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EXPERIENCE AT THE EDGE:
IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE AND THE GIVEN IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY
ANGLO-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

© Evelyn Fortier

Submitted in accordance with the requirements
of the Ph.D. Programme in Philosophy, University of Ottawa.

May 28, 1999



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0-612-45172-0

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of the idea of immediate experience. Three questions are asked: is there immediate experience, what is immediate experience and what use is immediate experience. These questions are posed in the course of surveying the recent history of immediate experience with a view to rehabilitating it as a means of solving a particular philosophical problem. This problem is the paradox resulting from the fact that knowledge both depends on a dichotomy of 'knowing' and 'object known' (mind and world) and yet is vitiated by it. A synopsis of approaches to the problem of the dichotomy of mind and world is presented and claims about experience in relation to the paradox are examined. Then it is proposed that we should reconsider the theory of immediate experience, incorporating the idea that experience is already conceptually informed. This results in a theory of immediate experience that is conceptualizable, that is constituted of thinkable contents. Immediate experience avoids the problems of dualism because it does not involve a dichotomy of mind and world. But once experience is conceptualized into ordinary, discursive experience, it involves a dichotomy so that knowledge is 'knowledge about.' By dissolving the paradox, immediate experience offers a better explanation than a dualistic account. And since immediate experience is conceptualizable, we avoid the criticism that there is no experience without interpretation or a conceptual framework in place.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Question of Immediate Experience

Conceptions of experience have played a major rôle in twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy. In one form or another, experience has been viewed as the source of our knowledge of the world. This can be seen in recent philosophy's preoccupation with the question of support for knowledge claims and what constitutes evidence. For empirically-minded philosophers, the answer to this question is that 'experience' grounds our knowledge and the ultimate appeal is to the evidence of our experience. This is what is meant by 'experience at the edge' between mind and world.

The appeal to experience has not been straightforward. There is a recognition that what is meant by the term 'experience' is ambiguous and, in some cases, using experience as a warrent for knowledge claims has been problematic. For this reason, a number of philosophers have advanced the idea that there is a kind of experience more fundamental than what is taken to be our 'ordinary' experience, which supplies the raw data for our knowledge. This primordial form of experience is called 'immediate experience.'

The idea of immediate experience has been significant in twentieth-century philosophy, especially in the early part of the century, but it has not been without controversy. Some philosophers have merely assumed its existence whereas others have flatly denied it. There has also been a certain amount of

disagreement about the meaning of the term 'immediate experience'. This makes it difficult to know whether the various arguments for or against it are talking about the same thing; for example, some arguments against immediate experience in the sense of the 'immediately given' appear to be irrelevant for immediate experience in the sense of 'feeling.' It is necessary to disentangle the different meanings of the term in order to consider the merits of claims for or against it.

Despite the confusion of meaning and the controversial nature of immediate experience, it is a topic that is worthwhile rehabilitating for present philosophical concerns. There are, as John McDowell has recently said, lingering problems in philosophy and their resolution requires a theory of experience that meets the needs for an explanation of knowledge. I will review the concept of immediate experience as a possible solution to these lingering problems.

The questions I will examine in the course of this reconsideration of immediate experience are about its nature and its utility: what is it and of what use is it. These questions will be examined in a survey of recent theories of immediate experience and its variations. This will include an analysis of the problems and issues surrounding the topic. In this way, the idea of immediate experience will be elucidated in order to properly evaluate its usefulness.

The first question to ask about 'immediate experience' is very simple: is there a 'state' of experience prior to, and

distinct from, experience as we normally take it to be? To answer this question, we must first clarify what is meant by 'normal' experience so that we can define immediate experience by contrast. One commentator contrasts immediate experience to normal experience which she says is defined "...in the usual dualistic terms as the subject's contribution in relation to that which is given."¹ G.E. Moore talks about experience as a matter of 'direct apprehension', and this implies that there is something doing the apprehending and something being apprehended. In both these descriptions of normal experience, there is reference (overt or implied) to a subject undergoing or feeling phenomena constituting an object for herself. The question of immediacy concerns the possibility of a state in which the subject is *not* aware of a distinction between herself and the phenomena comprising the object of experience, or 'not-self.' Put this way, the question of immediate experience becomes: is there a form of experience, not involving a subject having an experience plus an object of the experience, which nevertheless is, in some fashion, 'experience'? And if there is such a form of experience, what is its nature?

While it is generally assumed that there is such a thing as 'normal' experience, there are very few adherents of 'immediate' experience. One of the difficulties for a proponent of immediate experience is that in such experience there is no object, and so

¹ Siegfried, Chaos and Context, p. 4.

it cannot be a source of knowledge. Can we be said to derive any kind of 'knowing' from experience which is somehow *not* an object for us, the experiencing subjects?

The apparent uselessness of immediate experience as a source of knowledge has resulted in a widespread denial that there is any such thing. Even if there is, the fact that it is not an object for us and thus cannot be known or be a source of knowledge makes it appear to be philosophically negligible and not worth our consideration.

However, some philosophers have given the idea of immediate experience serious consideration, relying on it as a cornerstone of their theories. For example, F.H. Bradley claims that "...[t]here is an immediate feeling, a knowing and being in one, with which knowledge begins..."². The importance of immediate experience for such philosophers is that it is experience in a 'pure' state, before the knower distinguishes the object that she knows from the knowing of it, so that the subjective state of knowing is one with the object of knowledge. This is reality before it is separated into mind and matter, and thus not infected with the problems inherent in a dualism of 'thought' and 'physical stuff.' It is prior to, and more fundamental than, the mediated, conceptualized experience that, at every moment, evolves out of it to yield our normal reality of facts in relation.

² Bradley, "On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience", in Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 159.

This is immediate experience as viewed by some of its supporters. But, as we have already noted, probably most philosophers do not support such an idea of primordial experience. These opponents of immediate experience have different views regarding the inherent problems of mind and world as separate entities and look upon experience dualistically, as simply that in which an experiencing subject 'has' experiences of objects.

The problem facing both supporters and opponents of immediate experience is the problem of the relation of mind and world; does the mind apprehend a world independent of itself, a world it somehow 'finds' outside itself? Or is there a primordial unity involving no dichotomy, out of which the mind-world distinction is developed secondarily? The nature of experience reflects and embodies the nature of reality and we can draw conclusions about the primordial dichotomy or, alternatively, the promordial unity, based on experience.

There are four traditions in recent philosophy with regards to immediate experience. Philosophers in the first tradition propose an immediate experience prior to conceptualized or relational experience. This experience involves no distinction between mind and world (experiencer and object of experience). On this view, there need be no scepticism because 'world' is not something alien from 'mind'. But critics of this view say there can be no knowledge at all arising from it so that it is epistemically useless.

A second tradition involves the claim that there is immediate experience, but it is an object distinct from the subject having the experience. In this tradition, there is experience of data prior to the 'normal' conceptualized experience of the network of knowledge. This prior experience is called the 'given' and it comprises all our sensations and perceptions: that is, the data that floods in through our experience of the world. The world 'impinges' on our senses, and these impingements are the 'given'.

In a third tradition, philosophers claim that immediate experience involves a 'given' that is not simple, pure raw data from the world impinging on our senses. They admit that such raw data would be something completely alien to our rational framework, and thus it would have no meaning for us. So, in one fashion or another, they seek to demonstrate its relation to our minds by being a causal agent for the workings of our rational framework, or by being facts, or by being already conceptually determined when received by the experiencing subject, or somehow determined due to co-incidence with our conceptualizing faculties.

The fourth tradition comprises philosophers who completely deny the 'given' because of the difficulties of relating it to our rational faculties. But these philosophers nevertheless find themselves saddled with the same problem of explaining the relation between mind and world through the medium of experience. They also have to give explanations of the nature of experience,

or at least an account of the mechanism of experience. This is because, as is generally admitted, there is on one side 'mind' with its rational structure, and on the other side the stuff that mind processes as the content or object of experience. The two appear to be necessarily different and yet there must be a meaningful relation between them. World must be independent of mind (or, to put it another way, the object of experience must be something 'found', something which is not created or 'made up') in order for there to be genuine knowledge. Knowledge, by its very nature, must involve something 'outside' the rational faculty of the knower which the knower somehow 'acquires' and processes, so that the knower is in connection to something other than itself, its object, in order for this material to be knowledge at all. Otherwise, the experiencer would just be engaged in self-reflection or imaginative creation, and that would be more akin to engendering fictions than to perceiving something that is genuinely 'outside' oneself. Thus, philosophers in the fourth tradition deny a raw given of experience but must still give an account of it, whether to explain it or deny it, if they discuss it in terms of the relation of mind and world at all.

Thus we find that the philosophers in these traditions are dealing with a particular problem: how to characterize experience so as to account for two requisite but contradictory aspects of the epistemic relation of mind and world. One aspect requires the experiencer to be in relation to an object of experience

providing a situation in which there is a state of genuine 'knowing', and the other aspect requires that this experience must not have an object so alien to our rational faculties that it cannot truly be apprehended or experienced. The experiencer and the object of experience must be in a true epistemic relation such that there must be a difference between them, and yet this difference must not be such that the relation would be impossible.

Philosophers who belong to the first tradition are generally among those writing from the middle of the nineteenth century until the 1930s. They view immediate experience as a state in which there is no distinction between subject and object; there is only the flux of immediate feeling. For these philosophers, the conceptualized experience (normal experience) of objects for a subject is 'carved' out of this primary state of immediate feeling. Philosophers following them form the second and third traditions. They use the term immediate experience to refer to the object of experience, the 'given,' in which the world impinges on our receptive faculties (albeit immediately) in the form of sensations. Immediate experience for these latter philosophers is very definitely at the edge between mind and world, but its nature has changed from being a non-distinguished unity or whole to being necessarily an object, albeit an extremely attenuated one, for a subject. And there have been philosophers of the fourth tradition who have denied immediate

experience or the immediately given at various times since the middle of the nineteenth century.

In the following, I will examine the views of philosophers who represent these traditions. Each of the philosophers selected has referred to immediate experience in a way that is significant to the rest of his work, some who have advocated it, some who have denied it, and some who have used 'immediate experience' and 'the given' as equivalent terms. I have restricted my examination to those philosophers who actually use the term 'immediate experience' somewhere in their work and I concentrate on a few writers in order to avoid repetition. That is, I have focussed down like a microscope on the ideas of a few philosophers whose work seem to present the most concise exposition of a particular view, or time, or point in the development of the idea.

I begin with T.H. Green, who set the stage for the discussion of experience that followed. Green really belongs to the third tradition that I have identified because he thought the only experience that counts for knowledge is conscious experience, and the unrelated given is a fiction. Green had an enormous influence on the philosophers who followed, and his approach to the problem of experience as awareness of the world has its echoes in the work of philosophers to the present day. Right after Green, Bradley and James are the foremost proponents of a truly 'pure' theory of immediate experience in the first tradition. Any rehabilitation of 'immediate experience' as a

primordial non-cognitive sensing has to take into consideration the views of Bradley and James as giving the most developed exposition of such a view. After Bradley and James, it is difficult to find positive accounts of 'immediate experience' as understood by the first tradition. From the 1930's on, the philosophers who write about experience view it as a kind of conveyance for phenomena from an external reality. In contrast to looking at experience as pre-conceptual awareness, they are more interested in specific problems of sensing and perception. It is at this time that theories of 'the given' supersede theories of immediate experience. For example, G.E. Moore and H.H. Price give accounts of the given that are primarily in the second tradition, followed by C.I. Lewis in the third tradition with a theory of a conceptualized given. After Lewis, I examine the foremost representative of the fourth tradition, Wilfrid Sellars. Sellars denies 'the given' in the process of attacking sense-data theories and challenges the whole idea of unconceptualized, raw experience as a foundation for apprehension of the world. Finally, this historical overview of theories of experience 'at the edge' wraps up with a look at the most recent writer in this vein, John McDowell. His work is similar to Sellars in that he denies a raw given of sense-data, but he also claims that we need a theory of experience as states or occurrences that are passive but already conceptually informed. McDowell, it seems, is of both the fourth and the third tradition at the same time.

This historical overview of theories of immediate experience and the given is not primarily an exegesis of particular philosophers but depends heavily on specific written works that have expressed and influenced the ideas involved. That is, these philosophers each wrote a work that has achieved the hallmark of a classic for anyone interested in immediate experience or the given in recent Anglo-American philosophy. Any serious examination of the issue of primordial pre-conceptual experience must take into account Bradley's important paper, "On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience", or James' Essays in Radical Empiricism. The same is true for Price's Perception and Lewis' Mind and the World Order for anyone interested in 'the given.' Michael Williams writes that

The expression 'the given' owes much of its philosophical currency to C.I. Lewis' influential book Mind and the World Order, and to H.H. Price's Perception.³

Likewise, Wilfred Sellars wrote a classic paper, "Epistemology and the Philosophy of Mind" which is considered the definitive attack on theories of 'the given.' Philosophers interested in the topic of 'the given' and immediate experience cannot ignore Sellars' extremely important arguments in this paper calling into question the existence of such a foundational experience and examining relevant issues. Finally, McDowell's book Mind and World places the topic of 'the given' and immediate experience in a contemporary context and demonstrates how philosophy has not

³ Williams, Groundless Belief, p. 26.

yet finished with the problems which stimulated these ideas in the first place.

There are a number of philosophers who have not been included in the present work despite the fact that they have held theories of immediate experience or the immediately given, or who have denied immediate experience or 'the given.' Among these, the most glaring omissions appear to be G.F. Stout, Bertrand Russell, James Ward, A.J. Ayer, W.V.O. Quine, L. Bonjour, Paul Moser and Donald Davidson. Indeed, if one looks in the index of any general work on the history of twentieth-century philosophy under 'immediate experience' or 'the given,' one will find references to a great many philosophers who have not been included. As stated at the beginning, the topic has been significant in philosophy for the last 150 years. However, the philosophers selected are more than adequate representatives of a particular view or point in the development of the idea, have each written a work that is a classic presentation of some aspect of the topic, and, in order to avoid repetition and redundancy, have been taken as concise and worthwhile examples of the history of the theory and its evolution. The omission of many of the philosophers who have discussed immediate experience was deemed excusable in the interests of brevity, and since the writers who were included are believed to have adequately covered all the material necessary, the present work concerns itself primarily with the ideas of these selected few.

Each of the philosophers in these traditions brought his own individual concerns to the discussion of the topic of immediate experience. For each, there were larger problems into which a theory of immediate experience must be incorporated. Through the work of each one we are given an overview of the various problems of a theory of experience as immediate. Some of these problems involve relations *in* non-conceptual experience, relations *between* non-conceptual experience and conceptual experience, and relations between the individual focus of experience and the larger whole of experientiable reality. Depending on whether the philosopher is a pluralist or a monist, idealist or realist, or more interested in epistemology than metaphysics, the treatment of the problems will differ, reflecting those interests.

After examining the history of the theory, its development and the treatment of related issues in the work of philosophers representing the four traditions, the final chapter contains a summary and discussion of immediate experience, with a view to its rehabilitation as providing a viable answer to the recurrent problems identified. The questions that are addressed in the final section concern the nature and knowledge of immediate experience, and its usefulness in response to a problematic dualism which, however, seems to be a necessary aspect of a theory of knowledge. A contemporary view of immediate experience is proposed in the final section, synthesizing historical views and assessing its status in the context of present philosophical concerns.

To set the stage for this historical and analytical examination of immediate experience, I will begin by looking at some related issues in the work of T.H. Green. Most of the philosophers in the four designated traditions were directly or indirectly influenced by Green. He laid the groundwork for the discussion of experience that followed and the issues that he dealt with reappeared in the work of philosophers for the next hundred years. Examining Green's views is an ideal starting point for a reconstruction of the theory of immediate experience.

T.H. Green and the Quest for a Unifying Principle

Thomas Hill Green (1836-1882) was an influential philosopher in the mid-nineteenth century, although his reputation is primarily as an important teacher. It is known that F.H. Bradley attended Green's lectures at Oxford when Bradley was an undergraduate.⁴ Both Green and Bradley are idealists, and they share an abhorrence for an empiricism that views reality as a composition, or collection, of distinct, independent atomic units. If we compare Green's work and Bradley's, we can detect the influence that Green had on his student. In particular, they both begin with, and ground their metaphysics in, a view of experience that makes experience fundamental to (the essence of) reality.

⁴See Brand Blanshard, "Bradley: Some Memories and Impressions," in Ingardia, R., Bradley: A Bibliography, 1991; p. 9.

Green outlines his metaphysics of knowledge in Book I of his Prolegomena to Ethics, (edited by A.C. Bradley, the brother of F.H. Bradley, and published posthumously in 1884). Green's intention is to justify and give the basis for a philosophy of ethics and to argue against the ethics of a naturalistic philosophy. If man's moral nature is explained entirely in naturalistic terms, then human beings must be seen to act in accordance to moral laws merely out of submission to a superior force, out of habit, and out of a desire for a better condition of life. At best, then, the naturalistic theory of what is moral or ethical arises out of what Green calls a "serviceable illusion" (p. 10). He considered it philosophically unsatisfactory to accept the idea that a being who is simply the result of natural forces could form a theory about those forces as an explanation of itself as a moral being. For example, if man is merely the result of natural forces, and those natural forces involve laws of right conduct, exhorting men to obey those laws would have no meaning because such exhortations would imply that there was something more in man than those forces, something independent of those forces, that is being appealed to. This leads Green to the question whether there is in humanity a principle which is not natural, which allows men and women to have theories about themselves and about nature. In other words, "Can the knowledge of nature be itself a part or product of nature?"⁵

⁵ Prolegomena to Ethics, p. 11.

Green's whole project, it follows, is to subject the theory of knowledge to intense scrutiny in order to demonstrate that humanity is not just a collective child of nature, that there is a principle in humanity that is not natural, by which human beings have knowledge and thus also knowledge of ethical ideals. He says

We have to return once more to that analysis of the conditions of knowledge, which forms the basis of all Critical Philosophy whether called by the name of Kant or no, and to ask whether the experience of connected matters of fact, which in its methodical expression we call science, does not presuppose a principle which is not itself any one or number of such matters of fact, or their result.⁶

Green's Theories of Experience and Relations

According to Green, in order to analyze the conditions of knowledge, we must begin with experience. In our examination of knowledge, we find that what we are examining are *facts*, especially those connected facts that, in their 'methodical expression,' constitute science. If you take any fact at all, it involves either matter or motion or both, and the facts of matter and motion exist for us as relations between the objects of what Green refers to as "...that connected consciousness which we call experience."⁷ Experience supplies the content of our knowledge, and the objects of experience have their character through their relations with other objects of experience, all of

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 13.

which together form the content of experience. In other words, the relations between the objects that constitute the content of experience supply the facts which ultimately comprise the whole of our knowledge.

Green next asks, "What then is the source of these relations, as relations of the experienced, in other words, of that which exists for consciousness? What is the principle of union which renders them possible?"⁸

What Green is referring to is the fact that relations organize reality according to some *principle* of combining things and unifying them. How do we know reality? What we know involves objects and facts, things that we consider to be physical entities (matter) and their states and qualities and their positions (motion). The book is on the table beside the window through which I can see a tree near a road with a car driving along it. All of these I experience as being what they are through their relations to each other, (the book is something distinct from the table on which it sits; the car's motion is experienced as a number of successive positions in relation to its earlier positions and to other objects, e.g. the road and the tree). Reality, therefore, is organized by means of relations, and the real is the related. However, what is the principle of relating by which relations organize reality? Green insists that the principle cannot be the result of the organizing action of

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

the relations, since the organizing action of relations is based on the principle. He says of this principle:

Being that which so organizes experience that the relations expressed by our definitions of matter and motion arise therein, it cannot itself be determined by those relations. It cannot be a matter or motion.⁹

Achieving a knowledge of this principle of unifying and generally organizing experience is, for Green, the goal for our understanding of reality. And he takes it as fairly obvious that this principle is found nowhere else but in consciousness. Nothing that we have knowledge of is known in any way other than as an object of conscious experience. Therefore, if our knowledge consists of objects in relation, these objects in relation are found in conscious experience. The relations are part of conscious experience, and the principle by which relations organize experience is found nowhere else but in conscious experience.

Green anticipates the following objection: even if it is agreed that experience consists of objects in relation which are part of conscious experience, is this not because consciousness is the consciousness of an objective reality, existing independently of conscious experience, which conscious experience happens to 'find' as objects in relation? If so, then the organized reality which we experience is an objective reality, something *other than* our conscious experience, and there need be no principle of organizing involved. Reality just *is* objects in

⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

relation, and that is simply how we find it when we are conscious of it.

