions of the world as they know it.

It is worthy of remark that, both in common life and in science, the objection urged just above seems to be recognized implicitly, at least, and yet it does not shake men's faith in the external and objective. We all know that our knowledge of the world is mediated by our senses. If we are in the least given to reflection, we are aware of the fact that the world cannot seem just the same to all living creatures. Yet we do not refuse to declare true or false given statements regarding the material things with which we have to do in everyday life; nor does the man of science ever object to a theory merely on the ground that it is expressed in terms intelligible to man. The objective order, as such, stands unshaken, and there is no excuse for the step to subjectivism.

IV.

If the idealist will concede what is urged in the section just preceding, and the realist what is urged in the one that precedes that, I cannot see what is to keep them apart. And they may come together without the sacrifice on either side of a certain fundamental truth which has seemed important.

The realist may retain an objective order of phenomena, an external world, which appears to be revealed in experience and to be accepted unhesitatingly by science; a world which serves to order all our experiences, giving them a time and place of being and intelligible relations to each other.

The idealist, on the other hand, may, without quarreling with the realist, continue to maintain that the world of which we speak is a world of phenomena mediated by the senses and the intelligence of man. The contention of neither need cause uneasiness or suggest skeptical doubts. It is already implicit in the knowledge of the world possessed both by the plain man and the man of science.

What shall we call the doctrine which emerges as a result of the above-mentioned concessions? I should prefer to call it a *realism,* since it insists upon the truth that the phenomena of the objective order, as such, are not sensations or ideas, and may not be treated as such. But the name does not seem to me a matter of much moment. One may even call the doctrine *monism,* if one choses to indicate by the use of that name only that, in all our study of nature and mind, we are concerned with nothing else than phenomena and their relations, with the content of experience and the constructions which are justified by the principles of science. But the term *monism* usually carries with it further implications, and in so far it does not seem wholly satisfactory.