



Philosophical Review

Self-Consciousness, Social Consciousness and Nature. I

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Source: *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 4, No. 5 (Sep., 1895), pp. 465-485

Published by: Duke University Press on behalf of Philosophical Review

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2176152>

Accessed: 09-09-2018 16:42 UTC

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THE
PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS, SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS
AND NATURE.¹ I.

THE ultimate purpose of the present paper is to reach and, in closing, to sketch some views as to the relation of Man to Nature. By way of introduction, I must first define the place of my inquiry in the general catalogue of philosophical questions, and must then state the theses that I mean to defend.

There are two great divisions of philosophy — theoretical and practical. The present paper concerns itself with a matter belonging to theoretical philosophy. Within the range of theoretical philosophy, however, one may distinguish between the discussion of the ultimate problems of knowledge and of truth, and the treatment of the more special theoretical problems suggested by our human experience. General Epistemology and general Metaphysics have to do with what can be made out about the deepest nature of our knowledge and the final constitution of the universe. But there are, within the scope of theoretical philosophy, other problems relating to the constitution of our finite world, — problems which are often grouped together as the questions of special metaphysics, or of the Philosophy of Nature, — a doctrine to which has also sometimes been given the name Cosmology. The problems of

¹ A paper read before the Philosophical Club of Brown University, May 23, 1895, and later considerably enlarged and supplemented. The argument of the present discussion continues, although without any express reference thereto, the investigation opened by the paper on the "External World and the Social Consciousness," in the PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW for September, 1894.

Cosmology are such as the questions: What is the truth behind what we mortals call Nature, or the physical world? What are finite minds, and how are they related to physical reality? What, if any, is the philosophical interpretation to be given to the doctrine of Evolution?

Now the present paper, as I just said, is an inquiry within the region of theoretical philosophy. Within that region my investigation, however, here concerns itself only secondarily with the ultimate problems of general metaphysics. I shall chiefly aim to reach, before I close, light as to a certain problem of philosophical cosmology. Here about us, as we all admit, whatever our ultimate metaphysical views, is the natural world, the world that appears to our senses—a world manifesting some sort of finite, and obviously, as we mortals see it, some sort of highly fragmentary truth. Now man, as we phenomenally know him, appears as a part of nature, a product of nature, a being whose destinies seem to be the sport of purely physical laws. The problem that this paper aims in the end to approach is: What is the meaning of this phenomenal relation of man to nature?

Now, as I need not say, a real answer to this question must lead us past, if not through, the realms of the most ultimate and general sort of metaphysical inquiry. Nor will this paper wholly escape the responsibility of considering to some extent, as we proceed, such ultimate matters. But on the other hand, all philosophical students are used to the fragmentary, and I shall not here attempt completeness. Such general metaphysical views as come in sight in this paper will remain, after all, of rather secondary importance. I shall attempt only to clear some of the way that leads from the study of man as we ordinarily know him towards the regions where general philosophy attempts to grapple with the ultimate issues of life, and with the rational constitution of the universe.

The relation of man to nature—this, then, is our immediate topic. But why, you may ask, if such is the purpose of this paper, have I chosen my actual title? Why does a study of the relations of Self-Consciousness and Social Consciousness

seem adapted to throw light on the cosmological problem of the relation of human beings to natural processes? To this preliminary question let us at once address ourselves.

I.

The philosophical examination of man's social consciousness has been left, rather too exclusively, in the hands of the students of ethics. Even the psychologists, until very recently, have paid a very inadequate attention to the distinctively social aspects of their science. It is far too customary, in consequence, for the ethical philosophers themselves to begin their study of the duties of man with a very abstract view of the nature of the social consciousness, and of its original relations to our self-consciousness. We hear nowadays, for instance, in popular philosophy, a great deal about the supposed primal and natural conflict between Egoism and Altruism. Egoism, so we are told, is the original human tendency, — the natural and innate bias of any one of us mortals. And it is so because, as soon as one becomes self-conscious, *i.e.*, aware of one's Ego, one finds one's self, as an animal, instinctively selfish. The practical tendency of the self-preserving animal organism, translated into the terms of self-consciousness, becomes deliberate Egoism. Hence the moral problem is to make a man altruistic. The philosophical problem of ethics, on the other hand, is to show a man why he ought to be altruistic, *i.e.*, why Egoism, which is naturally prior and apparently self-evident, ought rationally to be subordinated, upon reflection, to its derived and slowly acquired natural opponent, Altruism.