Green provides a number of arguments to support his contention that relations exist only for the consciousness that experiences them and are not independent of consciousness. These arguments all have one fundamental form, namely, that relations actually *cannot be* what they appear to be. Take, for example, the experience of a couple of facts. The first fact is that the book is on the table. Then the book is moved so that the second fact is that the book is in the bookcase. Here we have a relation between facts: 'the book is on the table' is succeeded by 'the book is in the bookcase'. (In normal English, we would express this either as, "The book was on the table before it was in the bookcase," or, "The book was in the bookcase after it was on the table," depending on the context.) The relation is one of succession. It is a simple relation, one that we are utterly familiar with, and it is safe to say that our experience consists of constant successions of things. But, Green says, there is an important aspect of relations that must not be ignored:

Of two objects which form the terms of a relation one cannot exist as so related without the other, and therefore cannot exist before or after the other.¹⁰

Take, for example, a relation such as 'the cup is on the saucer.' As a relation, it is a whole, and all the elements of the relation, as related, exist simultaneously. One cannot say that

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

the cup exists before the saucer but is, at the same time, in the relation of 'on the saucer'. This would lead to an absurdity which could not be resolved. We would have an unimaginable situation in which the whole fact would consist of one term and a relation, expressed rather oddly as "the cup is on...", because if the cup exists before the saucer, the cup is on something which does not exist yet.

In a relational unity, the two terms of the relation and the relation they are in must all exist together. This means that, in the relational unity "the book was on the table before the book was in the bookcase," in which 'the book was on the table' is one fact, 'the book was in the bookcase' is another fact, these two facts, as related to each other, must exist together, even though one of the facts is taken to exist at a different time than the other. Green continues:

For this reason the objects between which a relation subsists, even a relation of succession, are, just so far as related, not successive.¹¹

But how can this be? Obviously, there are relations of succession, most of reality involves things that are before and after other things, and this requires that these things, the terms of the relations, actually exist before or after the things they are related to. The only solution to this problem, Green says, is that

...a succession always implies something else than the terms of the succession, and that a 'something else' which can simultaneously present to itself objects as

¹¹ Ibid., p. 34.

existing not simultaneously but one before the other.¹²

This 'something else' is, of course, consciousness, and consciousness presents to itself objects as existing before and after each other, and it presents them all at once in a simultaneous presentation. Likewise with relations other than the relation of succession. As consciousness is the condition of the relation of succession, so it is the condition of there being any kind of relation at all. Green says:

As little could there be a relation of objects as outside each other, or in space, if they were not equally related to a subject which they are not outside...¹³

Conscious experience, therefore, is the condition, not only of knowing reality, but also the condition of the reality that is known. Random phenomena of reality could not just organize themselves into the unified, interrelated whole within the system of the forces of nature as they are. There must also be a principle, outside nature, which organizes the phenomena in the act of presenting reality to itself. Green expresses it this way:

If there is such a thing as a connected experience of related objects, there must be operative in consciousness a unifying principle, which not only presents related objects to itself, but at once renders them objects and unites them in relation to each other by this act of presentation; and which is single throughout the experience.¹⁴

¹² Ibid., p. 34.

¹³ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 34-5.

Green agrees with Kant that, "the understanding 'makes' nature." For Green, consciousness 'makes' that which it experiences and reality is, through and through, a work of mind. But he disagrees with Kant that the understanding makes nature "out of a material that it does not make." That is, he does not follow Kant in thinking that the material which mind (or consciousness) works with is something which is somehow 'found' or 'given'.

Green's criticisms of Kant have their echoes in the kind of criticisms levelled against Kant in the twentieth century when he says that Kant's conception of the role of understanding falls short of a truly coherent explanation of knowledge:

...the work assigned to the understanding is a work merely among and upon phenomena;...the nature which it constitutes is merely a unity in the relations of phenomena; and...any conclusion we arrive at in regard to 'nature' in this sense has no application to 'things-in-themselves.'¹⁵

Green finds the Kantian notion of things-in-themselves extremely problematic. Either things-in-themselves are in some sort of relation to the world of experience or they are not. If they are in some sort of relation to the matter of our experience, then they must have those same relations to the subject that presents to itself the matter of experience as combined and unified by relations, and thus, they are no longer unknown things-in-themselves. But if they are not in some relation to the world of experience, then reality is dualistic, and we must somehow account for two utterly separate and mutually exclusive aspects

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 40

of reality. Also, if the latter conception is adopted, we are left in the philosophically unsatisfying position of maintaining the existence of something that will never be known.

Green and the Given

It is at this point that Green's discussion begins to take a turn in the direction that has a bearing on the topic of immediate experience. Green's idea is that dualistic views of reality and all the problems related to such views can be traced to an unnecessary bifurcation of form and matter. We are used to looking at reality this way, because we have found it useful when we give an account of knowledge and how we acquire it. When we examine the process by which we acquire knowledge, or when we just look at any piece of knowledge we have, we find that our knowledge is qualified by its relations to other parts of our knowledge, and that it is expanded by making even further qualifications and finding even more relations. But, at some point, the finding of further relations reaches an end:

When all accretions of form, due to the intellectual establishment of relations, have been stripped off, there seem to remain the mere sensations without which the intellectual activity would have had nothing to deal with or operate upon. These then must be in absolute sense the matter - the matter excluding all form - of experience.¹⁶

And what are these mere sensations, this absolute matter excluding all form, which accounts for experience before it is

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

organized in consciousness? This is, of course, the 'given,' and Green says it "...is taken to be feeling, pure and simple."

We separate out this matter, this 'given' part of experience, from the form which is the unifying and relating action of the knowing subject. But, Green claims, it is a mere abstraction to separate form and matter in an analysis of experience and we deceive ourselves if we claim that reality is thus constituted. It is true that the same principle is at work in our experience of the world as that which is the condition of there being a world at all. But in our individual experience of relations, we must not suppose that exact counterparts necessarily exist in reality.¹⁷ When we make abstractions, separating form and matter in experience, this constitutes only our own knowledge, but we cannot extrapolate to the whole of reality from the experience of one individual. Green says that, "Nature is the system of related appearances, and related appearances are impossible apart from the action of an intelligence...", and anticipates the question that seems naturally to follow from this when he asks, "Does this then imply the absurdity that nature comes into existence in the process by which this person or that begins to think?"¹⁸ The answer, Green

¹⁷ This is in direct contrast to William James, who claims that experienced relations are real relations - that is, they exist in reality just as they are experienced by a conscious subject. This also differs from C.I. Lewis, who claims that we are not capable of conceptualizing what is not there. Lewis says, "...attention cannot mark disjunctions in an undifferentiated field." (Mind and the World Order, p. 59.)

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 38.

replies, is a definite 'No.' It would be as absurd to suppose that nature comes into existence with the thinking of any person as it would be to assume that intelligence comes into existence in the process by which this person or that begins to understand. What is important here for Green is that there is a principle, outside of nature, which both presents organized nature and is also the condition of the existence of nature, and that this principle is consciousness. But this consciousness is not just the individual consciousness found separately in each of us.

At this point it seems natural to ask what this consciousness is if it is not the individual consciousness found separately in each of us. After all, we each know our own individual consciousness, and we infer that there are other individual consciousnesses like ours. What other consciousness exists besides these individual, separate ones?

In his explanation of this consciousness, Green gives a summary of the discussion so far and explains that, if we allow all that he has argued to this point, we cannot easily dismiss the idealism that follows:

The purpose of this long discussion has been to arrive at some conclusion in regard to the relation between man and nature...If by nature we mean the object of possible experience, the connected order of knowable facts or phenomena...then nature implies something other than itself, as the condition of its being what it is. Of that something else we are entitled to say, positively, that it is a self-distinguishing consciousness; because the function which it must fulfil in order to render the relations of phenomena, and with them nature, possible, is one which, on however limited a scale, we ourselves exercise in the

acquisition of experience, and exercise only by means of such a consciousness.¹⁹

Because there is nature constituted by a world of related phenomena, we know that there is a principle to account for this world. Relations would not exist without a consciousness of relations. And so, Green says, we know there is such a consciousness because of the existence of the world. But again, we ask the question, what *is* this consciousness? Green refers to it as an *eternal* intelligence, but this is to be understood only as a possible description (not as a name like Bradley's 'Absolute'). Green says of it that

...the concrete whole, which may be described indifferently as an eternal intelligence realised in the related facts of the world, or as a system of related facts rendered possible by such an intelligence, partially and gradually reproduces itself in us, communicating piece-meal, but in inseparable correlation, understanding and the facts understood, experience and the experienced world.²⁰

We know that there is an eternal consciousness, according to Green, because we know there is a whole of reality. Furthermore, we know that there is this whole of reality, as a system of related facts, because we know there is a principle of relation by which these facts are related. This principle is consciousness, but not just our separate, individual consciousnesses. Rather, it is the 'world-consciousness of which ours is a limited mode.' And so we reach the idea of the

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 38.

eternal, or world, consciousness through the appearance of the world as related facts and the conclusions we draw from our relation, as conscious beings, to this world of related facts. According to Green, this relation between man and world must inevitably lead to acknowledgement of the eternal, or world, consciousness, upon which the whole of reality depends, because this eternal consciousness is, itself, the whole of reality.

Green's theory of the eternal consciousness is integral to his own purposes in examining the theory of knowledge and inquiring into the relation of man and nature. But we need not follow him into this particular metaphysical issue. Instead, it is more important for the present discussion to look at those aspects of his work that have a bearing on the evolution of a theory of immediate experience. And so the next question we must ask Green is about the sensations that supply the fundamental matter of experience before the form of our relational understanding is factored out.

Green's View of Immediate Experience

Green says that it does not make sense that there should be "such data in the history of our experience, consisting in mere sensations, antecedently to any action of the intellect..."²¹. Why does this not make sense? Because for Green conscious experience always consists of *connections* of objects forming the

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

facts that constitute nature. Nature is "the system of connected phenomena, or facts related to consciousness, which forms the objects of consciousness." Now, since Green maintains that we are interested in experience in this sense -- i.e., in the sense of connected, unified objects of consciousness -- such experience necessarily involves relations, namely the relations that connect and unify phenomena. Thus, our knowledge of nature consists of facts known by means of the related phenomena in conscious experience. To suppose that there could be sensation given to a conscious subject, and that this given could be some kind of raw, unorganized, unrelated 'stuff' is meaningless. Green explains his conclusion thus: "...a sensation can only form an object of experience in being determined by an intelligent subject which distinguishes it from itself and contemplates it in relation to other sensations."²² And so to suppose that there is such a raw type of given stuff of experience is "...to suppose such experience to begin with what could not belong to or be an object of experience at all."

It is interesting to compare Green's dismissal of the given with that of Wilfrid Sellars, who likewise complained of philosophers making use of the given. According to Sellars, such philosophers

...have taken givenness to be a fact which presupposes no learning, no forming of associations, no setting up of stimulus-response connections. In short, they have

²² *ibid.*, p. 47.

tended to equate *sensing sense contents* with *being conscious...*²³

Both Green and Sellars consider it a fundamental mistake to suppose that there could be some raw, unconceptualized data that we receive from the world and that we could somehow 'know' as an object of our experience. And their reasons for thinking this a mistake are much the same. Sellars believes it is wrong to think that we could 'sense sense contents' without a conceptual apparatus in place allowing us to distinguish them, and Green likewise considers that a sensation is an object for us only if it has been conceptualized as part of a relational framework. According to both Green and Sellars, a conceptual apparatus is necessary in order for there to be any sensations at all as objects of conscious experience.

This criticism of the 'given' is, however, only one kind of possible criticism of givenness. When we look at Bradley's repudiation of the 'given' we find that he criticizes it for quite different reasons than those of Green and Sellars:

...if we mean by 'given' here to imply a relation of object to subject, then we must certainly avoid the word 'given'. For immediate experience, taken strictly, is free from every kind of relation.²⁴

We see here a certain confusion in the meaning of the terms 'given' and 'immediate experience.' Bradley, as we will find, thought that the 'given' was something in which there were

²³ Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", in Science, Perception and Reality, p. 131.

²⁴ Bradley, "Relations", in Collected Essays, p. 632.

already relations and which formed the object for a subject. Bradley denies the 'given' because it is relational, and asserts that immediate experience is non-relational. Green denies that the given is 'experience' precisely because it is free from every kind of relation and for Green, experience is a relational object for a subject. So we see that what Green claims as the 'given' is equivalent to what Bradley calls immediate experience, but Green denies it and Bradley asserts it. In some ways, Green has more in common with Sellars than with Bradley in his conception of the 'given.'

Sellars takes a shot at the idea that 'sensing sense contents' could be a matter of being merely conscious. For his part, Green thinks that consciousness and experience are equivalent, but denies that there is a meaningful experience that involves 'raw' sensing without consciousness of the sensing. Presumably, Green and Sellars are identifying a similar problem but using the terms in which they explain this problem to mean different things. Green admits that the word 'experience' is ambiguous:

But experience, as most students of philosophy must now be aware, is a term used in very different senses.²⁵

He cautions that there is a sense of the term 'experience' that offers problems. If the meaning (sense) of 'experience' that is required for an understanding of our knowledge of nature is one that involves consciousness of phenomena in relation, then we

²⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

should avoid that sense of 'experience' "...in which, for instance, a plant might be said to experience a succession of atmospheric or chemical changes, or in which we ourselves pass through a definite physical experience during sleep or in respect of the numberless events which affect us but of which we are not aware."²⁶ Green does not deny that this is experience at all, but it is a *kind* of experience that does not yield knowledge of nature.

It seems, then, that Green admits at least two kinds of experience, but insists that only one kind is admissible into our metaphysics of knowledge. The other form of experience cannot be a source of knowledge, or even the beginning of knowledge. This form of experience might, perhaps, be the condition by which a physical organism becomes, as Green puts it, "...organic to intellectual processes," because it alters "the mode in which the physical organism reacts upon stimulus." But it cannot, itself, be the reaction or the intellectual process. Green says that "between the two senses of experience there is all the difference that exists between change and consciousness of change."²⁷

The Problem of 'Mere Feeling'

Green rejects, as metaphysically inadmissible, this other sense of 'experience,' but he does not ultimately deny that it

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 20.

exists. This brings up a problem discussed by several philosophers for a century after Green. Can something be considered 'experience' of any kind at all if there is no awareness of it on the part of the experiencer? Green insists that "a consciousness of events as a related series" is "experience in the most elementary form in which it can be the beginning of knowledge." He never maintains that this is the *only* form of experience, but it is the only form of experience that yields knowledge. The form of experience that Green describes as being constituted of a mere series of events or "successive modifications of body or soul" cannot be, or result in, a *consciousness* of a series of related events. For Green, the reason why there must be consciousness of the series of events as related in experience considered as the foundation of knowledge is because there must be a spiritual principle which is more than, and necessary to, the otherwise unrealized phenomena of nature:

Nature, with all that belongs to it, is a process of change: change on a uniform method, no doubt, but change still. All the relations under which we know it are relations in the way of change or by which change is determined. But neither can any process of change yield a consciousness of itself, which, in order to be a consciousness of the change, must be equally present to all stages of the change; nor can any consciousness of change, since the whole of it must be present at once, be itself a process of change.²⁸

For Green, the principle that organizes the phenomena of experience is also the condition of reality, and there is no

²⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

reality outside the organized series of events present to a conscious subject. However, Green allows that there is a hazy intermediate state of being that is neither nature itself nor the conscious subject when he says that "(i)t is true...that in a great part of our lives we feel without thinking."²⁹ What he means by this, it would seem, is the same phenomenon that has sometimes been labelled the 'ticking-clock-problem.' We have been sitting in a room for a while, perhaps reading a book or concentrating on something that absorbs our attention, when we suddenly become aware that there is a clock ticking. The clock has been ticking all along and it cannot be that our ears have not been somehow affected by the sound. We are inclined to say that we have experienced it on some level, yet we were not conscious of it. The question, then, is whether or not this is an example of immediate experience.

This form of experience exists, according to Green, but it is *not* an independent object, outside the determination arising from the action of an organizing subject:

Mere sensation is in truth a phrase that represents no reality. It is the result of a process of abstraction; but having got the phrase we give a confused meaning to it, we fill up the shell which our abstraction has left, by reintroducing the qualification which we assumed ourselves to have got rid of. We present the *mere* sensations to ourselves as determined by relation in a way that would be impossible in the absence of that connecting action which we assume to be absent in designating them *mere* sensations.³⁰

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

When we become aware of the ticking clock, we infer that it was ticking all along, but that it was, as such, mere sensation unqualified by our distinguishing it and relating it - in short, mere sensation in the absence of conception. But in doing so, we claim that it was the ticking of the clock, which it could be only if it were determined in the conscious experience of a distinguishing subject who has a conception of it, and also that it is a mere sensation, abstracting from our conception of it. It cannot be *both* something determined by conception and not determined by conception at the same time. The ticking of the clock is a fact, but a sensation unrelated to thought cannot constitute a fact.

We may admit that we live in a world of facts and that, for us, there are no mere sensations, unqualified by thought, that constitute the world of facts in which we live. But is it possible that there are noumena, unrelated to our thinking consciousnesses, which ultimately inform our knowledge of reality simply by being *given*, or somehow initiating the alteration in our minds or bodies that leads to experience?

To answer this question Green again invokes the spiritual principle and his theory of an eternal consciousness. Mere sensation seems to be what it is, in abstraction from our conceptions, only for us with our limited experience. But for the eternal consciousness, all of reality is present and there are no such erroneous views. Green says:

...that large part of our own sensitive life which goes on without being affected by conceptions, is a series of facts with the determination of which, indeed, thought, as ours or in us, has nothing to do, but which not the less depends for its existence as a series of facts on the action of the same subject which, in another mode of its action, enables us to know them.³¹

According to Green, this subject on which the whole of reality depends is, of course, the eternal consciousness. It is, itself, the whole of reality, but the whole of reality is all the phenomena of reality together with the self-conscious subject by which all the phenomena are interrelated and organized. Thus we do not need the thing-in-itself as an absolute, because we have the world-consciousness. There is no given as a matter of mere sensation, save only in our abstraction of matter from form. For the world-consciousness, there is no given or mere sensation because everything is in relation to everything else, the many is in one and the one consists of a many. What we experience in abstraction and error has existence for the eternal subject as a complete whole with all its relations.

Bradley's Absolute, we will find, has the same characteristic wholeness as Green's eternal subject, and is likewise the final arbiter of reality. It also is a means of avoiding recourse to a thing-in-itself in order to account for phenomena which seem independent of our knowledge of them. But for Bradley, experience prior to the relations of our organizing intelligence (conscious experience) plays a larger role. Green

³¹ Ibid., p. 50.

calls such experience 'the given' and uses it as negative support for his concept of the world consciousness. Bradley denies that it is the 'given,' calls it immediate experience or feeling, and claims that it somehow exists for us prior to our awareness of it. But it is obvious that Green's concerns with 'conscious experience' or 'experience-as-mere-feeling' played some part in the formation of Bradley's own concepts of stages of experience and reality. These concerns are not easily dismissed even though they are not fashionable any more. They can be detected in the work of philosophers a century later, in discussions of the foundations of knowledge, of questions about the existence of a 'given,' and of the status of experience, whether pre-conceptual, inherently conceptual, or organized by a conceptualizing subject. We can see this in one of John McDowell's statements, where he identifies what he sees as a central problem for philosophy:

...we need a conception of experiences as states or occurrences that are passive but reflect conceptual capacities,³² capacities that belong to spontaneity, in operation.

It appears that McDowell's ideal conception of experience involves questions that were central to Green. In discussing these questions, Green set the stage for those philosophers after him who ask how we both receive and conceptualize data from the world in our experience.

³² McDowell, Mind and World, p. 23.

CHAPTER 2 - BRADLEY AND JAMES ON IMMEDIATE FEELING

Agreement and Disagreement in the Views of Bradley and James

In the work of F.H. Bradley and William James, the idea of immediate experience finds its fullest expression. Bradley and James serve as our primary sources for a comprehensive view of immediate experience, its character and its nature.

Francis Herbert Bradley (1846-1924) is considered one of the main British idealists. Like Green, he believes that there is a whole of reality which is all of experience, so that consciousness of reality is not merely the limited, separate consciousness that each one of us has (plus the objects of each consciousness). Green calls this whole of reality the 'eternal consciousness' whereas Bradley talks of the Absolute. Their theories have some similarities but, as was evident in the discussion of their conceptions of the 'given,' there are major differences as well.

William James (1842-1910), like Green, focusses on the importance of relations for an understanding of reality, but James and Green differ fundamentally on two points: first, James is a realist and Green is an idealist; and second, they disagree about the reality of relations in experience.