But now, I insist that, as a fact, this far too customary notion of a natural and fatal opposition between self-consciousness, Egoism, and our socially determined and derived Altruism, is also far too falsely abstract a notion. There are evil tendencies in plenty in human nature, and common sense has a very wholesome meaning in mind when it condemns our natural selfishness. But when one defines in philosophical terms our evil tendencies, or undertakes to analyze in an ulti-

mate sense what common sense knows as our selfishness, one does ill if one merely substitutes abstract distinctions for our concrete and passionate life-conflicts. As a fact, the abstract opposition, Ego and Alter, or Egoism and Altruism, ill suggests the meaning of the opposed ethical aims that struggle in us. This whole customary popular and philosophical opposition between a man's self-consciousness, as if it were something primitive and lonely, and his social consciousness, as if that were something acquired, apart from his self-consciousness, through intercourse with his fellows, is false to human nature. As a fact, a man becomes self-conscious only in the most intimate connection with the growth of his social consciousness. These two forms of consciousness are not separable and opposed regions of a man's life ; they are thoroughly interdependent. I am dependent on my fellows, not only physically, but to the very core of my conscious self-hood, not only for what, physically speaking, I am, but for what I take myself to be. Take away the conscious Alter, and the conscious Ego, so far as in this world we know it, languishes, and languishing dies, whatever may become of the physical organism in whose fortunes this Ego, while it is known to persist, seems to be involved. Hence, I am not first self-conscious, and then secondarily conscious of my fellow. On the contrary, I am conscious of myself, on the whole, as in relation to some real or ideal fellow, and apart from my consciousness of my fellows I have only secondary and derived states and habits of self-consciousness. I cannot really will to preserve the Ego, then, — this derived conscious creature of the habits of my social consciousness ; I cannot really will to preserve the Ego, without also willing to preserve and to defend some sort of Alter, and some sort of relation to my fellow who is this Alter, and upon whom my conscious Ego depends for its very life. It is only in abstraction that I can be merely egoistic. In the concrete case I can only be egoistic by being also voluntarily altruistic, however base may be the sort of Altruism that I chance to prefer. I can aim, for instance, to be a political 'boss.' That appears to be a very egoistic aim. But the political 'boss' exists by the

suffrages of interested people, and must aim at their conscious, even if illusory, sense of advantage in so far as he wills them to be sincerely interested. I can will to be a flattering demagogue, admired for vain show by a crowd of fools. The end is selfish; but it also involves wishing to be agreeable in the eyes of many people; and even a saint might on occasion wisely include so much of the demagogue's aim in his own vastly different context of voluntary life. The tyrant wills the lives and even the limited good fortune of his subjects, for without powerful and numerous and even devoted subjects he would be no tyrant. The master wills his slave's preservation, even in willing to preserve his own mastery. Even the thief or the defaulter wills that the hoarding of valuable property should be on the average sufficiently advantageous to others to make them willing and careful to provide him with the wherewithal to win his thief's livelihood. Even the murderer, although he directly aims to destroy his fellow, does so, in general, and whenever the act is deliberate and intelligent, for a social end, — honor, property, power, — all of them ends which involve willing the preservation, and even the prosperity, of many social relations involving others than the murderer himself. There is, then, much bad Altruism in the world, much base wishing of social relations which do involve the preservation, and even the relative private advantage of others besides the evil-doer. But bad Altruism is not mere Egoism, nor is it identical with a lower animal's unconsciously naïve selfishness. The mere instincts of the self-preservation of this organism have to be far transcended before one can become consciously egoistic. Vanity, pride, love of social power, the greed of mastery, covetousness, oppression, — all these are tendencies that, just in so far as they are conscious and deliberate, involve not only Egoism, *i.e.*, the love of the advantage of this individual, but also some more or less evil form of Altruism, — the love of the preservation, and often of a certain limited advantage, of those of one's fellows who form the necessary other term of the social relation which satisfies one's vanity, one's greed, or one's love of power. In brief, speaking ethically, you cannot con-

sciously be merely egoistic. For you, as a man, exist only in human relations. Your aims have to be more or less social, just so far as you clearly define them. The ethical problem is not: Shall I aim to preserve social relations? but: What social relations shall I aim to preserve?

But to return from these illustrations to the general topic: my first point on this occasion is that, just as there is no conscious Egoism without some distinctly social reference, so there is, on the whole, in us men, no self-consciousness apart from some more or less derived form of the social consciousness. I am I in relation to some sort of a non-Ego. And, as a fact, the non-Ego that I am accustomed to deal with when I think and act, is primarily some real or ideal finite fellow-being, in actual or possible social relations with me, and this social non-Ego, real or ideal, is only secondarily to be turned into anything else, as, for example, into a natural object that I regard as a mere dead thing. And I have dwelt upon these facts here for the sake of first introducing a matter towards whose final definition the whole of the following argument is to tend, *viz.*, the assertion that what you and I mean by Nature is, as a finite reality, something whose very conception we have actually derived from our social relations with one another; so that, as we shall see, to believe that there really exists a finite reality called Nature, is of necessity, when you rightly analyze the facts, to believe that there is, in the real universe, an extra-human, but finite conscious life, manifesting its presence to us by means substantially similar to those whereby we have become assured of the presence of the inner life of our human fellows. As it is not true that we are primarily and in unsocial abstraction merely egoistic, just so it is not true that we primarily know merely our own inner life as individuals, apart from an essentially social contrast with other minds. While it is true, as all idealistic analysis has affirmed, that the object of knowledge is precisely what it is known as being, it is not true that you and I ever know our own individual inner world of objects, without contrasting these objects with others that we regard as present to some sort of conscious life beyond our

own. But primarily we learn to contrast our own inner life with what we regard as the inner life of our fellows in human society. It is by virtue of this very contrast of our own inner life with a finite conscious life beyond our own, *viz.*, that of our human fellows, that we become self-conscious. When later, for reasons that I shall soon define, we learn to oppose to ourselves as finite knowers, a world of relatively independent natural objects, which we conceive as existent apart from any human insight, all the categories in terms of which we can learn to think of these nature-objects are categories derived from our social experience, and modified, but not really transformed, to suit the peculiar behavior of the relatively unsocial beings whose existence our experience seems to indicate to us in nature. Our relations with nature are thus such as involve a more or less social contrast between our life and the life of nature. And upon this principle every philosophy of nature must rest.

II.

I have begun our research, as you see, by some decidedly general and positive assertions. I must next try to show you more precisely and more in detail what these assertions mean, and why I find myself obliged to hold them.

The theses of the present paper, set forth in particular, run as follows:

1. A man is conscious of himself, as this finite being, only in so far as he contrasts himself, in a more or less definitely social way, with what he takes to be the life, and, in fact, the conscious life, of some other finite being, — unless, indeed, he modifies his natural self-consciousness by contrasting his own life with the conceived fullness of the life of God. But except by virtue of some such contrast one cannot become self-conscious, and the result is that, as a matter of simple and necessary meaning, if any metaphysical argument is to prove that I am I, *viz.*, this finite being, then at the same time this argument will prove that there is other conscious life besides

mine. For otherwise my own finite life as this Ego cannot be defined or conceived.

2. The other conscious life that I must contrast with mine, in order to become self-conscious, is primarily, in our human relations, the life of my fellow in the social order. The original, as Hume would say, of the conception of a non-Ego is given to me in my social experiences. The real other being that I, as this finite Ego, can know is, at first, the human being. A man who had no social relations could form no clear conception of the reality of any finite non-Ego, and so could get no clear notion of the reality of the non-Ego now called Nature. Our conception of physical reality as such is secondary to our conception of our social fellow-beings, and is actually derived therefrom.

3. In consequence, any metaphysical proof that what we human beings mean by physical nature exists at all, must also be a proof that behind the phenomena of nature, just in so far as nature has finite reality, there is other conscious life, finite like our own, but unlike human life in so far as it, the nature-life, does not enter into closer social relations with us human beings. Yet all that manifests to us the external existence of nature does so by virtue of a more or less definite appeal to the categories of our social consciousness.

4. But, as a fact, a probable proof, not amounting to philosophical demonstration, but capable of an indefinite degree of extension and illustration, does exist for the existence of a real finite world called the Realm of Nature. Hence this very proof indicates that there is behind the phenomena of nature a world of finite life in more or less remote but socially disposed relations to us human beings.