James and Bradley inherited some of Green's philosophical concerns but nevertheless developed different views on the nature of experience. Perhaps the most important difference is that, whereas Green does not have a theory of immediate experience and maintains that experience unmediated by consciousness can not

play a rôle in our views of reality, Bradley and James each make immediate experience a cornerstone of their philosophical claims. Their theories will serve as the yardstick against which to measure other views, since they set out the clearest distinction between pre-conceptual non-mediated experience and normal conceptualized experience.

There is an interesting mix of agreement and disagreement in Bradley's account of immediate experience and James' descriptions of the 'immediate flux of feeling'. Bradley discusses James' views most extensively in his essay, "On Professor James's 'Radical Empiricism'"¹, in the course of which Bradley brings out an ambiguity in James' account of the nature of immediate experience:

Have we terms and relations given as such, and therefore, as such, ultimately real? Or is what we actually experience, on the contrary, a non-relational whole, a continuous flux, with relative emphases of its diversities, but with no actual relations or terms?

Bradley suggests that James' description seems consistent with an account of immediate experience as a non-relational whole but is confused because James also seems to be committed to the reality of terms and relations in immediate experience. Bradley offers this correction to James' views:

The doctrine which Prof. James would, I think, have preferred is the view that given experience is non-relational, that it is an unbroken fluid totality

¹ In Essays on Truth and Reality, pp. 149-58.

² Essays on Truth and Reality, pp. 150-51.

containing in one 'now' an undivided lapse, and is in itself foreign to any terms or relations as such.³

This, of course, is Bradley's own view, found throughout his metaphysics.

James, for his part, had comments and criticisms to make on Bradley's view. In "Bradley or Bergson"⁴ he says

Bradley's first great act of candor in philosophy was his breaking loose from the Kantian tradition that immediate feeling is all discontinuous. In his Logic as well as in his Appearance he insisted that in the flux of feeling we directly encounter reality, and that its form, as thus encountered, is the continuity and wholeness of a transparent much-at-once.⁵

James agrees with this aspect of Bradley's immediate experience and therefore condones it. However, just as Bradley made a fundamental criticism of James, so James also found fault with Bradley:

With a world of particulars, given in loveliest union, in conjunction definitely various, and variously definite, the 'how' of which you 'understand' as soon as you see the fact of them, for there is no 'how' except the constitution of the fact as given; with all this given him, I say, in pure experience, he asks for some ineffable union in the abstract instead, which, if he gained it, would only be a duplicate of what he has already in his full possession.⁶

It can be seen from this exchange of critical commentary that Bradley and James believed they were, for the most part, in agreement, and yet they admitted profound differences. Since

³ ibid., p. 152.

⁴ In Collected Essays and Reviews, pp. 491-499.

⁵ Collected Essays and Reviews, p. 491.

⁶ Essays in Radical Empiricism, pp. 120-21.

much of their dispute centres on the characterization of immediate experience, we must consider what is common to their views and on what points they disagree. The groundwork for this enquiry involves an analysis of the 'continuous flux', the 'flux of feeling', the 'unbroken fluid totality' and the 'continuity and wholeness of a transparent much-at-once' to which they both refer. That is, what did they understand by 'immediate experience'?

First, some general assumptions about immediate experience, based on James' and Bradley's descriptions, will be considered. Second, we will look at James' account, especially with regard to its function in his philosophy of radical empiricism. This will be contrasted with Bradley's view in the third section, followed by an analysis of what constitutes the major difference between them.

Immediate Experience - General Assumptions

For those philosophers who have advocated a theory of immediate experience, there are certain basic conceptions of its nature and character that are fundamental no matter what differences they have on the finer points. For example, we often find that they describe it as 'feeling' and this term has been used interchangeably for the term 'immediate experience' in their work. A proper conception of what is meant by 'feeling' is necessary because there has been a subtle change in how this term is used:

In the nineteenth century the term "feeling" had been used very broadly to designate virtually any immediate state of consciousness whatsoever. As so understood, to feel something is the same as to experience it and, hence, feeling and experience become more or less synonymous terms.⁷

The term 'feeling' had often been used when 'thinking,' 'willing' or 'feeling an emotion' could be substituted with no change of meaning. But there was an increasing recognition of the differences in the character of the subjective states involved with the result that, "...the distinction between these three activities had become somewhat standard by the end of the century so that the term 'feeling' had come to have a far narrower meaning."⁸ This narrower sense of the term 'feeling' is an awareness of a special type, involving no reference to an object, and in this sense it expresses what is meant by 'immediate experience' as employed by many of its advocates. We will find that 'feeling' is a very important concept for Bradley and James, and they refer to it frequently in their explanations of 'primordial awareness.'

James proposes a theory of what he calls 'pure experience' in his Essays In Radical Empiricism. 'Pure experience' is James' version of 'immediate experience' and in his descriptions of it, we can find his views on this state of primordial awareness which he also called, at times, 'feeling.' He gives this definition:

⁷ Schrader, "The Structure of Emotion" in An Invitation to Phenomenology, pp. 253-54.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 254.

'Pure experience' is the name which I gave to the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories.

We are introduced here to a kind of experience identified as the 'immediate flux' of life, and since this experience is the source for the kind of experience in which our conceptual categories are employed, the immediate flux is not the same thing as conceptualized experience but is prior to it.

Bradley also refers to the 'flux' in his various discussions of immediate experience, describing it as 'a continuous flux' and an 'unbroken fluid totality'. In his essay, "On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience", he expands on this view:

I use, in brief, immediate experience to stand for that which is comprised wholly within a single state of undivided awareness or feeling.

For Bradley, whatever is involved in a 'single state of undivided awareness' is immediate experience. By that he means a condition in which the act of being aware and the 'whatever' of the awareness (its content) are one and the same, with no distinction between them. He also calls this 'feeling'. He elaborates on this state of feeling:

At any time all that we suffer, do, and are, forms one psychical totality. It is experienced all together as a coexisting mass, not perceived as parted and joined by relations even of coexistence.

⁹ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 93.

¹⁰ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 173.

¹¹ Appearance and Reality, p. 198.

Immediate experience, for Bradley, is 'feeling' which 'forms one psychical totality.' The stuff of 'feeling' is felt 'all together as a coexisting mass.' In the picture Bradley presents to us, immediate experience is a state which is felt as a whole of being with no distinctions or relations. This state is one in which there is no awareness of many separate objects, such as tables and chairs and itches and noises and volitions, because they are all one integrality felt as a mass or aggregate. We can try to imagine it as a 'state of being' which is a vast smear or blur in which, as Bradley says, "...extension and colour as they come first are not given as related. They are both in one, just as the contents of every 'this,' 'now,' and 'mine' come in one and make one with the pleasure and whatever else belongs to the moment's feeling."¹² But we must be careful here. Immediate experience is not a picture or a presentation or something before us. It is a state or feeling, in which the experienced and the experiencing are one.

Does this concur with James' view of immediate experience? The answer to this question is a qualified 'yes' - in some respects. When James describes 'pure experience' he says that it is

...full both of oneness and of manyness, but in respects that don't appear; changing throughout, yet so confusedly that its phases interpenetrate and no points, either of distinction or identity, can be

¹² Collected Essays, pp. 631-2.

caught. Pure experience in this state is but another name for feeling or sensation.¹³

Both Bradley and James claim that there is a kind of experience that has not yet been conceptualized, they both designate it as 'feeling,' and they agree that no distinctions, coexistences or identities can be picked out in this state. The immediate flux or coexisting mass is, according to James, a unity and multiplicity, although not as subsequent conceptual analysis would determine it. For Bradley, it is a totality, and all that is 'in' it or 'of' it is an all-at-once and an all-together. He says that feeling is an awareness that is non-relational and comprises an 'indefinite amount of difference' and a 'many felt in one' although there are no distinctions as such.¹⁴ Thus, both agree that 'feeling' is a state of being that comprises a wholeness, a mass of 'stuff' not given as separated or conjoined.

The descriptions they give of this primordial state of experience they call 'feeling' are quite similar. But we begin to detect differences when they discuss the constitution of the immediate based on inferences from mediated, normal experience. Somehow, out of immediate experience, there eventually is actualized or yielded our normal mediated experience. James calls the latter 'retrospective experience' or 'conceptual knowledge.' Bradley refers to it as 'judgement' or 'relational experience' and contrasts it with immediate experience:

¹³ Essays in Radical Empiricism, pp. 93-4.

¹⁴ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 174.

In feeling (with which we start) we have an immediate union of one and many ... In judgement this immediate unity is broken up, and there is a demand for qualification otherwise. This 'otherwise' involves distinction and relational plurality...¹⁵

Judgement, for Bradley, is a case of predicating an idea of some existing thing: an assertion is made, and this assertion is an idea that qualifies the real. In Bradley's account, abstract concepts are applied to experience, and feeling is broken up by conceptual understanding into things and the qualities predicated of them. As such, these things and qualities are abstractions and not reality.

James' distinction between the two kinds of experience is different from Bradley's in that he doesn't consider conceptualized experience as somehow less 'real' than the immediate. In James' terminology, the distinction is between 'concept' and 'percept' and he lists all those things which, for him, come under these two headings:

'Idea,' 'thought,' and 'intellection' are synonymous with 'concept.' Instead of 'percept' I shall often speak of 'sensation,' 'feeling,' 'intuition,' and sometimes of 'sensible experience' or of the 'immediate flow' of conscious life.¹⁶

James gives these distinctions an historical context when he says: "Since Hegel's time what is simply perceived has been called the 'immediate,' while the 'mediated' is synonymous with what is conceived." James places himself among those who follow

¹⁵ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 227n.

¹⁶ Some Problems in Philosophy, p. 48n.

this historical precedent of dividing the immediate and the mediated.

Despite the fact that James' view of what constitutes the 'immediate' *in this account* sounds very much like the 'given' of sense data and seems inconsistent with a view of immediate experience as having no subject-object distinction, he nevertheless agrees with Bradley that there is a distinction between the immediate and the mediated in that 'the immediate' has not yet been subjected to conceptual understanding. For James, immediate experience is perceptual experience but is prior to thinking or judgement and thus, not yet classified as things in relation to other things. Such experience would involve a seamless blur or mass which, when mediated by conceptual thinking, would be resolved into objects like books and tables and tastes and the room we are sitting in and other perceptual phenomena. All those things would be 'there,' but not as distinct items. They are distinct items *as such* only when our understanding, with its concepts, picks them out selectively and attends to them according to contextual requirements. In immediate feeling, they are not picked out and comprise an undistinguished mass.

When we ask Bradley and James whether there can be experience in which there is no 'understanding' of what there is and in which, as it were, the experience is blind as to what is experienced, they would agree that there is. For them this 'immediate' or 'pure' experience is one whole state which does

not involve the division between a conscious subject or self who is having the experience and the experience as an object of conscious experience. This constitutes the primary difference between their accounts of immediate experience and the traditional empiricist's account of the 'immediately given.' The latter involves a dualism of subject and object which is specifically what James and Bradley want to circumvent. As we have already seen in the discussion of T.H. Green's views, Bradley objects to the term 'given' if it means a relation of an object to a subject. James shares Bradley's objection to the 'given' when he condemns a 'neo-Kantian' view. He claims that this view has replaced a dualism of mind and matter or souls and bodies with a 'minimal essential being' of consciousness plus that of which the consciousness is conscious, namely, the content of consciousness. But, James objects, this consciousness-plus-content does not eliminate dualism, and merely substitutes another form of the subject-object distinction in experience. James denies this consciousness-plus-content and proposes instead his theory of 'pure experience.' He says of experience in its pure state that "...there is no self-splitting of it into consciousness and what the consciousness is 'of.'"¹⁷

In summary, immediate experience for James and Bradley is *not* an immediately 'given' experiential content for an experiencing subject that is aware of the distinction between

¹⁷ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 23.

itself and this content. Nor is immediate experience the content-plus-the-experiencing, co-present in the flux of feeling. In the same way that 'feeling' is a state that has not been conceptually mediated into an experience of many things in relation, it is also not an object for, and thus distinct from, a subject, nor is it an experience in which a subject, aware of a not-self as the object of its awareness, is thereby aware of self-plus-object in the experience. Thus, we cannot talk of 'having an immediate experience' because this implies a subject having the experience as an object. Nor can we talk of 'immediately experiencing' something because, again, an object is implied. In its strictest sense, immediate experience is a state of being, one stuff, what James calls the 'instant field of the present' and Bradley calls the felt totality or undivided whole of feeling.

From this shared view of the fundamental aspects of immediate experience in James and Bradley, we can derive a conception of the character of immediate experience. Thus it is non-conceptualized experience, involving no subject-object distinction or awareness of consciousness-plus-content, comprising a whole of feeling and a continuous flux. This view of immediate experience has not gone unchallenged, especially by those philosophers who balk at the idea of experience that is not an object for a conscious experiencer. Sometimes, the criticisms made by such philosophers appear to involve misconceptions. For example, G.F. Stout defines 'immediate experience' as a 'quasi-

cognitive awareness attaching to the mere existence of feeling.' This definition resembles Green's description of 'mere feeling'. Stout criticizes this idea as unnecessary, pointing out that, "...the content, as well as the awareness, is an experience of the person who feels - his *immediate* experience, if we choose to call it so."¹⁸ But this directly contradicts James' and Bradley's view that immediate experience involve no subject-object distinction or conceptualized discrimination between content and awareness of content. However, Stout may have meant that awareness and content are one thing, not conceptually discriminated in immediate experience. Even if this is his view, it is still not the same as Bradley's and James' views since he also refers to it as 'an experience of the person who feels' and also '*his* immediate experience,' implying that it is an object for a subject. Thus Stout does not seem to be using 'immediate experience' in the same way as James and Bradley and his criticism fails to hit its target.

James' Pure Experience and Its Relation to Knowledge

When we look at the way James employs what he calls 'pure experience' or immediate feeling in the rest of his philosophical system, we find that it has a different rôle to play than it has in Bradley's metaphysics.

¹⁸ Stout, G.F., 'Mr. Bradley's Theory of Judgement', in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1902-3, p. 5n.

For one thing, James states that 'the principle of pure experience' is a postulate of his 'Radical Empiricism' and is integral to this doctrine. James describes his Radical Empiricism as the doctrine that admits into its philosophical constructions only those elements that are directly experienced, and this includes the experience of conjunctive and disjunctive relations. Hence, in James' version of the immediate, conjunctive and disjunctive relations are directly experienced.

The content of immediate feeling and the content of conceptualized understanding are not as different from each other in James' view as they are in Bradley's. This is because James has a different reason for proposing non-dichotomized primordial experience than Bradley does. James introduces 'pure experience' in his argument against neo-Kantian 'consciousness-plus-content' dualism. He proposes the doctrine of pure experience as an alternative epistemology:

My thesis is that if we start with the supposition that there is only one primal stuff or material in the world, a stuff of which everything is composed, and if we call that stuff 'pure experience,' then knowing can easily be explained as a particular sort of relation towards one another into which portions of pure experience may enter. The relation itself is a part of pure experience; one of its 'terms' becomes the subject or bearer of the knowledge,¹⁹ the knower, the other becomes the object known.

For James, reality is experience, and experience is only one thing. It is not, in itself, split into consciousness and the content of consciousness. Pure experience, in its immediacy, is

¹⁹ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 4.

all one stuff or blur which does not involve, in the moment of its being, any self-division. But reflection carves this primal stuff into subject and object, perceiving entity and thing perceived, knower and known. Since pure experience is the 'only one primal stuff or material' in the world, knowledge has to be explained as something that takes place 'within' pure experience.

When James explains how knowledge takes place in pure experience, there appears to be a contradiction in his claims. He explains that knowing is a matter of the relations between parts of pure experience. But he has also denied a dualism of conscious entity and object of consciousness in pure experience. Obviously, the relation between parts of pure experience cannot be between one part which is a conscious entity and another part which is an object of consciousness. This prompts the question: what parts of pure experience are related in the relation that constitutes 'knowing'?

James' reply is that it is not a matter of *what* is related, but rather *how* it is related. James reiterates that pure experience, in itself, is a 'plain, unqualified actuality, or existence, a simple *that*.' In retrospection, because it is necessary on a practical level for us to analyze out the elements of experience in order to classify phenomena and see things in relation for basic survival and control of our environment, pure experience is *acted* upon and is thereby split into state of mind and thing intended by the mind. James says that "...its subjectivity and objectivity are functional attributes solely,

realized only when the experience is 'taken,' i.e., talked-of, twice, considered along with its two differing contexts respectively, by a new retrospective experience..."²⁰ He explains that, in this retrospective experience, items of pure experience are linked with other items with which they are associated. Because of this, elements of pure experience are like the points at the intersection of lines; if the element or item at the point is related in retrospection to one line of associates, it is an item in the 'conscious' life of the subject (knower); and if it is related to associates on the other line, it is an item in the history of some 'object,' material or factual. In this way, the originally undistinguished chaos of the flux of immediate feeling becomes discriminated in a retrospective experience into items constituting a dualism of thought and thing.

James' primary motive in proposing his 'pure experience' is to offer a better explanation of knowledge, one that avoids an original dualism of consciousness and content, so that there is no need to explain the relation between two irreducibly distinct orders of reality in the act or state of experience. As C.H. Seigfried explains:

James argued that the traditional thought-thing, subject-object dualism can be better explained in terms of secondary constructs by which mankind has gotten hold of and tried to make sense out of his world,

²⁰ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 23.

rather than as an inevitable split of reality which man's experience both reflects and embodies.²¹

Bradley, like James, proposes a theory of immediate experience as a corrective to the kind of thinking that asserts any kind of fundamental dualism. However, Bradley's motives are not to offer a better explanation of knowledge and he has no theory of a retrospective split of the immediate content into items on either the 'line' of conscious experience or the 'line' of some object's history. Immediate experience, for Bradley, is a guidepost to a higher form of reality and a fundamental aspect of his metaphysics of feeling.

Bradley's 'Feeling' and its Relation to Reality

A significant contrast between Bradley's view and James' is their difference as to how much is encompassed by immediate experience.

As noted above, James seems to be making a claim for 'only one primal stuff or material in the world' which he calls 'pure experience.' But he later emends this claim and says the 'that' of pure experience is

...just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness or what not...Experience is only a collective name for all those sensible natures.²²

The originally fluid mass of pure experience is, in retrospection, distinguished into many discrete items that were

²¹ Seigfried, Chaos and Context, p. 50.

²² Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 27.

always there but not yet discriminated. All those things which are retrospectively distinguished, all that which we attend to and which forms our knowledge, appears originally in the chaos of the immediate flux. Thus, reality is discoverable in our experience and James advises us that 'truth' is ascertainable when we "successfully dip back into the finite stream of feeling"²³, the sensible flux or world of sensation:

...the immediate experience in its passing is always 'truth,' practical truth, *something to act on*, at its own movement.²⁴

What we find in the retrospective conceptualized experience was always 'there,' (except in cases of error, illusion, hallucination), and a theory of pure experience corrects the flaws inherent in a dualistic, conceptualized experience, allowing us a clear picture of how experience *is* reality.

Bradley, on the other hand, although agreeing with James that reality is experience, denies that merely plunging back into the sensible flux gives us reality in its totality. He claims a more limited function for immediate experience or 'feeling', either in its original state as fluid mass or as retrospectively understood in judgement by our conceptual understanding. Reality is more than what is given in feeling:

²³ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 100.

²⁴ James, ERE, p. 24.

I do not suggest that what I call feeling is in every sense ultimate, and that we can take such a mode of experience as itself, in short, absolute Reality.²⁵

For Bradley, experience has different forms or 'levels'.

Immediate experience is the first or primary mode of these different forms. The second form is the realm of appearance in which we live, the form or mode or level of judgement, in which things appear to be in relation to other things. This is the form of experience in which there is conceptual understanding and objects are abstracted out of the undistinguished mass of feeling. In other words, this is normal experience, mediated by our conceptual understanding, and it is in this mode that reality appears to be an object of our experience. However, this second mode involves only the appearances of things and although we have judgement on this level, we do not have knowledge of Reality. For Bradley, what we normally call knowledge, which is really only the experience of relational appearances, occurs as part, or takes place within, a mode of experience separate from the original mode of feeling, and neither of these forms of experience gives the whole of Reality.²⁶

²⁵ Collected Essays, p. 632.

²⁶ Since we cannot know Reality within immediate experience or in the mode of relational judgement, commentators on Bradley complain that he offers no hope that we can ever truly know Reality and that our quest for knowledge is in vain. It can be argued that Bradley felt that we can have an awareness of Reality in an inferred understanding of the Absolute, but this is a whole other topic, and since I am writing only about his views of immediate experience, it will not form part of my discussion.