5. This proof of the finite reality of a conscious life behind the phenomena of nature is furnished by the whole mass of facts that in modern times have come to be conceived together as the basis of the doctrine of Evolution. And the doctrine of Evolution must in the end be interpreted in terms of this notion. In other words, the doctrine of Evolution seems to me the beginning of what promises to become a sort of uni-

versal Sociology, tending towards a definition of the social relations of the finite beings that together must make up the whole natural world, both human and extra-human.

6. Yet, on the other hand, the view of nature thus indicated ought to be very sharply distinguished, both from most traditional forms of Animism and of Hylozoism, and from the modern doctrine of Mind-Stuff. The view that I have in mind is not Schopenhauer's doctrine of the Will in Nature, nor Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, nor von Hartmann's theory of the Unconscious as manifested in physical phenomena. From such theories mine is to be distinguished by its genesis. It tries to avoid all premature dogmatism as to the inner aspect of the life of nature. But it conceives the possibility of a gradual and, as one may hope, a very significant enlargement through the slow growth of human experience, of our insight into the inner meaning of nature's life, and into the essentially social constitution of the finite world. Meanwhile this conception of the natural order as a vast social organism, of which human society is only a part, is founded upon no merely animistic analogies between the physical phenomena and the phenomena of our organisms, but upon a decidedly deeper analysis of the very nature of our conception of other finite beings besides ourselves. And further, if my conception is true, it quite transforms certain important aspects of our whole notion of the meaning of Evolution. For the process of Evolution, as I now view it, becomes, not the history of the growth of life from the lifeless, but the history of the differentiation of one colony, as it were, of the universal society from the parent social order of the finite world in its wholeness.

Such, in some detail, are my theses. They need, of course, both analysis and defense. I will take them up in their order, dwelling perhaps too long upon the first thesis, upon which all the rest depends.

III.

First, then, as to the thesis that one is conscious of one's Ego only by virtue of the contrast between this Ego and some

consciousness which one regards as external to one's finite self.

Speaking in psychological terms, one can say that our finite self-consciousness is no primitive possession at all, but is the hard-earned outcome of the contact between the being capable of becoming rational and the rationally-disposed world in which he slowly learns to move. A child becomes self-conscious only by degrees. When, as infant, he cries for his food, or even, when more intelligent, shows lively disappointment if his expectations are not met, he is not yet self-conscious. When later, as older child, he struts about, playing soldier, or shyly hides from strangers, or asks endless questions merely to see what you will say, or quarrels with his fellows at play, or shrinks from reproof, or uses his little arts to win praise and caresses, he is self-conscious. These latter conditions are all of them such as involve a contrast between his own deeds and meanings and the deeds and meanings that he takes to be those of other conscious beings, whom, just *as* his conscious fellows, he loves or hates, fears or imitates, regards with social curiosity, or influences by devices adapted to what he thinks to be their states of mind. In brief, then, I should assert here, as a matter of psychology, what I have elsewhere lately worked out more at length, that a child is taught to be self-conscious just as he is taught everything else, by the social order that brings him up.¹ Could he grow up alone with lifeless nature, there is nothing to indicate that he would become as self-conscious as is now a fairly educated cat.

But in the present paper I am dealing, not with psychology, but with certain aspects of the constitution of our knowledge. Let us consider briefly our self-consciousness, now that it has developed. It is a familiar paradox of idealistic analysis that we can have true knowledge of ideas or other objects of consciousness only in so far as they have first been presented to ourselves in our own inner life. Whatever I know must be

¹ I may be permitted here to refer to my paper, entitled "Some Observations on the Anomalies of Self-Consciousness," which is to appear at an early date in the *Psychological Review*.

really known to me, one says, only in so far as it is in me. I know, or can conceivably come to know, my own states, my own presentations, my own thoughts, my own experiences. Things external to me can be known only in so far as they first appear inside my conscious world. When I pretend to know something about a far-off star, that something which I know proves, upon analysis, to be my own state, my experience, or my thought, — nothing else. I cannot transcend consciousness. And consciousness is for me *my* consciousness, or, at least, can always come to be regarded as mine. “Das ‘Ich denke,’” says Kant, “muss alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können.”