The tensions in these two forms of experience, neither of which gives us Reality, leads to the third form of experience. This form would be a kind of transcendence into experience of the Absolute. But, just as we avoided following Green into a discussion of the 'eternal consciousness,' we will also avoid following Bradley into the Absolute. For the present, it is enough if we can grasp Bradley's idea of immediate feeling in contrast to his idea of normal, relational experience.

We have seen that Bradley does not consider 'immediate feeling' to be the whole of reality. This leads us to the question of the rôle that it plays in Bradley's metaphysics. He claims that, although immediate experience does not give us ultimate Reality, it does supply an insight into its nature. Bradley considers it the task of metaphysics to know reality rather than mere appearances, and this quest answers a need for intellectual satisfaction. In our normal relational experience, we find contradictions which lead to dissatisfaction, and Bradley spends the first part of Appearance and Reality showing that our relational thought gives us only appearances and not reality. Philosophical reflection on our ordinary experience of the world, (the relational conceptualized mode of experience), discovers problems in accounts that explain reality as a matter of primary and secondary qualities, substance and attribute, relation and quality, space and time, change, causation, things, the self, and so on. Bradley says that for this reason the philosophical attitude condemns ordinary experience and, since we crave the

intellectual satisfaction of knowing reality and all we have at our disposal is experience, we look to a form of experience other than the relational to satisfy this need. We turn to experience not mediated by concepts and hence, a non-relational whole, a flux which is, as Bradley says, "...a knowing and being in one." On this need to turn from conceptual understanding to the original flux of feeling, Bradley concurs with James. James acknowledges this:

Mr. Bradley agrees that immediate feeling possesses a native wholeness which conceptual treatment analyzes into a many, but cannot unite again.²⁷

For both James and Bradley, conceptual understanding is inadequate and gives a false picture of reality. However, they each propose different resolutions for the philosophical quest and where James endorses a plunge back into the sensible flux of immediate feeling, Bradley takes what James calls a 'desperate transconceptual leap'²⁸ beyond both immediate experience and conceptual understanding and assumes an Absolute experience which will unite feeling and conceptual thought in some way. As noted above, this would be the third form of experience.

For Bradley, Absolute Reality is the One, the totality, everything, and Absolute experience possesses a wholeness denied by any experience in which there is a plurality of things. Immediate experience, by its nature, points to this wholeness. It is a state of being involving emotion and will and imagining

²⁷ Some Problems in Philosophy, p. 92.

²⁸ Collected Essays and Reviews, p. 496.

and sensing and anything else which later would be picked out and separated in relational judgement. Bradley says

In my general feeling at any moment there is more than the objects before me, and no perception of objects will exhaust the sense of a living emotion.²⁹

That is, if we could stop ourselves at any particular moment in the midst of any of the activities of our ordinary lived experience - for example, walking down a street, sitting in a chair reading a book, driving a car, conversing with friends, baking a cake, or whatever - and if we could 'slice' through this moment to examine its contents, what would we find? Bradley says we would find not merely a panorama of sense-data, and we would find more than the ideas we are thinking about, the plans we are making, the memories, the desires and so on, that make up the objects of our conscious attention. These are merely the objects comprising the present process of my relational judgement and perception. But, Bradley says, there is much more to that state of being which constitutes our feeling than these isolated presentations:

Everything which is got out into the form of an object implies still the felt background against which the object comes, and, further, the whole experience of both feeling and object is a non-relational immediate felt unity.³⁰

This immediate feeling is a positive, non-relational, non-objective whole in which awareness and content of awareness are one, and this whole of feeling is the background which forms the

²⁹ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 159.

³⁰ Essays in Truth and Reality, p. 176.

basis for the distinct objects in relational experience. The objects of our conscious experience are got out against this background of feeling, but the feeling is always there. And thus, at any given moment, the entirety of our state is one of both feeling and relational consciousness, and this entire state is a unity of both forms of experience.

Take, for example, the experience of driving a car down a highway. If we were to slice down the middle of any moment of this experience, we would find a number of sensations, such as the feeling of one's hands on the steering wheel, foot on the gas pedal, the colours and shapes of things in our field of view, sounds such as the music on the car radio or engine noises, and there would also be the ongoing ruminations of our thinking, and particular emotions such as anxiety, annoyance, and there might also be a consciousness of hunger or thirst or tiredness. We would find, in this 'slice', many objects which are not connected at all with the business of driving the car. But also in this 'slice', there would be a background mass of undistinguished 'stuff' out of which new objects would occasionally emerge, new thoughts or sensations would come to our attention, and against which all our objects play their parts, like an elaborate blurred screen in a theatre before which a few actors and props shift and move, sometimes melting into the screen while new dramatis personae emerge out of it. Bradley paints a picture of feeling as a non-relational whole which is the background for our normal relational thought, and which is the whole of our state at any

given moment, comprising our immediate feeling and our relational consciousness in a unity. And of this immediate experience, Bradley says though it "...in a manner is transcended, it nevertheless remains throughout as the present foundation of my known world".³¹

The description of immediate experience as a 'background' or 'foundation' is a point of agreement in James' and Bradley's views. James says that "...conception as an *act* is part of the flux of feeling"³² and he later says that "...the flux can never be superseded. We must carry it with us to the bitter end of our cognitive business, keeping it in the midst of the translation even when the latter proves illuminating, and falling back on it alone when the translation gives out".³³ As for Bradley, for James also the immediate flux is always present, and is the foundation of our conceptual understanding. But whereas James endorses a return to the immediate flux in our quest for reality, Bradley claims that *both* feeling and relational experience are inadequate and reality lies beyond them.

Despite the fact that immediate feeling does not ultimately yield reality, it is far closer to being reality, or it gives a better picture of reality (it has more degrees of reality in Bradley's terminology) than relational experience does. This is

³¹ Essays in Truth and Reality, pp. 159-160.

³² Some Problems in Philosophy, p. 48.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 78-79.

because reality, according to Bradley, is one whole in which there is no self-contradiction. Since immediate experience is a whole of feeling in which there are no relations, and thus does not involve the contradictions that arise from relational experience, it is less defective than conceptual/relational experience.

And yet, immediate experience or feeling is not, admittedly, our normal or ordinary form of experience. We are, most of the time throughout our adult lives, living in what Bradley would call the realm of appearances, in which we experience a multitude of things and qualities and phenomena in relation to each other, and we experience all of this as the objective content given to an experiencing subject. We live in the realm of appearances, of relational experience, and *not* in the realm of immediate experience. But immediate feeling is the background for all this relational experience, and the felt totality is always there as part of the whole of experience. In what way is it there?

The answer to this question is significant because, in telling us 'how' immediate experience is omnipresent, Bradley fills in the details about 'what' immediate experience is. He asks how we can *know* immediate experience, since knowing it involves making it an object, in which case it is transcended. In other words, knowing immediate experience would be a matter of having an object conceptually mediated before us, in which case it is no longer immediate experience and thus no longer itself. This leads to the dilemma, as Bradley puts it, that "...so far as

I know of immediate experience, it does not exist, and that hence, whether it exists or not, I could in neither case know of it."³⁴

How can Bradley assert the existence of something he admits cannot be known? The answer is, of course, that we can know something inferentially even when we do not know it directly. Briefly, in Bradley's view, it is in the nature of human thought to reflect on the essence of the real, and in doing so, the reflective thinker is dissatisfied with the appearances of things, that is, with the objects of our relational experience, as a source of knowledge. We find that these objects are incomplete when what is wanted is an object that is whole and complete. In other words, we form the idea of an all-inclusive reality through our dissatisfaction with the limited objects of our ordinary experience, and the subsequent idea of an object with nothing outside of itself:

Our actual object fails to satisfy us, and we get the idea that it is incomplete and that a completed object would satisfy. We attempt to complete our object by relational addition from without and by relational distinction from within. And the result in each case is failure and a sense of defect...Then we try the idea of a positive non-distinguished non-relational whole, which contains more than the object and in the end contains all that we experience. And that idea...seems to meet our demand.³⁵

Bradley says that when we have an experience which we take to be, e.g. a matter of sensations and ideas in relation, we find that

³⁴ Essays in Truth and Reality, p. 160.

³⁵ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 188.

there is something left out, making this experience fall short of being complete reality. We try adding to it by tracing its relations to other objects comprising the context in which it is found, or by bringing out more of its internal content. But it is only in the realization that the object is completed by addition from an immediate whole of feeling that we find intellectual satisfaction. The addition to the objective relational experience does not come from anywhere but from the whole of feeling of my finite centre of experience. Bradley refers to this as the 'felt outgoing of myself and from myself.'

Thus the reality of immediate experience is felt as being and coming from myself. It is my immediate experience and, as a whole mass of unmediated feeling, it is the whole of reality, since reality is in feeling and experience is reality. Reality is felt 'there' in the undifferentiated flux before relational experience abstracts objects from it.

For this reason, Bradley talks most often in terms of states and feelings, moods, sensations and emotions. For example he talks of a feeling that his finger has been bitten by an insect³⁶, or despondency, or anger, or *ennui*³⁷, or volition³⁸. This is different than James' account of feeling, in which he talks of perceptions, presentations, physical objects ("...his

³⁶ Essays in Truth and Reality, p. 164.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 167.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 188.

actual field of vision, the room he sits in, with the book he is reading at its centre..."³⁹) and even when James talks about the experience as a 'that' which is a point on two lines, one line being "...a train of sensations, emotions, decisions, movements, classifications, expectations, etc..."⁴⁰, these mental phenomena form only one of the lines and the other line is the history of a physical entity such as a building, a room, or a book. James espouses a realism in which the sensing of the qualities of physical things, such as tables and chairs and dogs (brownness, hardness, etc.) are the objects which our conceptual understanding finds in reflective experience emerging out of the flux of feeling. For Bradley, on the other hand, the object of our relational experience is a state of being, an emotional state, it is *my* sensations, *my* willing, *my* ennui, etc. (rather than independent physical things in the world). For example, he talks about the sensation of being bitten by an insect, but he does not talk about an experience of an insect. In this, James and Bradley rely on different metaphors. For James, experience is made up of whatever is in the world, whereas for Bradley the world *is* my experience.⁴¹ Although immediate experience is

³⁹ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 11.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴¹ T.S. Eliot makes this point in his book on Bradley, Knowledge and Experience, p. 19. Also, we will find that many philosophers emphasize one metaphor or the other when they talk about experience. I will re-examine the use of these different metaphors in the final chapter.

neutral and theoretically unknowable, whatever is claimed to be subsequently carved out as its object or objects conceptually understood, says a great deal about what we infer it to be originally. And for Bradley, 'feeling' is retrospectively objectified as 'my feeling' of the world and of myself, whereas for James, 'feeling' is retrospectively objectified either as an item of conscious experience or as a physical object.

Where is the subject in Bradley's view? Bradley says that "...at no stage of mental development is the mere correlation of subject and object actually given."⁴² This is because, for Bradley, the real subject is always felt, and the object falls in the experience of the felt subject. There is no experience of a relation between the object and the felt subject.⁴³ But what if the experience involves my self in connection with something that is not myself? For example, what if my experience involves an emotion, e.g. anger, and in a reflective moment I become conscious of myself experiencing the anger? The anger is not-myself and is an object of my experience. When I become aware in a self-conscious moment that I am experiencing anger, am I not experiencing my self and something which is not-myself in relation? Yes, says Bradley, and in that case, 'self and not-self in relation' is one whole object, and this object falls in the experience of a felt subject. The object is given to the

⁴² Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 200.

⁴³ The felt subject is not a mere awareness of my self as something which is 'picked out' in its relation to something which is not-self.

subject, but the subject cannot be given because then it would, itself, be an object. So even if the object contains 'self and not-self' in relation, this whole is an object which is the experience of the felt subject. This object, involving 'self and not-self in relation', is a unity given in the context of a totality which involves a felt background, the whole of feeling. The object is experienced along with the whole of feeling, but there is no experience of a relation between them. Bradley explains:

And when by reflection a relation seems given, the experience has been changed. That relation is now part of a new 'object,' and with that new object we have a felt subject, with which it is experienced, but to which it is not related.⁴⁴

The felt subject is not merely my self, as it is relationally experienced in the unity of 'self and not-self' which forms the object for conceptualized experience. It is, rather, a whole of feeling comprising a finite centre, which is the background that is always there, out of which the constituents of relational experience are actualized.

The crucial difference between Bradley's 'feeling' and James' 'feeling' is found in their accounts of relations. For Bradley, there are no relations, as such, in immediate feeling. For James, relations are felt in immediate feeling along with the 'sensible natures.' The reason why they disagree about relations in immediate feeling is intimately linked to Bradley's emphasis

⁴⁴ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 195.

on the subjective nature of feeling in contrast to James' emphasis on its objective nature.

The Major Difference - The Status of Relations in 'Feeling'

Both Bradley and James agree that there are conceptual relations as a part of our reflective understanding or relational judgement. And both agree that conceptualized relations are, as such, not in immediate feeling. But are there any relations at all in immediate feeling? Actually, both say yes, but disagree as to *how* they are in immediate feeling. James says that:

...the continuities and the discontinuities are absolutely co-ordinate matters of immediate feeling. The conjunctions are as primordial elements of 'fact' as are the distinctions and disjunctions.⁴⁵

James asserts that, in immediate feeling, even though we have not yet conceptually distinguished its elements, the 'feeling' is of things 'conjunct and separated.' Thus feeling comprises felt conjunctions and felt distinctions as much as felt sensations. All of this is felt as part of the flux, as a whole, and so relations are felt as much as the other undistinguished phenomena are felt.

Bradley agrees with James that there are relations in immediate experience, but with important qualifications:

Relations, of course, like everything else, that is, are immediately experienced, but never as relations in the proper sense, simply and merely as such. Relations are nothing if not conjunctive; but what is merely conjunctive so far does not belong to immediate

⁴⁵ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 95.

experience, and cannot in that character enter into feeling. And yet, since it is nothing if not felt, a relation enters into immediate experience as a self-contradictory abstraction.⁴⁶

For James, the relations in immediate feeling are not relations conceptually understood and 'picked out,' but nevertheless, they are there as part of the whole of feeling and thus are felt along with everything else. For Bradley, relations are experienced in conceptualized relational experience, but this relational experience is given against a background of feeling out of which it is abstracted and upon which it depends. The relational experience and the felt background form one whole experience which is itself a non-relational immediate felt unity. So, although relations are within the whole of immediate experience, they are not 'felt' relations, but are the conceptual abstractions carved out and given against the felt background. Relations can only be conceptual for Bradley and thus they are never felt. In this Bradley is similar to Green, and both differ from James. Bradley and Green claim that relations, as 'given' in our individual conceptual experience, are abstractions, whereas James claims that relations are 'real' entities in immediate experience and are 'felt' as such.

The difference in the views that James and Bradley have regarding relations in immediate feeling is reflected in their different approaches to questions of knowledge and reality. For James, immediate feeling is the flux, but the flux is 'of things

⁴⁶ Collected Essays, p. 655.

conjunct and separated.'⁴⁷ Although the parts of the flux are not picked out and discriminated by our conceptual understanding, nevertheless they are there in the whole of feeling.

Furthermore, the things that are conjoined or separate in immediate feeling flow together and "... (i)n the same act by which I feel that this passing minute is a new pulse of my life, I feel that the old life continues into it..."⁴⁸. In immediate feeling, the whole is a chaos of sensations felt, but not conceived, to be continuous or discontinuous, and the whole flows from 'now' to 'now' to 'now,' not as discriminated moments, but as an ongoing stream. All of this is in feeling and is felt.

Bradley, by contrast, claims that relations are always the product of abstraction, and it is only as abstractions that they are given. Take, for example, a perceptual experience, such as the sense-perception of a green leaf. Bradley claims that it is contrary to the plainest fact to say that the green leaf is experienced as a unity consisting of one or more relations. We do not, for example, experience it as a green-ness that inheres in the particular leaf shape. Rather, the sense-perception is a given whole, the whole green leaf, and its unity is not contingent on 'relational couplings.' Such relations are only products of our conceptual judgement. Furthermore, and more to the point, Bradley asks us to consider any emotion. Take, for example, anger. It is an emotional whole, felt all at once as

⁴⁷ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 94.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 95.

one thing, and is not felt as an interrelation of emotional parts, or ideas, or of subject and object. Emotional wholes are like states of being and, though they are not the whole of feeling (since they are not-self and thus constitute objects of experience), when we attend to a state involving an emotion such as anger, we have an insight into the nature of immediate experience. When I feel angry, I am not aware of myself feeling the anger, at least not immediately. The anger is all at once and is a whole in which awareness and content are one. Likewise, we can make inferences about immediate experience, and although it is not to be identified merely with perception, sensation, emotions or volitions, it can be inferentially grasped when we consider such experiences. Just as we do not feel relations when we feel a rush of anger, or when we see a leaf, we do not feel relations in the immediate flux, the felt totality. We do not feel relations in immediate experience because, for Bradley, immediate experience is always feeling as a mass, a blur, a 'that' which is one whole in which nothing is distinguished from anything else.

If I take the whole of the felt state as a case of 'the world is my experience,' this gives a different picture than if I take it as 'my experience is of the world.' If I stop and slice through a moment of my experiencing, and if I tend to find that what is primarily given is emotional states, musings, volitions, imaginings, sensings, and so on, this will colour my view of experience and make me tend to believe that it is primarily a

unity. If, however, I find that the slice through my experience reveals a redness, and a musical sound, and a smoothness, and an extendedness, and so on, albeit given all at once in a flux, I will tend to believe that the experience comprises those features of the world that are later carved out in reflection. The limits are probably only a matter of the limits of language to explain what cannot be put into words without distortion. However, James and Bradley have used language to imply different things and their views appear to be different based on the descriptive choices they have made and the metaphors they have used.

Although for both James and Bradley there is immediate feeling, their views of the reality embodied by this immediate feeling are different. This should not surprise us, given James' pluralism and Bradley's monism and the different rôles immediate experience plays in these philosophical positions.

In chapter five, I shall incorporate James' and Bradley's shared basic assumptions into the foundation of a theory of immediate experience. This will require a description of primordial experience that does not use the metaphors of 'my experience' and 'the experienced world,' to avoid any possible dualism inherent, as Eliot says, in 'importing meanings' into a description of the immediate.⁴⁹ In this way, we can examine the concept afresh as a possible means of avoiding the contradictions of dualism while at the same time retaining the ability to account for knowledge as 'knowledge about.'

⁴⁹ Knowledge and Experience, p. 19.

CHAPTER 3 - EXPERIENCE TRANSMUTED IN THE 1930's

The Nature of the Change

When James uses the term 'pure experience' and Bradley uses the term 'immediate experience,' what they mean by 'experience' is something more extensive than is allowed by their philosophical successors. Their notions of immediate experience encompass desires, emotions, sensations, the contents of consciousness, and all those things in the forefront and the background of our awareness at any moment. In contrast, the majority of philosophers after the turn of the century have a view of experience that limits it to a kind of conveyance for phenomena from an external reality. Their focus of interest is primarily epistemological: their chief problem is how perceptual experience informs us of a reality independent of our minds. This is quite different from the focus of interest for James and Bradley, for whom, as we have seen, the chief problem is the nature of the whole of experience before it is broken up into a knowing mind and the object of knowledge for this mind. This is because experience is reality for James and Bradley whereas for the philosophers after them, experience connects us to reality.

Following on the heels of James and Bradley, this new generation of philosophers adopted a different approach to the classic problems of philosophy (in the Anglo-American or analytic tradition). In British philosophy, many of this new generation rejected the Idealism of Bradley, and in American philosophy,

James' seeming subjectivism was considered suspect by the adherents of an increasingly popular realist view. In England, Moore and Russell led the battle against Bradley's theories and they succeeded in establishing an analytic method in philosophy and an epistemological focus of interest that has dominated ever since. Besides Moore and Russell, another philosopher who rejected British Idealism was Cook-Wilson, who had a profound influence at Oxford and led many philosophers into the realist camp. In America, James' reputation as a respectable philosopher was secured mainly through the identification of his work with Pragmatism, but his theory of experience and his radical empiricism were largely ignored. The new generation of American philosophers tended to take up realism as the preferred doctrine and, like their British counterparts, focused on epistemology and analysis, especially the kind fostered by the transplanted Vienna Circle. As a result of this shift in dominance of philosophical doctrines, the treatment of many topics underwent a significant change.

Two of the philosophers representative of this change were Henry Habberly Price (1899-1984) and Clarence Irving Lewis (1883-1964). Price taught at Trinity College, Oxford, was influenced by Cook-Wilson and was considered, by H.A. Prichard, to be a follower of Russell¹. Lewis acknowledged the influence of

¹ Passmore, J., A Hundred Years of Philosophy, p. 253.

Peirce's and James' pragmatism in his work². Price published Perception in 1932, and Lewis published Mind and the World Order in 1929, so their work is contemporaneous. Each devotes a significant amount of attention to a theory of the 'immediately given'. However, there is a difference in their approaches. Price says very little about experience, limits his discussion to the topic of perception, and focusses on the given of sense-data. His major interest is the relation of sense-data to apprehending minds and to material objects in the world. On the other hand, Lewis talks about 'qualia,' which he distinguishes from sense-data because they are a type of universals, and claims that we can never experience a mere given in isolation from our conceptual framework. The sensuous content of the world is not 'raw data' because it is only through our a priori concepts that it is accessible to us. But a priori knowledge is not fixed and immutable for Lewis and he views it as subject to change in the face of continuing experience. The changes are based on pragmatic principles. For this reason, our categories constitute a pragmatic a priori for Lewis. Both Price and Lewis think that the given is the foundation for perceptual knowledge, but differ in their views on the nature of the given.

Unlike the work of James and Bradley, where immediate experience is the whole of reality before it is discriminated

² In a footnote on pp. 64-5 of Mind and the World Order, Lewis ends an argument with the statement that, "...In this, of course, I am merely arguing for the indispensability to meaning of the 'pragmatic test' of Peirce and James."

into subject and object, Price and Lewis view whatever is immediate as something which is already 'not-me' or an object. How did the topic of 'the immediate' change from being about something all-encompassing to being about that small fraction of experience consisting of the given element of sense-data? When we consider the difference between a theory of the immediate whose scope is the whole of reality, and a theory of the immediate that focuses down like a microscope on discrete perceptual units, the change in focus seems more revolutionary than evolutionary. And in a sense, this is true. The change from the traditional metaphysical approach of the nineteenth century to the more analytical approach of the early twentieth century has often been referred to as a revolution in philosophy. One of the revolutionaries who effected this change was G.E. Moore. In Moore's writing, there is a definite rejection of late nineteenth-century metaphysical views (especially those of F.H. Bradley) and the stage is set for analytic and linguistic approaches to philosophy. Moore's work is a pivotal point in the transmutation of theories of experience.

G.E. Moore and the Initial Change

Moore's clearest exposition of a theory of the immediately given is in "The Status of Sense-Data", first published in Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society for 1913-14. This paper marks a shift in views about the immediate since Moore makes a distinction between what constitutes sense-data and what

constitutes experience. This distinction is, of course, at the heart of the problem of the relation of mind and world, and expresses the difference between those philosophers who point to experience as the whole of reality and those who consider experience to involve distinctions between experiencer and experienced.

Moore begins his essay with definitions of all the things we label 'sensory experiences'. He names five classes of these things but, essentially, they break down into sensory experiences as a matter of what is seen, heard, tasted, etc. of a supposed external world of real, concrete objects and events, opposed to sensory experiences that are our images, memories, hallucinations, dreams and so on. This harkens back to Hume's distinction between 'impressions' and 'ideas'. Moore's explanation is this:

Every event, of any one of these five classes, consists in the fact that an entity, of some kind or other, *is experienced*. The entity which is experienced may be of many different kinds; it may, for instance, be a patch of colour, or a sound, or a smell, or a taste, etc.; or it may be an image of a patch of colour, an image of a sound, an image of a smell, an image of a taste, etc.³

Moore makes a further important distinction between the entities which are experienced, and the fact or event of their being experienced. There is, he claims, an important difference between *what* is experienced and the event of its *being* experienced, because the event of its being experienced involves

³ Moore, "The Status of Sense-Data", in Philosophical Studies, p. 169.

the fact that the entity is *in relation* to something else. In other words, the experience of a sense-datum comprises three things: an entity experienced, an act of experiencing and being experienced that involves a relation, and a something which is experiencing the entity. This is in direct opposition to Bradley, who viewed immediate experience as involving no divisions between experiencer and experienced, and who viewed so-called ordinary experience as an unreal abstraction.

Having made the distinction between the entity which is experienced and the relation involved in the experience of this entity, Moore makes a further distinction between two kinds of relations: there is the relation involved in the experience of sense-data as it is actually experienced when there is a present act of seeing, hearing, touching, etc., and the relation involved in the experience of a memory or image of a sense-datum. Moore says

I shall express this relation, which I certainly do have to a sensible when I actually see or hear it, and most certainly do not have to it, when I only think of or remember it, by saying that there is in my mind a *direct apprehension* of it.⁴

Moore wishes to use 'direct apprehension' as a technical term. He says he is trying to avoid using the terms 'presented', 'given', or 'perceived' because he feels that these terms are ambiguous, although he implies that what other writers may have meant when they used any of these terms *could* be the same as what

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 173.

he himself means when he uses 'direct apprehension'. So it seems that, where many philosophers use the term 'the given', or 'the immediately given', Moore substitutes his own technical term, 'direct apprehension.'

Moore also divides experience into something direct, which is equivalent to what other philosophers call the immediately given, and something which is not direct. We can illustrate this bifurcation by considering two ways we can experience, for example, a tomato. First, when a person walks into a room and sees a tomato on a table, there is an entity, a red bulgy sense-datum, which is directly apprehended as a matter of the experiencing of the entity 'red bulgy sense-datum', and the sense-datum is experienced by someone or something, which means there is a relation between the entity experienced and the something having the experience or doing the experiencing. The second form is a matter of the person leaving the room and thinking about the tomato or remembering it or having an image of it in her mind, in which case the experience of the red bulgy sense-datum is *not* one of direct apprehension.

What about the experience involved in direct apprehension? Moore admits that there may be more to it than he has allowed for:

...it seems to me to be commonly held that sensibles are often in our minds in some sense quite other than that of being directly apprehended by us or that of being thought of by us. This seems to me to be often what is meant when people say that they are "immediately experienced" or are "subjective modifications"; though, of course, both expressions are

so ambiguous, that when people say that a given entity is immediately experienced or is a subjective modification, they *may* mean merely that it is directly apprehended. And since I think this view is held, I want to explain that I see no reason whatever for thinking that sensibles ever are experienced by us in any other sense than that of being directly apprehended by us.⁵

Moore says there are two kinds of argument people make when they claim that things are immediately experienced. The first involves a ticking clock which we suddenly become aware of, even though it must have been ticking all the time. So it seems that we did not experience the ticking earlier as a matter of *hearing* it, but we now become aware of it and *hear* it, which means (using Moore's terminology) we suddenly become conscious that we are directly apprehending it. But the ticking was going on earlier and some sort of stimulus was acting on us so we must have experienced it in *some* way. Moore feels that this is what is often meant by 'immediate experience' and that it is not supposed to involve direct apprehension.

The second argument is similar to the first and points out that we can suddenly become aware of, perhaps, the eighth chime of a clock striking the hour and *remember* hearing the earlier chimes, even though we did not directly apprehend them as they occurred. Again, this involves a stimulus which we seem somehow to have experienced without this experience being a matter of direct apprehension.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 177.

In both cases, Moore thinks it is possible that we *did* directly apprehend the sense-data involved, but that our level of *attention* in both cases was so very slight (if there was any at all) that we were not aware of our experiencing these sense-data. In either case, Moore maintains that the experience does involve direct apprehension, but that the direct apprehension involves almost no attention on the part of the experiencer, and thus, sense-data can be directly apprehended without actually being attended to.

This attempt by Moore to dismiss the idea of immediate experience is unconvincing. It can be argued that it fails to eliminate the possibility of primordial awareness or feeling. A defender of the concept could reply to Moore: "Exactly! Immediate experience involves all that is directly apprehended, whether it is attended to or not. And, as a matter of fact, there is much more in ongoing experience that is *not* attended to than *is*. At any moment, there is all the data to which I attend, the colour patches, the voice of the person speaking to me, the taste of the coffee I am drinking, and there is also, concurrently, all the data to which I do not attend, the feeling of the clothes I am wearing, the ambient noise in the background, the colours and shapes on the periphery of my vision, and so on. All these things are directly apprehended by me but only a small portion of them are ever attended to." The phenomena that are apprehended but not attended to are potential objects for

conscious awareness.⁶ Moore has succeeded in making clearer *what* immediate experience is, but he has not successfully argued against it.

Although Moore's remarks about immediate experience do not seem to amount to much of a refutation, few philosophers after him bothered to debate the issue. We will find that Lewis is one of the few philosophers who argued against a view of experience such as Bradley's and James'. For the most part, the issues that preoccupy philosophers after Moore are epistemological, involving the directly apprehended and 'attended to' data of sensory experience. A member of the generation of philosophers who followed in the footsteps of Moore, Russell and Cook-Wilson is Price, whose work is cited as one of the clearest expositions of the theory of perception written at this time⁷.

The Given in Price's "Perception"

The first chapter of Price's Perception, is titled "The Given". In it, Price offers a detailed analysis of the immediate presentation of reality to our apprehending minds and the immediate apprehension of this presentation. For Price, the given is something of which we can be truly certain:

⁶ This distinction between what is attended to and the larger sphere of experientiable phenomena will constitute a significant part of the discussion in chapter five.

⁷ See, for example, R.J. Hirst, The Problems of Perception, 1959, and Hirst's article, "Perception", in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol. 6, pp. 79-87.

When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is any material thing there at all. Perhaps what I took for a tomato was really a reflection; perhaps I am even the victim of some hallucination. One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is directly present to my consciousness.

It can be seen from the outset that, when Price talks about what is immediate, he has a very different concern than Bradley and James. Price uses the given in a quest for what is epistemically certain, and his focus is entirely on the act of perception as a source of knowledge, not on the reflection and embodiment of reality in experience. Price says:

My aim in this book is to examine those experiences in the way of seeing and touching upon which our beliefs concerning material things are based, and to inquire in what way⁹ and to what extent they justify these beliefs.

The given, it appears, is to serve as the foundation of any system of beliefs we may have because it is the one thing of which we can be truly certain. I can doubt that there is a tomato on the table in front of me even though I believe it is there. But if I believe there is a tomato on the table how can I justify that belief? The only thing I can do is analyze my perceptions to find what is indubitable in them. In this case, the indubitable element is the red bulgy patch which is the given

⁸ Price, Perception, p. 3.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 2.

element of my perception. So we must find out the relationship between what is given in our immediate perceptions and the system of beliefs we have about the world of material objects that supposedly surround us.

But first we must ask: what, according to Price, occurs in any act of perceptual awareness, and what elements are involved in this act? Price says that when I see, for example, a red bulgy patch, this patch is a datum, and its manner of being present to my consciousness is called 'being given'. He next says that the corresponding mental attitude I have when this datum is given to my consciousness is called 'acquaintance', intuitive apprehension, or sometimes 'having'. This corresponding mental attitude seems to be the same thing Moore has in mind when he talks about 'direct apprehension'.

These are the elements identified by Price as comprising perceptual awareness; but what about the state of experience involved? Price does not use the phrase 'immediate experience' and even refers to it as an "unfortunate term". He states that "...immediate experience ought to mean immediate awareness of something...", but this is not what it appears to mean, in particular as used by Stout.¹⁰

Nevertheless, he has a form of immediacy in mind when he talks about *how* sense-data are present to consciousness. Price says that the field of sensa is 'directly present' to

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 120.

consciousness, and this seems to be its most important characteristic. He says that the *sensa* is such that

...my consciousness of it is not reached by inference, nor by any other intellectual process (such as abstraction or intuitive induction), nor by any passage from sign to significate."¹¹

How does this 'being directly present to consciousness' relate to the whole of perceptual experience? Price explains that this 'manner' of being directly present to consciousness is called 'being given', and it is 'on the side' of the data that are given to consciousness. That is, sense-data are given, and they are given by means of being directly present to consciousness. This is one half of a dualistic view of perception, because 'on the other side', so to speak, there is what Price calls the "corresponding mental attitude". This corresponding mental attitude is, as explained above, 'acquaintance', 'intuitive apprehending', or just 'having'.

Once again, this is a situation in which experience is divided into two components: 'my experience' and 'the experienced world.' Price divides perceptual experience into two elements: the 'given sense-data,' which is analogous to 'the experienced world,' and 'acquaintance' as the corresponding mental attitude, which is analogous to 'my experience.' When Price discusses the given sense-data as the fundamental component of perceptual experience, his emphasis is on that half of the dualistic view of experience identified as 'the experienced world.' He says that

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 3.

sensing is "...an immediate 'confrontation' of mind and sense-data..." ¹² But he also discusses perceptual consciousness and how it is related to sensing, and it appears that this would be the half of the dichotomy that is equivalent to 'my experience.'

Price says that perceptual consciousness is made up of two forms: namely, 'perceptual acceptance' and 'perceptual assurance.' Perceptual acceptance is a kind of 'taking-for-granted' the existence of a material thing when we have an awareness of sense-data that belong to it. Perceptual assurance is a later stage in which the original acceptance is confirmed or refuted by further perceptual acts. However, perceptual consciousness is beyond the 'immediate confrontation' and so we will restrict our interest to Price's views on the 'given' as the component most relevant to the transmutation of immediate experience.

Price is interested in the relations that sense-data have to material objects and to the act in which we perceive them. He claims that the issue of relations is important, in particular when we come to scrutinize what, exactly, are sense-data. When we look at the given element in perception, Price emphasizes the importance of relations:

What concerns us is not the *nature* of sense-data, but only their *relations*: their relations, first, to the material things to which they somehow 'belong'; and secondly, their relation to the perceptual act, that

¹² *ibid.*, p. 149.

is, their 'presentative' function, by which they help to make us conscious of these material things.¹³

Despite his disclaimer of interest in the *nature* of sense-data, he does digress to tell us something about them, primarily to demonstrate how they are to be understood in terms of things in relation.

First and foremost, a sense-datum is *not* a substance.¹⁴ This is because it does not fulfil an essential requirement for what constitutes a substance, namely, a sense-datum does not have independent existence but exists only when "suitable bodily and mental states are present."¹⁵ The sense-datum comes into existence when an act of perceptual consciousness becomes aware of the sense-datum, and the sense-datum persists as long as the act of perceptual consciousness remains. Price says of the sense-datum:

It does not contribute to its own preservation in any way whatever; its persistence, like its origination, is wholly 'parasitic'. And in this it is wholly unlike anything ordinarily called a substance.¹⁶

So what are these sense-data if not substances? Price says they are events or phases, and he grants that the natural question following from this is: what are they phases of? They could be

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁴ I am assuming here that the definition of a substance is 'something capable of existing on its own'. This appears to be the definition Price intends, although he does not define 'substance' specifically.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 115.

phases of material (physical) objects (the objects we perceive by means of them), or they could be phases of mind, or they could be phases of a percipient's brain. But he immediately rejects the first option since it is part of the Naive Realist view that sense-data are somehow 'of' physical objects, and that theory has been disproved by means of the argument from illusion or hallucination. Are sense-data, then, phases of mind or the brain? He is more thorough in his discussion of these possibilities.

Price examines a particular view of sense-data as a *sort* of psychical events, namely, the contents of feeling or the "ways in which we feel". On this view, sense-data can be analyzed as adverbs of the act of sensing or feeling. For example, just as we can say, "I feel hot", we can also say "I see redly" and "I hear musically". Price explains that there would really be nothing on this view except feeling: he says that, "... (w)ords like see and hear stand for various determinable characteristics of feeling; words like striped and loud, for the determinate forms of these."¹⁷ It follows that there would be nothing outside of our feeling, nothing in the world, nothing in objective reality, that would *be* red, or striped, or musical, or soft, or sour. This view would lead us to the conclusion,

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 120.

according to Price, that "...sensing is an acquaintance with ourselves, ie. a kind of intuitive introspection."¹⁸

It is interesting to compare what Price says about equating sensing with feeling, with the view Bradley has about reality and experience:

Everything phenomenal is somehow real...When we ask as to the matter which fills up the empty outline, we can reply in one word, that this matter is experience. And experience means something much the same as given and present fact. We perceive, on reflection, that to be real, or even barely to exist, must be to fall within sentience. Sentient experience, in short, is reality, and what is not this is not real...Feeling, thought, and volition (any groups under which we class psychical phenomena) are all the material of existence, and there is no other material, actual or even possible.¹⁹

For Bradley, what there is must be what there is in feeling, and he also says he cannot understand "...[w]hy in the case of a pleasant feeling - for example, that of warmth - the side of pleasure should belong to the self, and the side of sensation to the not-self (psychologically or logically)..."²⁰ In other words, Bradley considers that all feeling and sensation must belong to the self, and it is incoherent to him to claim to find sensations that somehow 'belong to' and 'come from' something outside of the sentient self. Bradley would fundamentally disagree with Price that the 'sensation' is 'on the side of the data,' which Bradley calls the 'not-self.' For Bradley,

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁹ Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 127.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 91.

sensation belongs to feeling, and is of a whole which initially is not divided between what is self and what is not-self. He claims that sensing is, indeed, what is felt and known as sentient experience or, in Price's terms, sensing is intuitive acquaintance with ourselves, our experiencing beings.

But Price is a realist and cannot agree with such a position. He thinks that there may be theories in which the word 'feeling' has a special sense, that is, a sense which means something similar to 'acquaintance' or 'intuitive awareness'. But he criticizes such usage because it introduces a confusion into the meaning of the verb 'to feel'. Besides, Price thinks there are good arguments against sensing (or sense-data) being a species of feeling (or sense-data being a kind of 'feelings').

For one thing, when we have a feeling, we 'live through' some emotion, and this involves, as an element of the emotion, an awareness of the feeling or emotional state preceding it. There is, Price says, a difference between a felt fear and an unconscious fear, a felt anger and an unconscious anger, or a felt pleasure and an unconscious pleasure. This difference is due to the fact that felt emotions involve awareness of the phases, in the process of feeling emotion, that preceded. This is true of emotion or feeling, but it is not true of sensing or the experience of sense-data. The event of a coloured expanse in my field of vision does not contain, as a necessary element, the awareness of the coloured expanse in my field of vision just before this event. So sensing is different from feeling in that

awareness of what precedes is not essential for the former, but is for the latter.

Furthermore, Price says that there is a difference in the 'location' of the feeling and the sense-data. When we are aware of a feeling, we are aware of it 'in us'; but when we are aware of a sense-datum, our direct awareness does not place it as something 'in us' (if it *is* 'in us', this must be proved, and in any case it is not how we are aware of it).²¹

Price goes on to argue that sense-data are not 'in' a mind, or 'for' a mind, or 'of' a mind, and likewise they are not 'in', 'of', or 'for' a brain. After examining hypotheses concerning each of these possibilities and rejecting them, he concludes that sense-data are *not* psycho-cerebral events at all, and so are not events or phases of any substance whatsoever. Although sense-data *are* events, they must be events that happen to nothing or in nothing, but nevertheless do not 'occur in the void'. They cannot be 'in the void' because in veridical perception they are connected with psycho-cerebral events, upon which they depend, and are connected with external objects.

This is Price's answer to the question: "What *are* sense-data?" According to him, they are not really things, entities, substances or any such similar 'furniture of the world'. Rather, they are events that happen, and so are neither 'mental' nor 'physical'. But, most importantly, they are intimately related

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 122.

to two different kinds of things: first, a psycho-cerebral organism doing the sensing, and second, a material object 'in the world' which has a number of sense-data belonging to it and which is sensed by means of these sense-data. Price gives this illustration:

Thus the colour-expanse with which I am acquainted when the tree is present to my senses is a member of at least two distinct complexes. One consists of a certain animate organism together with all the sense-data which are at that moment 'prolongations' of it. The other consists of the tree together with all the sense-data which at that moment belong to it.²²

This explanation seems to make of sense-data stuff which exists in relation both to the psychical and the physical realm at the same time. Is Price trying to overcome the problems of dualism by proposing sense-data as a neutral kind of 'stuff' prior to anything 'mental' or 'physical', and are sense-data as such the ultimate constituents of reality? Price himself recognizes that his explanation of the nature of sense-data might lead to that conclusion, and acknowledges the similarity of his explanation of sense-data to the theory of Neutral Monism which he describes in this way:

...the theory of Neutral Monism...maintains that sense-data are the constituents both of the psychical and the physical worlds, mind and matter being names for the two main ways in which this *neutral stuff* simultaneously arranges itself...²³

²² *ibid.*, p. 137.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 137.