Now all this is, in one sense, quite true. There is an aspect of knowledge which is always dependent upon my presentations, my direct acquaintance with mental contents. Without such direct acquaintance, I have no knowledge. But, on the other hand, if one asks a little more closely about the implications of our inner consciousness, one comes upon another, a strongly contrasted, and a highly momentous aspect of our human knowledge. And this aspect is indicated by the well-known fact that if I can only really know my own inner states in so far as they are inner, still, on the other hand, I can never really define to myself just how much is actually presented at any one moment to my inner life. One can know the far-off star only by virtue of ideas and experiences that get presented in the inner life; but, on the other hand, this presentation, merely as such, is not enough. For if anything present in the inner life were, as such, at once and altogether known to me, I should always be able to know just what it is, just how much it is, that now constitutes the whole filling and meaning of my inner life. But alas, I never can find out in all my life, precisely the whole of what it is that gets presented to me in any one moment. Are you now conscious of all that is in your field of vision, *e.g.*, of the head of every person who sits in this audience within this instant's range of your vision? Obviously you are not, or at least are not equally conscious of all the possible objects of your momentary visual attention.

You are now clearly aware only of what you are now attending to, and not of all the contents that are present but that you merely *might* attend to if you chose. But once more, what is precisely the whole of what you are now attending to — words, thoughts, sights, faces? It is impossible just now exhaustively to tell yourself, unless — unless you first attend to your own process of attention, capriciously fixate its normally fluctuating attitudes, and so give an artificially prepared account of a deliberately falsified situation. The inner life, as we get it, is conscious, but normally very unequally self-conscious, — possesses contents, but cannot precisely define to itself what they are; seeks not to hold the present, but to fly to the next; scorns the immediate, the presented, and looks endlessly for the oncoming, the sought, the wished-for, the absent, so that the inner eye gazes on a flowing stream of events, but beholds rather what they hint at than what they present.

Now it is this other, this curiously contrasted aspect, of our finite knowledge that constitutes one of the deepest problems of the life of human reason. I can know only what can get presented to me. But, on the other hand, most of what gets presented to me always escapes my knowledge. I know not the merely presented, as such, but only that which in the presented facts I can hold, apperceive, contrast with other contents, and define as to the real meaning of this object which I am to know. But alas, the moment flits. What I now know turns into what I just now knew, even while I reflect upon it. The direct gets lost in the indirect, the instant in the imperfectly known series of states; and my best approach to knowledge appears as only a sort of substituting of expectations and of memories for the desired presentations. If, then, on the one hand, I can know only my own ideas, states, thoughts, presentations, our present unhappy result seems to be that, as a fact, owing to the ceaseless flux of consciousness, I cannot fully know even these. For, once more, I can know only what I can examine with steadily fixated attention; but while I fixate my attention upon the inner object, it changes even while I observe it. *Only the presented can be known*: this idealistic

proposition seems to be mockingly answered by the fairly tragic counter-assertion: *Not even the presented is as such known.*

In view of these paradoxes of our finitude, in view of the fact that only the presented can, as such, be known, while the presented never stays long enough in one moment of consciousness to allow us fully to know what it is, the actual situation of our human knowledge is simply this: What is always most clearly present to our consciously inquiring intelligence is the conceived relation between some content now immediately apprehended but very imperfectly comprehended, and that which, as we hope, believe, or expect, *will be* or *would be* apprehended, when we come more fully to know, or if we now more fully knew the meaning of this immediate datum. What I now experience leads me to expect another experience. My conscious knowledge is, then, mainly of this relation of transition from the immediate fact to the expected outcome. Or again, what I now experience leads me to believe that, were I otherwise situated, I should apprehend such and such other facts. My knowledge is here again consciously concerned with the relation between my actual and my conceived possible experience. Or, once more, I now have passing through my mind an assertion, a belief, an opinion. And I am thinking just what it is that I mean by this opinion. In this case, my meaning is partly presented to me, partly conceived as a more fully developed meaning, which I should get presented, or shall find presented, upon a further consideration of what I am aiming to do.

Thus, you see, the original paradox of our idealistic analysis gets corrected by this other paradox. To the unknowableness of whatever cannot get presented is now opposed the equal unknowableness of whatever merely gets immediately presented, without being held through a constant inner appeal from what *is* presented to what in future will be presented, or to what conceivably *would be* presented, were consciousness otherwise determined. I know only my own states and ideas; but those I know only by virtue of their conceived relation to states and ideas that will be, or that would be, under other

conditions, or in other moments, the contents of my experience.