In Price's conception of Neutral Monism, the neutral stuff is limited to what is given perceptually, to sense-data, the stuff of the 'given'. He implies that this is a generic description. But is it? We can compare Price's view of Neutral Monism to James' theory of Pure Experience which is a version of Neutral Monism. At one point, James says

Just so, I maintain, does a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, play the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness'; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective 'content'. In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing.²⁴

It is important for James that the 'neutral stuff' prior to division into 'thought' or 'thing' is pure experience, not sense-data. Even when he talks about perceptual experience, he is not referring to anything as specific as Price's sense-data. For James, perceptual experience is not just the sensing of objects but also involves 'affectional facts' such as pleasures and angers, desires and distastes. Price, on the other hand, talks about phenomena such as 'red bulgy patches', which is more precisely a matter of the sensing of objects in the world. James' pure experience is *not* Price's sense-data, even when we understand that Price is talking about events or phases. When James and Bradley use the term 'experience,' they refer to something more extensive than sense-data. To bring out the difference, we need only consider Price's criticism of Neutral

²⁴ James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, pp. 9-10.

Monism: "...the conclusion drawn by Neutral Monism, that both minds and matter *consist* of sense-data, does not follow from this, and does not, in fact, seem to be true."²⁵ For Price, a theory of Neutral Monism must assume both minds and matter, then explain that both somehow consist of sense-data. But when we compare James' Neutral Monism to Price's characterization of it, we detect a major difference. James starts with experience as the neutral stuff, which is related to either of two groups of experiences: the experience of a conscious entity, or the experiences which make up the physical world. James never says that minds and matter *consist* of sense-data; he says, rather, that pure experience is the fundamental stuff, which is subsequently 'taken' as either part of a 'field of consciousness' or as part of the history of a physical object. Price is correct to point out the similarity of his conception of sense-data to a theory of Neutral Monism, but not to *all* theories of Neutral Monism. Consequently, his criticism misses the mark if aimed at a theory such as James'.

This aspect of Price's discussion shows how his doctrine of the 'given' differs from the theory of immediate experience. James and Bradley both posit their theories in response to fundamental problems about the nature of experience and reality. James wants to attack a dualism of 'consciousness-plus-content' and proposes his theory of pure experience as that which is prior

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 138.

to our conceptualized view of the world. Bradley points to immediate experience as the fundamental form of experience prior to understanding the world in terms of the relational framework. Both Bradley and James want to challenge our ordinary common-sense assumptions because they detect inherent problems in such assumptions -- problems about our actual conceptions of reality.

Price sets himself a more modest task. He is not so much concerned with 'what there is' as he is with describing the mechanism involved in a single perceptual act. Price does not examine the nature of minds and physical reality but sets out merely to look at experiences involving seeing and touching and to give as clear an exposition as possible of their 'workings'. It is as if James and Bradley were describing a whole factory, what is produced there and how it is made, whereas Price is describing, in minute detail, the working of one machine.

The fundamental point, for Price, is that there *is* a given, which consists of the sense-data that are the events in the ongoing act of acquaintance that a perceiving organism has of the world. Price says that he cannot *prove* that there is a given, he can merely appeal to each person to examine his or her own consciousness. He is sure that, from simple inspection, each person will acknowledge that there is given data out of which our knowledge is constituted.

Price considers the claim that there is *no* given, and it is interesting to look at his reply to such a claim in light of the fact that philosophers twenty years later would reject the theory

of the given as a myth. How does Price's confirmation of the given stand up against arguments that reject it?

First Price considers the argument that raw, unprocessed data are not the contents of an apprehension because apprehension is always a matter of apprehending facts, not unqualified things. Philosophers who make this argument claim that

...what we apprehend is always a *fact* - something of the form 'that A is B' or 'the B-ness of A'. You cannot apprehend a round red patch without apprehending that it is₂₆ red and round and has certain spatial relations.²⁶

It is interesting to compare Price's depiction of the critic's position with what John McDowell says when he claims that "...[i]n a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*."²⁷ McDowell's statement is very much along the lines of what Price says a critic of the given is bound to say. But Price thinks this kind of criticism does not refute that there *is* a given; it just asserts that the given is not apprehended *merely* in the relation of being given but has other relations to the mind because it is also 'thought about' or 'judged'. In reply to this criticism, Price agrees that the given's relation to an apprehending consciousness is not a simple state of given-ness since it is coupled with other relations, notably the relation of being thought about (McDowell would say it comes with conceptual

²⁶ Price, *ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷ McDowell, Mind and World, p. 26.

content). But Price denies that this disproves there is a given. After all, he says, there must *be* something to be thought about, and so there must be a given in order for there to be something *thought about*. He also thinks that this something must be a raw given at some point, separate from its being thought about, or there would be an infinite regress of thinking about something that is thought about, which itself involves thinking about something that is thought about, and so on.

Price considers a number of other arguments against the given, but most of these break down upon analysis to the criticism that nothing is ever merely given. Acquaintance with the given is not with a mere given but with a given that is 'known' or attended to, or interpreted, or somehow in relation to an apprehending consciousness that is 'active' in its apprehension of the given (and thus possibly distorts or alters it from being merely given). Price admits that the given is never merely given and says that "...there is no sense-datum which is not the object of other sorts of consciousness besides sensing."²⁸

For Price, there is some sort of raw data that constitute events of sensing and these events belong to a state in which a psycho-cerebral consciousness actively perceives in an act of perceptual consciousness. We have, here, a form of dualism, in which the given stuff of sense-data is in a two-pronged relation:

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 18.

the first, a relation of being given to a consciousness, and the second, another kind of relation imposed on it by the consciousness, involving apprehending, thinking, knowing, perceiving or whatever relation is required to make the raw stuff intelligible for a reasoning mind. This seems to gloss over the problem of the relation between the two different relational unities involved; that is, on one side, there is a relation of being given, and on the other side there is a relation of 'being actively conscious of'. This presupposes that the object of both relations is the same. But how can they be? If there is a relation "A is given B" where 'B' is the object, can it be the same 'B' as in "A is perceptually conscious of B"? In the first relation (A is given B) A would passively receive B, but in the second relation (A is perceptually conscious of B) A would actively grasp, or be actively conscious of, B. In the first case, B would presumably be pure 'raw' data, whereas in the second case, B would be conceptually mediated by A's rational consciousness. Price has already admitted that there are many other relations involved in perceptual consciousness besides the relation of given-ness. Perhaps all these relations bundled together in the act of perceptual consciousness transform the object, as a result of attending, discriminating, or otherwise conceptualizing, into something different than the object that is just given in its 'raw' unconceptualized state.

Price denies that attending changes the object, because the difference is in our mode of apprehension rather than in the

object itself. But if there are two modes of apprehending and the objects of these two modes *appear* to be different (even if in reality they are not), how do we know which object is real? That is, which mode of apprehension gives us reality, the passive or the actively conscious? Since Wilfrid Sellars' critique of the given, it has generally been denied that there could be a passive reception of raw data because this raw data, being something that has not been conceptualized or 'interpreted,' could bear no relation to our rational faculties and we could not know it. But in claiming that we are actively perceptually conscious of something, (that is, we have attended to it, conceptualized it or interpreted it), we run the risk of being unable to prove that our object is 'of the world.' We cannot prove that it is not merely part of a closed system of the conceptual and thus not derived from a world external to thought. This is a fundamental problem for anyone who wants to claim that there is a given which is never merely given because it has other relations to an apprehending consciousness.²⁹

Price's 'given' is supposed to be the element of perception that ensures certainty, but his account of the relation of the given to a conceptualizing consciousness involves what is

²⁹ We will find in the discussion of McDowell's view of experience that he tries to solve this problem by claiming that the perceiver (A) is passive, but that the content (B) is already conceptual, so that A does not actively apply concepts to B but is passively perceptually conscious of B as a conceptual content of experience.

arguably a problematic dualism. But can any theory involving a 'given' solve this problem adequately?

C.I. Lewis and the Interpreted Given

When we turn to C.I. Lewis' discussion of 'knowing the given', we find that he approaches the problem of this dualism head-on, right at the beginning of Mind and the World Order, where he claims that "...[p]hilosophy is the study of the a priori...", and "...[i]t seeks to reveal those categorial criteria which the mind applies to what is given to it..."³⁰ Unlike Price, Lewis does not think that it is the business of philosophy simply to expose the workings of the mechanism involved in perception, as if it could be dismantled into independent parts and the parts viewed and understood as autonomous units. Rather, Lewis thinks that the mechanism has to be considered as a whole functioning mechanism. Thus, we cannot understand experience merely by looking at some raw given of experience; we must realize that experience is what it is for us, namely, experience of reality, because our minds have interpreted and classified what has been received in sensation. For Lewis, "...[t]he world of experience is not given in experience; it is constructed by thought from the data of sense."³¹ Thus, we could not know the given purely as the given; it is only known to us as already conceptualized.

³⁰ Mind and the World Order, p. 36.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 29.

That being said, Lewis *does* believe that there is a given and, although he initially admits that he is presuming a distinction between "...mind, or what mind brings to experience, and some other element, presumably independent of the mind's activity and responsible for other parts or aspects of experience"³², he does not leave this presumption unexamined. Instead, he analyzes it critically, asking if anyone who presumes such a distinction has a right to it, and on what grounds such a distinction can be made. Furthermore, he asks what is knowledge and experience if an approach presuming this distinction is in order.

We saw that Price was primarily interested in a theory of perception, the mechanism of the reception of sense-data. Lewis has a slightly different focus of interest; he is also concerned with a theory of knowledge, with delineating what it is that we know and in what way we know. For Lewis, the mechanism of perception cannot be considered in isolation because it is necessarily connected to the conceptual element in our cognitive experience. This can be seen in the statement with which he opens his discussion:

There are, in our cognitive experience, two elements; the immediate data, such as those of sense, which are presented or given to the mind, and a form, construction, or interpretation, which represents the activity of thought.³³

³² *ibid.*, p. 36.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 38.

Lewis distinguishes between the given element in knowledge and the activity of thought which interprets or applies concepts to this given. But his method of isolating the given element gives us a different picture than Price's "red, bulgy datum". Lewis' illustration of the given relies much more on subtracting from experience than pointing to one aspect of it.

Lewis says he has a fountain pen in his hand. This pen is identified in a description using terms he has learned and abstracting it from the whole field of experience in which it is found and to which it is connected by innumerable relations. He says that when, for the first time in his life, he encountered a fountain pen, it was not the same 'presentation' for him then as it is now. What it is now is filtered through all the relations to other experiences, both actual and possible, and results from a classification based on past experiences and learned meanings. Lewis says that a very young child or a person living where there are no such things as fountain pens would not classify the thing presented in the same way, not having all the learned categories, previous experiences, and acquired recognition of the thing in relation to other things, as Lewis has. So the presentation would not be 'a fountain pen' for the infant or the person who had never before encountered such a thing (or anything like it). However, there would be something, a "...merely presented colligation of sense-qualities..."³⁴, which would be classified as 'pen' by Lewis, due to acquired understanding of the clues

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 49.

that this character of the group of sense-qualities has for him with respect to classifying it. But if one takes away the meaning, the classification, the understood character of the sense-qualities, there is something fundamental which is the same whether experienced by Lewis, by the infant, or by the person who has never encountered a fountain pen before. This is the given element, although it is something that can only be alluded to negatively, by removing its relations to all other experiences and to acquired meaning.

Lewis says of this pen that, depending on circumstance, it would be described by him as 'a cylinder', 'hard rubber' or 'a poor buy'. The description depends on the relations it has, in each case, to whatever the mind's attitudes and interests and modes of interpretation impose on it. Lewis explains:

In whatever terms I describe this item of my experience, I shall not convey it *merely* as given, but shall supplement this by a meaning which has to do with relations, and particularly with relation to other experiences which I regard as possible but which are not just now actual. The manner of this supplementation reflects my habitual interests and modes of activity, the nature of my mind. The infant may see it much as I do, but still it will mean to him none of those things I have described it as being, but merely "plaything" or "smooth biteable". But for any mind whatever, it will be more than what is merely given if it be noted at all. Some meaning of it also will be contained in the experience.³⁵

The fact that this item is "more than what is merely given" is crucial to Lewis' picture of our ongoing commerce with reality. At any moment of my experience, there are items which I

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 50.

encounter, pick up, use, and interact with in many ways. There are two elements or aspects of the things involved in my focus of interest, namely, the given and the interpretation brought to it by my mind. And if we ask what is this thing that Lewis calls the given, he replies that it is whatever is *not* the element brought into the experience by the interested activity of my mind. So far, this is a rather negative answer. But Lewis' description of the given depicts something which, by its nature, could only be explained reductively, ie. by pointing to various aspects of experience and saying, it is not this, nor this, nor this, (these things being primarily meanings and parts of experience that are what they are because in relation to other parts of experience, and especially to future possibilities), until the given element is all that is left.

And what kinds of more 'positive' things can we say about the given? Lewis says there are two: first, the fact that, unlike the element of interpretation in our experience, the given element is unalterable. That is, the pen can be for me a pen (with all its meaning as writing instrument, thing in need of replacing, etc.), for a child a smooth biteable, for someone who has never seen one, a cylinder of a particular colour and size, and so on. These are its meanings and the interpretations put on it by the mind and are changeable according to circumstance. But there is something unalterable that anyone would experience. According to Lewis, "...I can apprehend this thing as pen or

rubber or cylinder, but I cannot, by taking thought, discover it as paper or soft or cubical."³⁶

The second thing we can say about the given is that it has the character of 'sensuous feel or quality'. But Lewis emphasizes that isolating these two elements is only a makeshift to aid our understanding. The given cannot really be described as such, as the given, because the given is ineffable always. When we describe the given, we are making use of concepts and, by bringing it under some category we have qualified the given and thus have not pointed to the 'pure' given. But this is not a problem as far as Lewis is concerned. Just because the given is ineffable does not argue that it does not exist. Moreover, the fact that there is an unalterable element in our experience is a positive argument *for* the existence of the given. He remarks that, "...no one but a philosopher could for a moment deny this immediate presence in consciousness of that which no activity of thought can create or alter."³⁷

Lewis would not agree with Price on the identification of the given. Price, as we have seen, has talked of the indubitable element of experience, using the example of the "red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape", when a person is looking at what could be a tomato. Lewis would not say even that much. Even the 'redness' and the 'bulgy shape' would involve a certain amount of

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 53.

interpretation put on the item in our field of vision. What we experience is always something that is 'for' us, that combines an unalterable sensory content with the structure of our apprehending minds. Lewis says that reality "...is a whole in which mind and what is given to mind already meet and are 'interwoven'."³⁸ So presumably, the given element could not be a 'red patch of a bulgy shape' alone because a red patch would involve some coloured something which would be 'red' for us due to some interpretation already put upon it, likewise with the 'bulgy shape'. Lewis considers the given element to be ineffable. Therefore, unlike Price, Lewis could not even allow that there would be a 'red bulgy patch' as a given. This would be experience already interpreted and hence describable, not ineffable. Lewis claims:

The datum of our philosophic study is not the "buzzing, blooming confusion" on which the infant first opens his eyes, not the thin experience of immediate sensation, but the thick experience of everyday life.³⁹

Lewis' second objection to Price is that we can't isolate the given as a datum of sense. He argues that we experience objects and facts about objects; we do not experience colour patches and uninterpreted sensations of touch or sound (as such), but rather tomatoes and hard-backed chairs and piano music. We can be wrong about these things, but they are, nevertheless, what comprise our experience, and it is only by analysis that we pull

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 30.

apart experience to discover what is involved in it, to investigate our reality.

Lewis also has a great deal to criticize in earlier views of the immediate and, although he never mentions Bradley, we can gather what he would say about Bradley's theory of immediate experience. For example, he claims that previous philosophers have emphasized either one of the two elements of experience, i.e. the immediately given or the element of the mind's interpretation, to the exclusion of the other. Lewis then criticizes theories of the first type and singles out Bergson as an example. He says that for Bergson, the "...ultimate reality is life, or the inwardly grasped 'real duration'."⁴⁰ He adds that for Bergson, the state of pure immediacy is more real than the world that is constructed when we impose our categories and interpretations on the immediate stuff. Lewis finds this concept problematic. For one thing

Unless there be such a thing as pure esthesis (and I should join with the critic in doubting this), the given never exists in isolation in any experience or state of consciousness. Any Kantian "manifold" as a psychic datum or moment of experience, is probably a fiction, and the assumption of it as such is a methodological error. The given is *in*, not before, experience.⁴¹

Immediate experience as such, (and as conceived by philosophers such as Bradley), probably does not exist, according to Lewis. Even if it did, it would not be cognitively significant. Lewis

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

claims that our experience is restricted to 'the given' and 'the interpretation' and an immediate flux would be meaningless, something that could not form part of experience. Even if the given is something like Bergson's 'real duration' or 'stream of consciousness', it would not be reality for us without also being subject to categorial interpretation. We cannot separate this out without making an abstraction, and then it is not the given 'as such'. Furthermore, to those who would claim (as Bradley would) that immediate experience is not a number of distinct things in relation, Lewis says that "...we should beware of conceiving the given as a smooth undifferentiated flux; that would be wholly fictitious."⁴²

Thus Lewis would entirely disagree with Bradley that there is experience which is an undifferentiated whole that contains differences but not distinct things. He would agree with James (against Bradley and Green) that, in the immediate data of sense, relations are real, they are 'there' *as relations*. But the difference between Lewis and James is that Lewis would not agree there is a primordial flux out of which thought and thing are conceptualized. James argues for felt relations in this undifferentiated primordial flux whereas Lewis denies any undifferentiated flux at all. Lewis would also disagree with Bradley and James that there is an immediate experience in which there is no distinction between experiencer and experienced. He

⁴² *ibid.*, pp. 58-9.

claims that experience involves a given element and the interpretation of that given element by an active consciousness. So for Lewis, there could be no pre-conceptual experience which is not an object for a subject.

Lewis says the given is *in*, not before experience, by which he means that the given is never discoverable as an ineffable 'something' prior to the experience in which it is apprehended in its interpreted state. He does not consider the given to be an isolated object for a subject since, on his view, mind does not 'find' a raw given (as an object), but rather a unity whose content is 'interpretation-and-given,' together as an all-in-one. In other words, mind does not experience the given as raw data, and thus never experiences the given alone as an object. He allows that we can analyze out the two elements in experience. But we do not discover them as 'unreal' abstractions, as Bradley would maintain. We cannot create what is not there (just as we cannot "...mark distinctions in an undifferentiated field.") So the given, as unalterable sensuous feel, is there distinct from the interpretation integral with the given in the experience of reality. This leads to the final major difference between Lewis and Bradley -- namely, their different attitudes towards abstraction. Bradley condemns abstraction as giving something which is not real when he states, "...I cannot on any terms accept as absolute fact a mere abstraction."⁴³ He thinks that

⁴³ Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 518.

analysis can only give representations, but not things as they really are:

If...you take a billiard-ball and a man in abstraction from place, they will of course...be indifferent to changes of place. But on the other hand neither of them, if regarded so, is a thing which actually exists; each is a more or less valid abstraction. But take them as existing things and take them without mutilation, and you must regard them as determined by their places and qualified by the whole material system into which they enter.⁴⁴

Lewis opposes such objections to abstraction of the sort that Bradley makes. He does not consider an abstraction to be a mutilation, nor does he consider something regarded in abstraction as something that does not exist. Lewis makes a number of comments about abstraction (and the analysis that abstracts things from the whole of which they are a part). He says, for example, that, "...the condemnation of abstractions is the condemnation of thought itself."⁴⁵, and, "...[o]nly the mystic or those who conceive that man would be better off without an upper brain, have ground for objection to analysis and abstractions."⁴⁶ Lewis approves of analysis and abstraction as necessary tools of our scientific knowledge. He says, "...[w]ithout analysis, there can be no advance of understanding."⁴⁷ And how does analysis and abstraction advance our understanding? Lewis says that if we could just get by with

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 517.

⁴⁵ Mind and the World Order, p. 55.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 55.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 54.

reality as we experience it, that is, as a world of objects and the facts concerning these objects, we would not need to analyze our experience. But there are problems to be solved and we need to probe more deeply into what it is that we know. It is in this deeper investigation into knowledge that we realize that there is an unalterable 'given', separate from the meaning that this given has for us in conjunction with interpretation.

Lewis acknowledges a problem with our understanding of the given as an abstraction from experience. He admits that the given is not real as such because it exists always and only in conjunction with the mind's interpretation. He says that "...[n]othing that thought can ever comprise is other than some abstraction which cannot exist in isolation.⁴⁸" The given, as we understand it, is only something in our thought -- it is never a 'real' entity as such, ie. as a 'given' -- and yet we cannot condemn thought and its abstractions because that is how we understand reality. We would make no advances in our understanding without the action of thought making abstractions, and so Lewis chastises as 'mystics' and 'those who conceive that man would be better off without an upper-brain' all who condemn abstraction and analysis.