But, from this point of view, the nature of the world of our knowledge gets transformed. Our only approach to that ideal of knowledge which complete and fixated presentation would involve if we *had* it, is afforded us by the imperfectly presented relation between fleeting actual presentations and conceived possible presentations. And therefore you will observe at once that my notion of my own Ego and of its contents depends upon a certain contrast between these contents and a conceived world of actual or possible experience beyond this Ego. For what I come nearest to knowing at any moment is the relation between imperfectly grasped immediate contents and the conceived experience beyond the moment. It is indeed true, as idealism is accustomed to say, that of a *Ding-an-sich*, out of relation to possible knowledge, I have and can have no sort of knowledge or conception. For, as soon as I try to tell what such a *Ding-an-sich* is, I turn it into actual or conceived possible experience, and conceive it only as in such experience. But, on the other hand, my whole knowledge of my inner finite Self and of its meaning is dependent upon the contrast between the immediate experiences of this self and a world of abstractly possible or of genuine experiences not presented to any moment of my inner self as such. Thus, all my finite knowledge involves as much mediation as it contains immediacy, — assures me of fact only by sending me elsewhere for truth; lets me know something, never the whole, of my actual experience, but through its contrast with possible experience; verifies merely by presupposing experiences now unverified; instructs me by suggesting further problems; tells me who I am by indicating whither I am to go to look for my true self; suggests fulfillment of insight, yet all the while sending me out to wander for more insight; arouses the question, What do I mean? at the very moment when I am attempting to answer the question, What is the experienced datum?

Now this realm of contrasts, of the light of present experience and of the shadow of possible or of distant other experi-

ence, of presentation and of thought; this dwelling in hope rather than in fulfillment, in search for a lost self rather than in enjoyment of a present self; this realm, I say, and this dwelling constitute the inner finite life of every one of us in so far as he lives rationally at all. My actual inner life is, then, always contrasted with experience other than is now mine; and the problem of my intellectual life, whatever my worldly calling, is this: Where is the rest of my experience? or, What is the content of the other experience with which mine is even now contrasted?

But it is, of course, vain to regard my inner view of myself as constituted solely by the contrast between my individual presentation and a possible inner experience that I view as merely my own private but still *individually* possible experience. My possible experience and the world of other experience than is now mine — these terms, in a wide but an essentially human sense, constantly include not merely the conceived experiences that I alone in my individual capacity am likely ever to have, or to find individually accessible, but also the whole world of experiences that other human beings either have had, or will have, or may have. The upper Nile valley is in the general and abstract sense a possible experience of mine; but I individually shall doubtless never come to get that experience. Yet the upper Nile valley is, and has been, a system of actual and of accessibly possible experiences for very many of my fellow-men. When I conceive the upper Nile valley, there are presented to my inner life words, images, map-experiences, and the like; and these I know as meaning something to me, in so far as I contrast these relatively immediate data with the conceived contents of the experience of other men who more directly verify what I only conceive as to that region. And, in fact, the whole contents of my individual experience get regarded as one conscious system of remembered and expected contents, in so far as, in conception, I contrast my own private inner life with the experiences which I attribute to my actual or conceived fellows. I often say that my own inner life, as a whole, past and future, actual and

accessibly possible, is better known to me, is more immediate, is more accessible to me, than is your inner life. But what do I mean by saying this? Surely both my past and my future are now as truly and literally unrepresentable to me as are your inner states. I have now only my memories of my past, as I have only my beliefs as to your inner states. Directly, I can now verify neither set of ideas. What I mean by the relative intimacy and accessibility of my own individual past is, then, only the fact that my notion of my past has a "warmth," a definiteness, a sort of inner assurance, which contrasts with the notion that I form of the past of any other man.