Lewis defends the given from any critic who objects to 'the immediate' or 'the given' as a fit subject for epistemology. Just because the given is only discoverable in abstraction does not mean that it is not real and useful for our understanding of

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 55.

reality. He appeals, ultimately, to the reader; having identified what constitutes the 'given' and what the 'interpretation,' he is confident that anyone would have to agree there is an unalterable element in our experience which is, of course, the given.

As to the nature of this given, Lewis admits that it is more than the object determined by an analysis that distinguishes it from our interpretation. This analysis is also a matter of our conceptualizing and so cannot isolate a 'pure' ineffable given. This leads him to admit that:

...there is, in all strictness, only one given, the Bergsonian real duration or the stream of consciousness...The absolutely given is a specious present, fading into the past and growing into the future with no genuine boundaries. The breaking of this up into the presentation of things marks already the activity of an interested mind.⁴⁹

This bears some similarity to James' description of 'pure experience' and Bradley's 'immediate feeling'. Does this mean that Lewis admits the possibility of immediate experience that resembles James' and Bradley's?

The answer is a definite 'no' since Lewis did not intend us to stop with this explanation and draw conclusions similar to James' and Bradley's. For one thing, Lewis disavows, as we have already seen, a conception of immediate given-ness as a 'smooth undifferentiated flux'. Bradley and James claim that the distinctions between thought and thing are discerned *after* the

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 58.

immediacy in our ordinary relational or conceptual experience. But Lewis says that the given and the interpretation are there from the beginning as an object for us and are not realized as such in a later experience. Thus, the 'immediate' for Lewis is not, as James and Bradley would have it, 'feeling' that can be considered as a philosophical datum.

Furthermore, Lewis thinks that, to the extent that there is an initial one-ness, not yet broken up by analysis, it would have no use for us epistemically:

Even in that sense in which the given is always one whole, it is not important for our purpose of analyzing knowledge that we should dwell upon this integrality of it. Our interest is, rather, in the *element* of givenness in what we may, for usual and commonplace reasons, mark off as "an experience" or "an object".⁵⁰

This leads us to ask *why* the integrality of it is not important, and this question naturally involves what is important for Lewis. We find the answer to this question throughout the remainder of Mind and the World Order.

Identification of the given is only one aspect of Lewis' work. He declares that the 'business' of philosophy is "...to analyze and interpret our common experience".(p. 36) In order to do this, philosophy

...seeks to reveal those categorial criteria which the mind applies to what is given to it, and by correct delineation of those criteria to define the good, the right, the valid, and the real.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 36.

It is the categorial criteria which is ultimately of interest to Lewis, more than the initial experience in which the given is presented along with its interpretation. The given is only of interest to him in that, if we want to investigate the nature of knowledge, we must analyze experience to find the unalterable given and the interpretation, inextricably intertwined. He says:

Concepts are of the mind. All knowledge is in terms of concepts, and the possibility of it depends upon their applicability to experience...But the content of experience is independent of the mind.⁵²

Lewis considers immediate experience to be epistemically negligible. He admits that there may be such stuff and, if there is, it may be as Bergson has described it. But immediacy, according to Lewis, has no cognitive significance, in and of itself. Only coupled with our concepts can it 'mean' anything and thus be something we can know, or just 'be' for us at all. That is, it would not be knowable without our concepts and if we did not *know* it, it would not exist in any meaningful way. Thus, immediate experience as Bradley and James conceive it does not interest Lewis, who explains:

A state of intuition utterly unqualified by thought is a figment of the metaphysical imagination, satisfactory only to those who are willing to substitute a dubious hypothesis for the analysis of knowledge as we find it.⁵³

In summary, we find, in Price and Lewis, how philosophy has moved beyond the interests of James and Bradley. Instead of

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 345.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 66.

proposing a theory of immediate feeling to overcome the difficulties of a dualism of thought and thing, we have the analysis of experience to discriminate what is 'given' and what is the element of mind's part in experience (acquaintance or interpretation). Instead of appealing to immediate experience as a state in which there is no subject-object distinction, we have an appeal to experience to show how there is a given element from an independent reality. Metaphysics is put on a shelf to gather dust while the pursuits of epistemology reign supreme. But it wasn't long before the notion of the 'given' underwent an attack as damaging to it as the dismissing of 'immediate experience' was for that view. This attack sets the stage for a reconsideration of the issues surrounding primordial experience.

CHAPTER 4 - SELLARS, McDOWELL AND THE MYTH OF THE GIVEN

Sellars' Attack On Sense-Data

In contemporary philosophy, the 'immediately given' is considered a nearly-dead issue, or at least, one that has been so seriously wounded that its survival is in doubt. Philosophers who refer to 'the given' acknowledge its critical state and defend their interest in this moribund topic. The near-mortal wounds that 'the given' seems to have suffered were primarily inflicted by Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989) in an article entitled "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind". It is customary to preface any discussion of 'the given' with an acknowledgement of Sellars' impact. For example, Paul Moser says:

Since the time of Wilfrid Sellars' celebrated attack on the so-called "Myth of the Given" in the late 1950's, it has been a widespread dogma among philosophers that any epistemology relying on a notion of the epistemological given is untenable.¹

Sellars' attack is pivotal, effectively removing the 'given' from the list of serious topics and placing it in the category of spurious entities whose discussion must be prefaced with an explanation why it merits any examination at all.

As Moser says, Sellars attacks the epistemological given. He focusses on the given used

...to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a 'foundation'² of non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact...

¹Moser, P., "The Given in Epistemology", in Communication and Cognition, p.249.

² "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," p. 128.

Sellars' concept of the given is one that he locates in traditional empiricism and in sense-datum theories. That is, Sellars aims his critique at 'sense data,' namely colour patches, sounds, tastes, hardnesses, coldnesses, and so on, in the act of sensing. He calls this given of sense-data a *myth* and argues against it as such. A myth is defined as a widely held but false notion, or as an imaginary thing. In labelling it a myth, Sellars is claiming that there is something incorrect or false about the concept of the given. He does not argue against the actual *existence* of the given. Rather, he wants to show that the *use* of the given is wrong-headed, because it involves an erroneous account of what it is that we know and how we know it.

It is because empiricists use the theory of the given to make claims about *how* we know which has implications for a theory of what there *is* to be known that has moved Sellars to construct his critique. He is mostly concerned with epistemological claims in his attack, but he takes issue with the whole edifice of sense-datum theories which claim we are given sense data because *that's* what reality consists of. In the course of this attack, Sellars outlines and explains what we know and how we know it, not as a matter of presenting some systematic theory, but rather in contrast with, and as an alternative to, the now exposed myth of the given.

Sellars' first sally against the notion of an immediately given is an argument claiming that, if the given is raw sense-data that impacts on our senses, it cannot also be the foundation

of our experience and knowledge of the world. He sees a contradiction between two aspects of sense-datum theories. The first aspect is that

...according to sense-datum theorists, it is *particulars* that are sensed.³

The second aspect, (of empirically-minded sense-datum theories), is that

...what is *known*, even in non-inferential knowledge, is *facts* rather than particulars, items of the form *something's being thus-and-so* or *something's standing in a certain relation to something else*.⁴

Obviously, then, we cannot *know* sense-data, because sense-data are particulars, not facts. And if we cannot *know* sense-data, then sense-data cannot constitute the non-inferential knowledge upon which the edifice of our experiencing and knowing the world can be built.

Sellars then attacks another move made by sense-datum theorists in which they try to establish sensing as a kind of knowing. To do this, sense-datum theories make a distinction between an act of awareness and the sense-datum which is its object. When, for example, a person enters a room in which there is a blue chair, the person will have a perceptual experience (the act) which is called sensing, and there will be blue colour patches (the object of the person's experience) seen by the person in his or her act of sensing. But it is the *act* of

³ *ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 128.

perception that is at issue here. Is it an act involving simple reception of data (sensing), or is it an act of actually knowing the data? Can the person really have an experience of a colour patch as an item of raw data which is non-inferentially known to be whatever it is - i.e., a blue colour patch, or a red triangle, or a note of music, etc? As Sellars has pointed out, sense-datum theorists claim that it is *facts* that are known, not particulars - and yet, sense-data are particulars, not facts. Sense-datum theorists, he argues, want to have their cake and eat it too by maintaining that

...sensing is a knowing *and* that it is particulars which are sensed.⁵

The way sense-datum theorists manage this is by turning the act of sensing into a *knowing*, which is accomplished by changing the object of sensing into a fact.

The non-inferential knowing on which our world picture rests is the knowing that certain items, e.g. red sense contents, are of a certain character, e.g. red.⁶

The sense-datum theorist maintains that when a person enters a room and encounters the chair, she would have an experience of the chair as a matter of knowing that the blue patches are of a certain character, namely blue, enabling her to sense the sense contents as being blue. The act of sensing would involve the sensing of a fact, i.e., that the sense contents are blue, and thus the act of sensing would be a knowing. The crucial point

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 129.

⁶ Sellars, *EPM*, p. 129.

for Sellars is that, in order for a theory to claim that sense-data are the 'given' forming the foundation upon which our knowledge of the world rests, this knowledge of, for example, sense contents being blue, must be knowledge which is non-inferentially known. This leads to Sellars' primary complaint about sense-datum theorists. I have already quoted this complaint in the discussion on Green, but it is worth repeating:

For they have taken givenness to be a fact which presupposes no learning, no forming of associations, no setting up of stimulus-response connections. In short, they have tended to equate *sensing sense contents* with *being conscious*...

It is Sellars' contention that it is just plain *wrong* to assume that there can be sensations without prior concept-formation.

As an example of the kind of sense-datum theory that Sellars is attacking, we can recall what was said by Price. We saw that Price argues for given sense-data that are non-inferentially known. In arguing for the certainty of the 'red patch' Price states that

...when I say that it is 'directly' present to my consciousness, I mean that my consciousness of it is not reached by inference, nor by any other intellectual process (such as abstraction or intuitive deduction), nor by any passage from sign to significate.

Price argues for the non-inferential awareness of sense-data, which is exactly what Sellars attacks.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 131.

⁸ Price, Perception, p. 3.

According to Sellars there must be something wrong with the way classical empiricist philosophies use the word 'sensation.' He examines the implications of traditional accounts of 'sensation', and critiques those accounts while contrasting them with what must really be the case. He characterizes these accounts:

...classical sense-datum theories...reveal themselves to be the result of a mismating of two ideas: (1) The idea that there are certain 'inner episodes', e.g. the sensation of a red triangle or a C# sound, which occur to human beings and brutes without any prior process of learning or concept formation...(2) The idea that there are certain 'inner episodes' which are the non-inferential knowings that, for example, a certain item is red and triangular, or, in the case of sounds, C#, which inner episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge...

Sellars points out that the idea of 'inner episodes' is common to both ideas, but in one case the inner episode is some sort of sensation, and in the other case it is a non-inferential knowing. Sellars does not want to deny that there are 'inner episodes', but he does want to deny that those inner episodes which are sensations and those inner episodes which are knowings are the *same things*. In other words, he denies that our sensations are knowings. Sellars makes it clear that he affirms the idea of inner episodes and the idea of sensations as inner episodes when he says:

It is my purpose to argue...that not only are inner episodes *not* category mistakes, they are quite 'effable' in intersubjective discourse. And it is my purpose to show, positively, *how* this can be the case.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 140.

I am particularly concerned to make this point in connection with such inner episodes as sensations and feelings...

It remains, then, for Sellars to show that sensations are not knowings, i.e. not epistemic, and to present a case for his alternative view.

The Argument Against Private Sensations

Let us return to our example of a person perceiving a blue chair. What is involved, says Sellars, in the claim that the person has the sensation of a blue chair-shaped something? According to the traditional sense-datum theorist, the person experiences a given involving a blue sense-datum and is thus experiencing some sort of 'inner episode' which is private and not public. If all experience of sense-data is private, then sense-data are subjective, not objective. Philosophers who have advanced theories of 'the given' concur with this. For example, Lewis says:

There are recognizable qualitative characters of the given, which may be repeated in different experiences, and are thus a sort of universals; I call these "qualia". But although such qualia are universals...they must be distinguished from the properties of objects...The quale is directly intuited, given, and is not the subject of any possible error because it is purely subjective. The property of an object is objective; the ascription of it is a judgement which may be mistaken...¹¹

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 176.

¹¹ Lewis, Mind and the World Order, p. 121.

How, we may ask, can a given quale, which is subjective and never erroneous, give rise to judgement, involving the ascription of an objective property, which might be in error?

Lewis and Sellars tackle this question from different sides of the argument regarding the existence of the 'given.' Lewis, as we have seen, defends the 'given' as subjective, as the 'unalterable sensuous feel' which, coupled with the mind's interpretation, makes up the whole of our experience. Sellars, on the other hand, quotes the doctrine of sense-data theories in order to criticize them. Both examine the problem of the relation between 'given' and judgement and the possibility of error that can result, using an example of perceptual experience that illustrates the difficulty.¹² Take a nickel or a penny or any similar sort of coin; tilt it at an slight angle and examine it. What you will see is an ellipse. But if requested to describe what is seen, most people (especially those not trained to deal with such experiences phenomenologically) will state, "I see a *round* coin (of some denomination)". Even though they see an ellipse, they will report that they see something round. What they experience will be different from the objective property they judge the item to have. As Lewis says:

But the givenness of the appearance is not the givenness of objective roundness. Given the elliptical appearance, the judgement "That is round," may be in error. Indeed, given the *round* appearance, the

¹² This example has been discussed by many philosophers, including C.D. Broad, Scientific Thought, London: Kegan Paul, 1923.

judgement may still be in error, as measurement with precision instruments might reveal.¹³

Lewis considers the given appearance to be a subjective appearance, an inner episode, and it is only the judgement that involves the error. There have been many philosophers since Lewis' time who have objected to this notion of the givenness of the appearance as an entirely subjective matter, an 'inner episode.' The dissonance between an experienced subjective given and an ascription of objective properties involving judgements which may be wrong is unpalatable to critics of the 'given' because, as Sellars explains:

...the learning of a language is a *public* process which proceeds in a domain of *public* objects and is governed by *public* sanctions, so that *private* episodes...must needs escape the net of rational discourse...¹⁴

Sellars points out that, if what is given in experience is utterly subjective and private, then we cannot make statements about it. That is, according to the sense-data theorist, we have a private 'given' which is never incorrect, but because it is subjective we cannot make statements about it. We are able to make statements about objective properties because these are ascriptions made in vocal judgements and are, as such, public objects. But, as we have seen, these may be in error. Critics like Sellars complain that we could not identify experience without language, which is public, and thus private, subjective

¹³Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 140.

experiences would be something we could not identify, not even to ourselves. What happens when a small child, being presented with a coin tilted in his line of vision and seeing an ellipse, is however told, "This is a round penny"? What if a group of people experiencing an object in a badly lit room all refer to it as 'red' when, if they took it outside into sunlight, they would find that it was actually orange? How could we ever even learn the words 'round', 'red', 'hard', 'soft', 'sweet' and so on in the first place if the experiences of these qualia were always only private and subjective? The dissonance between the actual given qualia and the ascription of a public objective property would never allow for any rational discourse about actual sense data.

To address this problem, supporters of the theory of the given have introduced what Sellars calls "looks talk". Lewis, for example, explains how language which is used to describe objective properties can also refer to the given qualia:

A thing is said to "look round" when it presents the quale which a really round object does when held at right angles to the line of vision; and a thing is said to "look blue" when it looks the way a really blue thing does under usual or standard illumination. In general, the name of the property is also assigned to the appearance of it under certain optimum conditions.¹⁵

Returning to the example of the person encountering the chair, the sense-datum theorist would embellish his or her account of the act of perception involved using some statement of how things

¹⁵Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 122.

'look' to that perceiver. What does the person perceive? A blue chair. Of what does this perception consist? It consists of certain sense-data, involving patches of blue colour, which are sensed by the perceiver. But how can we know that the person senses blue sense-data? The sense-datum theorist will reply that, if there really is a blue chair in the room involving blue sense-data, and there are certain optimum conditions, then the chair will *look* blue to the person entering the room. We can confirm this by asking the person, "What do you see?" When she answers, "I see a blue chair", if we follow up with the question, "How do you *know* that it is blue?", she will very likely reply, "Because it *looks* blue." This kind of report leaves the sense-datum theorist with a fact: "The chair looks blue to the person entering the room when the person encounters the chair." This fact is of the form "physical object x looks blue to person S at time t." This form of what constitutes the given (i.e., as a fact "X looks ϕ to S at t") cannot be rejected by philosophers who complain that the given involves 'private, inner episodes' because it uses a public object, namely its looking to someone that there is a blue object somewhere at sometime. It is this form of the given at which Sellars directs his next attack.

Sellars begins by arguing that, e.g., *being blue* is logically prior to *looking blue*. He accuses the sense-datum theorists of employing a sort of definition in which

x is red. = .x would *look* red to standard observers in standard conditions¹⁶

However, Sellars maintains that the concept of *looking* red (or blue, or whatever) is dependent on a prior concept of *being* red (or blue, etc.), and not the other way round. He illustrates this point with a discussion of the difference between reporting something and endorsing something in the act of reporting it. If we say that our perceiver has an experience of the chair *looking* blue to her at that time, we are making a claim about that experience. But if we say that our perceiver has an experience of *seeing* that the chair is blue, we not only are making a claim about the experience, but we are also endorsing it. Compare:

(1) The chair looks blue to person S.

and

(2) Person S sees that the chair is blue.

Sellars says that statement (2) makes a propositional claim about S's experience and endorses that claim. In sentence (1), the chair only *looks* blue, and it may, in fact, be a different colour. Sentence (2) on the other hand says that person S has an experience of the colour that the chair *really is*. According to Sellars, when our claim is that "the object looks blue to S at time t", if we were prepared to endorse the propositional claim involved, we would say "S sees the object to be blue at time t". We are not prepared to endorse it, however, so we claim only that object x *looks* blue to person S. However, the claim

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 142.

(1) Object x looks blue to S at t.

could be rephrased

(1a) Object x looks to be blue to S at t.

We can see that it involves the same propositional claim as

(2a) S sees object x to be blue at t.

The statement that something looks to be blue (or, for short, looks blue) and the statement that something is seen to be blue involve the same propositional claim - namely, 'to be blue'. The only difference is that statement (2a) *endorses* the claim and statement (1) and (1a) do not. But we can see that when we use statements involving 'looks talk', the concept of something *being* a certain way is what we are really referring to, albeit with a weak claim about its being that way (i.e., it only *looks* to be that way). So the concept of *looking* some way involves as a prior notion the concept of *being* some way. Thus, Sellars argues, "x is red" is *not* reducible to "x looks red to standard observers in standard conditions". Rather, "x looks red" involves as a prior notion "x's being red", and the concept of "being red" involves

...the ability to tell what colours objects have by looking at them - which, in turn, involves knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its colour by looking at it.¹⁷

The key word for Sellars in this whole argument seems to be the word 'know'. In order to say "x looks blue", we have to have a prior conception of what it is for something *to be* blue, and

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 146.

this involves knowing the right circumstances, (i.e., circumstances about viewing things, such as having the right lighting, not looking through distorting lenses, and so on) that are necessary in order for the correct perception of the colour involved. This means that 'being blue' is not something we understand as a matter of reducing this notion to 'looking blue'. Rather, the notion of 'looking blue' is only understandable as a matter of the prior notion of 'being blue'. And since 'looking x' requires the prior concept 'being x', Sellars argues that we could not know how anything looks without a conceptual structure:

For if the ability to recognize that x looks green presupposes the concept of *being green*, and if this in turn involves knowing in what circumstances to view an object to ascertain its colour, then, since one can scarcely determine what the circumstances are without noticing that certain objects have certain perceptible characteristics - including colours - it would seem that one could not form the concept of *being green*, and, by parity of reasoning,¹⁸ of the other colours, unless he already had them.

According to Sellars, our person entering the room and encountering a blue chair would *not* have a perception of the blue chair unless the person already had the concept of the colour blue (and also the concept of 'chair'). As a matter of fact, the person encountering the chair would not be able to perceive the chair without having, prior to the perception, a whole conceptual structure that includes knowledge of colours, shapes, textures, space, and so on, involving all the properties the chair both *is* and *is not*. Sellars claims that, "...one is not in a position to

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 147.

be perceptually aware of any fact, however minimal, unless one has a whole system of concepts..."¹⁹ We cannot perceive anything without this whole conceptual structure as a prior condition. And because of this, Sellars maintains, we have to abandon "...the traditional empiricist idea that observational knowledge 'stands on its own feet'."²⁰ In other words, a *seeing* of a blue chair, or a *tasting* of a sweet sugar cube, or a *hearing* of a C#, (and so on) is not an experience involving raw sense-data that has an impact on our various apparatuses of sensation, to which raw data we then apply some classificatory terms in order to fit them in to our network or structure of understanding reality. The sense-data are *not* given to us prior to some sort of application of a conceptual framework, and we are *not* made aware of all the objects of reality simply in virtue of having sensations and images. The point, for Sellars, is that sensations are not, in themselves, knowings and so there is nothing epistemic about undergoing a sensation. Rather, perception, as epistemic, is a much more complex state of affairs than is implied in such an account.