You see, whatever way I turn, I am definable to myself only in terms of a contrast with other experience which might, abstractly speaking, be conceived as mine, but which, as a fact, is viewed either as now inaccessible in comparison with my present experience, or else as the actual or possible experience of my fellow, and so as now more remote than even my own relatively warm and quasi-accessible, although actually unrepresentable past experience appears to me to be. But to define any sphere whatever as the sphere of my own finite life, *i.e.*, to define my life either as the sphere of my momentary finite life, or as the sphere of my whole human individuality, involves in each case a contrast between what is within my defined Ego, in the way of relatively realized, or warm, or accessible contents of experience, and what is beyond my defined Ego, as a sphere of experiences that, abstractly speaking, I regard as possibly mine, while, as a fact, I contrast them with mine as being really somehow beyond me, and relatively inaccessible to me. These other experiences, which are not mine in precisely the degree in which what I call mine is viewed as belonging to me, — these other experiences are, primarily, the actual experiences of other men. *My* opinion means, in general, my opinion as contrasted with opinions which I attribute to other men. *My* private experience means, primarily, whatever nobody else but myself has experienced, and is therefore defined by contrast with the conception of what everybody else has experienced. In brief, take away the concept of that world of abstractly possible

other experience, which might be mine, or which would be mine, if I were you, or Caesar, or any one else, or which would now be mine if I were once more my past self, — take all this other experience out of my conception, and forthwith I lose all means of becoming conscious of my experience as mine, or of knowing what I mean either by my whole individuality or by my present Ego.

IV.

So far, then, for our first thesis. To myself, I am I, not merely in so far as my inner contents get presented to me, but in so far as I contrast my experience present, or the sum total of my conceived individual experience, with an experience which is, in some sense, not mine, but which is conceived as other than mine.

But now what warrant have I, philosophically speaking, for assuming that there is any other experience than mine at all, — any experience past or future, remote or warm, like my present experience, or unlike it? Is this merely a practically warranted assertion of common sense, or has it a deeper philosophical basis?

The general answer to this question is simply that I know the presented experience as such, and in so far as, in passing, it is imperfectly grasped at all, only by virtue of its contrast to the conceived other experience. Without knowledge that the other experience is, there can be then no meaning in saying that the presented experience itself exists. That the present is, he alone can say who regards the past and future as real. That I as this individual am, I can say only if I contrast myself with some conceived other experience. The judgment: ‘There is experience,’ can have meaning only if one defines some experience that is to be thus real. But the only way to define any finite experience is by its contrast with other experience. The total object of true knowledge is therefore never the immediate experience of my own state as such and alone, although there never is any knowledge without some immediate expe-

rience as one of its elements. The judgment : 'There is experience' means, then, for any finite being, 'There is my finite experience, known as somehow contrasted with other experience than what is here presented as mine.' Thus, then, the conviction that there is other experience than what is presented to me here, has not only a common sense value but a philosophical warrant. But if one says: "No, but the contrast is itself something given, and so is not the contrast between my experience and any experience that is really known to be other than mine, but is only a contrast between my presented experience and one that is not presented as other than mine, but that is merely conceived as other than mine," — then to this objection, once more, the answer is, that the very conception of other experience than what is now presented as mine either actually relates to such other experience, or else is a meaningless conception. But if it is to be meaningless, even while it takes itself, as it does, to have a meaning, then this conception that always shadows my presentations, this conception of other experience than mine, is itself an experience that is in fact other than it takes itself to be. For it always takes itself to mean something ; although, unless it actually does refer to other experience than mine, it is meaningless. But to say that a conception, or any other presented content of consciousness, is other than it seems, and is, for example, really meaningless when it seems to mean something, this is already to distinguish between my erroneous experience of its nature, and another, a fuller experience of its nature which, if I knew it better, I should have. But thus to distinguish between what my experience really is and what it seems to be, is simply to distinguish between a presented and a not presented aspect of the very experience in question. For what can one say of an experience which is not what it seems to be, and which is yet only a presentation after all, — a mere matter of the instant in which it happens to live? If an experience, *viz.*, here the conception of other experience than mine, presents itself as meaning something beyond the moment when it really means nothing beyond the moment, then this very experience itself is really

other than the experience as it is presented, and once more one gets a real contrast between my experience as presented, and related experience which is not presented. The conception of other experience than mine must, therefore, in any case, have relation to a real experience which is other than my presentation.

Thus, then, that there is some experience not individually mine, is an assertion precisely as sure as the assertion that my own experience is. For neither assertion has meaning apart from the other. On the other hand, it is impossible to contrast my experience with any *Ding-an-sich*, existent apart from all experience, because the instant that I tell what I mean by a *Ding-an-sich*, I have converted it into an experience, actual or possible, and other than mine.

But finally, in this connection, one must still further insist that our now frequently illustrated contrast cannot ultimately be one between my presented experience and an experience other than mine which is *barely* a possible experience, and not an actual experience at all. A possible experience, not now mine, is a notion that has a very sound meaning in case it has some direct or indirect relation to a real experience not now mine. But bare possibilities, to which no actualities correspond, are indeed meaningless. Are there real facts or aspects of experience not now presented to me, then I can easily define these in terms of logical possibilities. But possibilities need realities to give them meaning. There must then be other experience than mine, not merely as possible experience, but as actual experience. Given such actual experience, there is not only convenience, but rational necessity in the attempt to define its nature in terms of all sorts of conceived possibilities; but unless you have some actual experience upon which to base your possibilities, then the possibilities themselves become mere contradictions. A barely possible experience is, as Mr. Bradley has well said, the same as an impossible experience.

V.

There is, then, an universe of other actual experience than my own finite experience, presented or remembered. Were

this central truth not known to me, I should have no means of being conscious of myself as this finite Ego. The general constitution of this world of other experience, in its wholeness, I must here leave to general metaphysics. We are now concerned with the finite aspects of the complex of experiences with which, as human beings, we have to do.

Concretely, we get information about the contents of experience not our own, when we communicate socially with our fellows. And the essence of social communication is this: My fellow does something in a certain situation, — deals with his environment so or so. He uses tools, utters words, makes gestures. If these deeds of his are new to me, they do not convey to me his inner experience. These deeds are so far, for me, phenomena in my own experience. I cannot directly view my fellow's experience at all. How, then, is a word, or gesture, or other deed, which as yet conveys no meaning to me, to acquire a meaning, or to become expressive to me of my fellow's inner life as such? The answer is, that, from infancy on, my fellow's expressive acts get a meaning to me as the suggestion of his concrete inner life, just in so far as I am able to imitate these deeds of his by bodily acts of my own, brought to pass under conditions like those in which he, my fellow, acts. For when I definitely repeat a bodily act that expresses any human meaning, the act, as I repeat it, under definite conditions, gets for me an inner meaning which I could never grasp so long as I merely observed such an act from without, as an event in my perceived phenomenal world. But this inner meaning which the act gets when I repeat it, becomes for me the objective meaning of the act as my fellow performs it; and thus the meaning of the imitated act, interpreted for me at the moment of my imitation, gets conceived as the real meaning, the inner experience of my fellow, at the moment when he performs the act which is my model. If you laugh, I know what you mean just in so far as, under similar conditions, I can join with you and laugh heartily also, and can thus, by fully imitating your deed, get a sense of your meaning. But if I see you laughing under circumstances that absolutely

forbid me even to conceive myself as imitating your expression of mirth, then I have frankly to say that I do not in the least know what you mean by laughing at just this situation, and so cannot conceive in so far what your inner experience is. If I see you playing cards, or chess, I can only make out what your inner experience is in case I learn the cards, the pieces, the rules, or the moves of the game, and proceed to play it myself. If I want to know what the poets mean when they sing of love, I must myself become a lover. When I have imitated, in my measure, the lover's situation, and the lover's sincerely expressed devotion, then I know something of what love meant for the poet. In general, I believe in other human experience than mine in so far as I notice other people's expressive acts, and then gradually interpret them through social conformity. What I cannot interpret by imitation, I cannot definitely realize as another man's experience. Yet as my imitations always remain incomplete, and my interpretations correspondingly indefinite, I have constantly to contrast my fellow's experience, so far as I can realize it, with my fellow's experience so far as it attracts my efforts to interpret it, but also sets a limit to the success of these efforts. And thus I get a notion of a boundless world of human meanings which I can partially, but not wholly, grasp. In the effort, by social conformity, *i.e.*, by imitation of expressive actions, to interpret such inadequately grasped human meanings, a great part of my social life consists. This effort is constantly supplemented by my efforts to convey my own meanings to others; and thus my self-consciousness and my social consciousness, each helped and each limited by the other, since each exists only in contrast with the other, get organized and developed in the endless giving and taking of social communications.

Thus far, then, we have been illustrating our first and second theses. Their application to our notion of Nature remains to be developed.

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(To be concluded in next number.)