Sellars' Alternative Account

Sellars rejects the sense-datum theorist's account of sense-data as the 'given' stuff forming the basis of our knowledge and

¹⁹ "The Structure of Knowledge", p. 314.

²⁰ "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," p. 168.

offers an alternative. He views perception as essentially being or involving a *thinking*. He says:

Roughly, seeing *this* to be a pink ice cube involves a thinking *this* to be a pink ice cube.²¹

What Sellars means by this claim is that, seeing *this* to be a pink ice cube involves the occurrence in the perceiver's mind of a sentence in the form of 'inner speech' to the effect that, "This, over there, is a pink ice cube." So our person entering the room and encountering the chair has a kind of inner speech that says, "this is a blue chair". But it is clear that *seeing* the chair is *not* just a matter of *thinking* "this is a chair". As Sellars admits, surely there is a great deal of difference between actually seeing that this is a blue chair and merely thinking that this is a blue chair. It is obvious that perceiving is not merely thinking.

What, then, comprises perception according to Sellars if it is not just a matter of thinking (in 'inner speech') thoughts such as "x, over there, is ϕ "? Sellars, like his predecessors, admits two elements in perceptual experience. He refers to thoughts (in inner speech) such as "x, over there is ϕ " as the 'propositional component' of perception and he acknowledges that there must be, furthermore, what he calls the 'descriptive component'. He says of this component:

...phenomenologically speaking, the descriptive core consists in the fact that *something* in *some* way red and

²¹ "The Structure of Knowledge", p. 303.

triangular is in *some way* present to the perceiver
*other than as thought of.*²²

This sounds very much like the 'impressions' of the classical empiricists or the 'sense-data' of their twentieth-century counterparts. In particular, it resembles Lewis' 'unalterable element' of experience. But Sellars denies that when we have the 'somethings' that are in 'some way' red, round, etc., in some way present to us, these are 'inner particulars' which are the direct objects of our awareness. He maintains that it is *physical objects* rather than impressions that are directly known to us, and these impressions in themselves are not instances of knowing. Sensing, for Sellars, is a *state* of the perceiver rather than a knowing. When our person entering the room encounters the blue chair, Sellars would not say that this person has a *sensation* of a blue chair. Rather, he would say that the person is in a state of a kind that involves a *manner* of sensing, namely, sensing 'a-blue-chair-ly'. Sensations thus become causal factors in perception rather than the objects thereof. Furthermore, these visual impressions (such as the one of the blue chair) are conceived of as items which are analogous in certain respects to physical objects that are blue and chair-like. The analogies between these items and physical objects are analogies between things of different kinds, namely, *states* and *physical things*. However, since only physical objects can have the perceptible qualities we attribute to them, and impressions, not being

²² *ibid.*, p. 310.

physical, can not have the perceptible qualities we attribute to physical objects, we must rely on analogies to characterize impressions. Sellars explains how visual impressions are analogous to physical objects:

...visual impressions stand to one another in a system of ways of resembling and differing that is structurally similar to the ways in which the colours and shapes of physical objects resemble and differ.²³

Thus, according to Sellars, we *know* independent physical objects by way of sensing, say, 'a-blue-chair-ly' or 'a-red-triangle-ly', and the sensations of the physical objects involved are conceived of analogously to the physical objects. C.F. Delaney explains Sellars' theory thus:

The descriptive core of our perceptual experience is not itself a prior experience from which physical objects and their properties are either constructed or inferred. It is independent physical objects that are directly characterized by the proper and common sensibles with the descriptive core of our experiencing being similarly characterized only indirectly and by analogy.²⁴

In summary, we can characterize Sellars' position as one which straddles the view that our knowledge is a self-contained, coherent network and the view that our knowledge is informed by an external world. A whole conceptual framework must be in place before there can be any perception at all, and we cannot, for example, see a red triangle until we know, not only what constitutes being a red triangle, but also being a green circle.

²³ "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," p. 193.

²⁴ "Theory of Knowledge", p. 12.

a blue square, and many other things besides. But there is also what Sellars calls the 'descriptive core' of our perception, which is something like what other philosophers have called the sensuous content, but without the corresponding difficulty of conceiving it as something somehow 'inner.' For one thing, it is physical objects in the world that are known in perception. For another, sensing is a state of the perceiver, such as 'sensing-a-red-triangle-ly', rather than being the reception of sensation as some sort of private sense-content. The character of these states is analogous to the character of the physical objects in the world that are perceived, and the 'descriptive core' of our perceptual experiences is characterized only by analogy to the independent physical objects which are characterized directly. The important point for Sellars is that we acquire our conceptual framework when we acquire our language, and we cannot have perceptions without this conceptual framework. Thus, our perceptions are characterized using the terminology of a public realm of discourse and are part of the rational sphere of concepts. For Sellars, to have the ability to perceive is to have the ability to think.

Evaluating Sellars' Attack

Sellars' attack on the given is pivotal in twentieth-century theories of experience. But how effective is it? Is it relevant only for sense-data theories, or can its impact be felt on a theory of immediate experience?

First, with regards to his attack on the given, one of Sellars' critics complains that it does not deal with all possible views of the given. This point is made by Bredo C. Johnson who claims that Sellars failed to accomplish his stated intention in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." He points to this statement of Sellars':

Many things have been said to be 'given': sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself. This framework has been a common feature of most of the major systems of philosophy, including, to use a Kantian turn of phrase, both 'dogmatic rationalism' and 'sceptical empiricism'...many who today attack 'the whole idea of givenness'...are really only attacking sense data...If, however, I begin my argument with an attack on sense-datum theories, it is only as a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness.²⁵

Sellars says he wants to offer a critique of the 'entire framework of givenness'. But he never delivers the goods. Nowhere do we find a critique of this whole framework of givenness. Johnson finds Sellars' limited attack disappointing. He says that its focus is exclusively on

...the question whether anything could have various properties the given was alleged to have...and not at all on the important question what it is for something to be given.²⁶

In targeting sense-datum theories exclusively, arguing that sense-data are not epistemic, and claiming that we do not have perception without conception, Sellars neglects the larger

²⁵ "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," p. 127.

²⁶ Johnson, "The Given", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, p. 600.

picture and misses making an all-encompassing attack on a truly generic 'given'. If we, the readers of Sellars' argument, are looking for a deeper analysis of a general theory of the immediate 'stuff' of experience and/or being, we will find our expectations unfulfilled. As Johnson observes:

The hoped-for discussion of the *framework* of the concept, promising insight into what it is *to be* given, has collapsed into a discussion (albeit a brilliant one) of the merits of individual variants of that concept.²⁷

And so we, the readers, may be left wondering, "What about a given that is not epistemological?", "Could theories of the given that do not have the same traits as traditional empiricisms escape Sellars' critique?", "How would Sellars aim his critique at claims for non-perceptual immediate experience which is also pre-conceptual?", and so on. We may be unconvinced by Sellars' argument because there are other questions and other possibilities that he has left out. And after reading all the way through his arguments, we may still be left wondering, "Yes, but surely when a person enters a room in which there happens to be a blue chair, it is not just a matter of learned concepts in the perception of the chair because the concepts have to be in relation to some sort of given 'stuff' -- and at some time in the history of the individual experiencer, this stuff had to be there

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 601.

prior to the concepts in order for the concepts to be learned.²⁸ So what is this 'given stuff'? What *is* it that happens at every moment in the ongoing mass of experience before it is discriminated and ordered and understood by our concept-applying faculties to be transformed into a perception?" Sellars has been so busy attacking what he considers to be the definitive version of the given that he doesn't seem concerned that he might have missed other views.

Sellars' whole theory of perception and his rejection of the theory of 'the given' rests on a kind of 'horse-and-cart' reasoning. He accuses the sense-datum theorist in particular and the proponents of the immediately given in general of putting a cart in front of a horse, and he claims that he has righted this unworkable situation. We can see this in Sellars' repeated denial that we experience raw sense-data, from which we derive our concepts and knowledge of the world. His alternative is that we have a conceptual framework in place before we can have even the most minimal perceptual experience. He summarizes the heart of his discussion by saying that when we

...recognize that even such 'simple' concepts as those of colours are the fruit of a long process of publicly reinforced responses to public objects (including verbal performances) in public situations, we may well be puzzled as to how even if there are such things as impressions or sensations, we could come to know that

²⁸ This is Lewis' point when he talks of his pen and how it is something different for him than it is for the infant or for the person from a culture that does not have pens, both of whom may be encountering the object Lewis understands as 'pen' for the first time, and for whom the experience would evoke a different set of concepts, a different 'interpretation.'

there are, and to know what sort of thing they are.
*For we now recognize that instead of coming to have a
concept of something because we have noticed that
thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is
already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and
cannot account for it.*²⁹

The latter part of this quotation is the kind of statement that leads philosophers like Moser to label Sellars a 'radical conceptualist'. Moser portrays radical conceptualism in the following way:

The proponent of the radical conceptualization of perceptual awareness typically relies on the following kind of argument:

- (i) Minimally perceptual awareness requires the discrimination of a discrete thing X.
- (ii) But to discriminate X is to discriminate X as something.
- (iii) Hence, to perceive X is to perceive X as something.
- (iv) But to perceive X as something is to conceptualize X.
- (v) Hence, minimally perceptual awareness, including awareness of phenomenological content, requires conceptualization.

On the basis of such an argument many philosophers have concluded that any event of perceptual awareness is conceptual, and thus that perceptual awareness is radically conceptual.³⁰

Considering Sellars' account of perception, it seems legitimate to attribute the above argument to him.

²⁹ "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," p. 176.

³⁰ Moser, "The Given in Epistemology", p. 255.

Moser's primary objection to the radical conceptualist's argument lies with its first premise, i.e., that minimally perceptual awareness requires discrimination of a discrete thing X. Moser considers this premise to be just plain false. He points out that radical conceptualists have operated on the assumption that visual perceptual awareness *must* involve discrimination, and that this kind of perceptual awareness of something as a discriminated, discrete something X is the only kind of visual apprehension that counts as 'perception'. He argues against the idea that perception must involve discrimination.

Moser's first argument is that radical conceptualism, since it adheres to the idea given in premise (i), (which requires that perception involve discrimination), leads to an endless regress of required conceptual events. According to the radical conceptualists, in order for person S to have visual awareness of an object X, S must discriminate X as something, and this involves categorizing X under some general term ϕ . But if S is to categorize X under ϕ , S must have had some logically prior awareness of X. How else could S categorize something under ϕ if S did not have a prior awareness of the something to be categorized, namely X? But in order to have a prior awareness of X, S would have to have a logically prior event of *conceptual* awareness of X, given the radical conceptualist's reliance on premise (i). But in order to have a logically prior event of conceptual awareness of X, S must categorize X as something in

this prior event, and that requires prior conceptualization. But in order to have *this* prior conceptualization, S must have some logically prior awareness of X - that is, which is logically prior to the logically prior event that leads to the original conceptualization of X under ϕ . And of course, this will in turn lead to another logically prior conceptualization, and so on, regressing to something prior over and over to infinity. Moser says this is not only unreasonable, but

...since each of our episodic conceptual events occupies a distinct and finite amount of time, and since our events of perceptual awareness occur in a finite amount of time, we have good reason to deny that perceptual awareness entails an infinity of conceptual events.³¹

If a theory of perception requires the discrimination of a discrete thing, and this in turn means conceptualization, then there is an infinity of conceptualizations and no stopping point where some non-conceptual apprehension of things takes place. Such an endless regress is untenable for obvious reasons. Just as Sellars has attacked the traditional empiricist view by arguing that observational knowledge (perception) cannot stand on its own feet, Moser has counter-attacked with the argument that conceptualization, likewise, cannot stand on *its* own feet.

Moser's second objection to radical conceptualism is that it results in a contradiction. He points out that the radical conceptualist assumes that the content of perceptual awareness cannot be of a determined something X unless it involves

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 256

conceptualization. It follows that simple perceptual awareness, without any conceptualization, is indeterminate. But, says Moser, if this is true then conceptualization, involving as it does *determinateness*, is a misrepresentation of perceptual awareness, which is *indeterminate* according to the assumption. That is, if perception is *indeterminate*, and conceptualization ascribes determinateness to it, then conceptualization falsifies it (makes it something it is not). This would make all empirical judgements, which ascribe determinateness to perceptual content, false. Therefore, requiring conceptualization leads to the demonstrable falsity of conceptualization, which is a contradiction. Such a contradiction, at the heart of the theory of radical conceptualism, renders it incorrect.

Sellars' Conceptualism Versus 'The Given' - A Comparison

We have seen that Sellars requires concepts before there can be perception, which leads Moser to label him a 'radical' conceptualist. There is, between the positions of a conceptualist and an advocate of the given, a difference in accounting for the initial experience of perceptual phenomena. What really is at issue between them?

To answer this question, let us return once more to our person entering the room in which there is a blue chair. What is the nature of the experience involving the perception of the blue chair, according to these two philosophical positions?

First, as representative of the conceptualist view, Sellars would say that, as a *perception* of a discrete thing, a blue chair, the event of perceiving would involve the perceiver's network of concepts, so that the perceiver could have (as a matter of 'inner speech') the 'thought', "This (not that) over here (not over there) is a blue (not red or green or purple and so on) chair (not table or bed or book-case or so on)". This thought would be provoked by some cause (the descriptive component of perception) which would result in the perceiver seeing 'a-blue-chair-ly.' In other words, the perceiver would be in the perceptual state involving concepts 'blue' and 'chair' and the network of concepts of which these are a part. As has already been noted, for Sellars perceiving this is a blue chair is primarily thinking this is a blue chair.

In opposition to this view, the advocate of 'the given' would say that the perceiver, upon entering the room, would be immediately aware of and somehow apprehend some sort of raw visual data, either an object (the blue chair) or sensations involving blue coloured patches of a certain shape. We would classify the phenomena encountered and/or apprehended using the concepts 'blue' and 'chair.'

Roughly, it seems to be a matter of what is prior in an event of perceptual experience -- the phenomenon or the concept. Or, for that matter, can there even be phenomena without concepts, or concepts without phenomena? These questions are at

the heart of the debate between conceptualists and advocates of the given.

McDowell's Attack on 'The Given'

Sellars calls 'the given' a myth and claims at one point that he has killed this myth³². But perhaps he has only wounded it and left it for dead, as yet not dealt the final *coup de grâce*. A number of philosophers have mounted their own attack on the given since Sellars' supposedly victorious assault. It seems they consider it to be a still powerful adversary. One of the most recent of these is John McDowell (1942-), whose book Mind and World is partly concerned with counteracting the appeal of the given as a theory that explains lingering philosophical puzzles.

McDowell's whole endeavour is to address the problem of the relation between what seems to be a self-contained consciousness that 'knows' an outer reality and the reality that is known by, but independent of, consciousness. How can consciousness be in relation to an independent world and know that its relation involves true knowledge, i.e., that the world truly is what consciousness 'knows' it to be? McDowell says that if we adhere to the dominant picture of mind and world - that is, a picture that views mind as the realm of knowledge or the 'conceptual sphere,' and views the world as the objective stuff which we

³² "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," p. 195.

'find' when we experience reality, we have a problem regarding our knowledge of reality that seems answerable in one of only two ways. This produces a difficulty:

...we are prone to fall into an intolerable oscillation: in one phase we are drawn to a coherentism that cannot make sense of the bearing of thought on objective reality, and in the other phase we recoil into an appeal to the Given, which turns out to be useless.³³

In the course of explaining this 'intolerable oscillation,' McDowell outlines the nature of the problem and then proposes a solution. In his picture of the problem, he does not present an actual theory of 'immediate experience,' nor does he scrutinize experience as such. That is, he does not see the world entering into our consciousness via the channel of experience. Rather, he is more concerned with the manner in which thought apprehends reality. It is as if he sees thought reaching out to grasp the world rather than seeing the world flooding into the realm of thought.

Thus, McDowell frames the problem of mind, world, and what constitutes the relation between them in terms of certain fundamental assumptions. He does not examine experience first to analyze its make-up. Instead, he makes it plain that we must begin with the 'how' of our knowledge. We live in the realm of the conceptual and we must start there, examining our concepts in their 'about-ness', the way they are about the world. He begins his book by saying "...[t]he overall topic I am going to consider

³³ McDowell, Mind and World, p. 23.

in these lectures is the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world".³⁴ It is in terms of this topic of concepts as intermediaries that McDowell frames the picture of experience and reality.

McDowell begins with the problem that has led philosophers to the 'intolerable oscillation' between a theory of the given and a coherentism. The problem is an epistemological one: how is our system of knowledge and beliefs meaningfully related to the reality which it is 'about'?

The first important point is that our realm of knowledge and belief, our space of concepts, cannot be empty. First, he describes our 'space of concepts.' When we think something, our thoughts are in relation to other thoughts and the whole system, (or parts of it), is subject to revision in accordance with logical requirements. That is, our knowledge is a rational system; it is organized by our reasoning. How we, as rational beings, organize, relate and give reasons for our knowledge and our beliefs is completely up to us; in our reasoning we are free, not subject to the control of some external cause. McDowell puts it this way:

...rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it. In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom.³⁵

He then explains how this space of concepts cannot be empty. He says that there are limits on our freedom. There must be

³⁴ *ibid.* p. 3.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 5.

constraints on thought from reality external to thought, the reality that thought is 'about.' Otherwise, we would be just 'making it all up' and what we think would involve mere fictions. When we think about reality, we can't be merely engaged in a kind of thinking that is in relation only to other thoughts within a self-contained system that never connects to the world represented as the object of the system of thoughts. If our thoughts are not subject to external constraints, they are empty, because they have no 'real' content (no content informed by objective reality). McDowell says that there would be nothing that we think when we think such thoughts:

Thoughts without content - which would not really be thoughts at all - would be a play of concepts without any connection with intuitions, that is, bits of experiential intake. It is their connection with experiential intake that supplies the content, the substance, that thoughts would otherwise lack.³⁶

If thoughts did not connect with intuitions, the matter of our experiences, then they would merely be the results of an internal activity, a 'play' of concepts, and they would have no meaning. Our thoughts would be ours, we would be free in that we would be responsible for our thinking, but our thoughts would have no meaning because they would have no content. Therefore, concludes McDowell, it is imperative for any theory that claims to make sense of the relation between thought and its object that it takes into account that thoughts cannot be empty.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 5.

This statement that thoughts cannot be empty leads to the second important point for McDowell: although the idea of a 'given' seems to answer the need for content, necessary if thoughts are to be *not empty*, the given does not answer this need and is, in fact, useless. The given is useless because the experiential content that acts as a constraint on the responsible freedom of our thinking must supply a justification for our thinking, and a pure 'given' cannot do this.

Before explaining why the given cannot act as a justification, we will ask what is 'the given' for McDowell. He has identified a need for a constraint on thought from outside the system of knowledge and belief, a constraint that would guarantee that thoughts are 'about' something and thus have meaning. This constraint would be supplied by experience, which is the reception of whatever is conveyed to the mind (the conceptual sphere, the realm of thought) through sensibility.³⁷ According to traditional empirical models, knowledge cannot be knowledge if it is merely a self-contained system of thoughts and ideas (this point is also made by Green and Lewis, as will be discussed in the final chapter). Our thoughts and ideas must be 'about' something, they must signify something other than themselves, to count as knowledge at all. Our thoughts and ideas connect, it is true, in a system of interrelations where some

³⁷ What is meant here by the term 'sensibility' is what Kant means when he defines it as "...the receptivity of our minds, its power of receiving representations, in so far as it is in any wise affected...". McDowell refers to this quote from Kant in a footnote on p. 4.

ideas serve as supports and reasons for others. But when one thought connects to another as a justification, and that justification connects to a prior justification, and so on all through the system of our thoughts, foundational epistemology demands an ultimate ground for the justifications. This ultimate ground involves pointing to something that is simply received by our faculty of sensibility. It is a pure bit of data from outside the system of our thoughts and concepts. It is a raw datum received by our senses, and it serves as the foundation, the ultimate justification, for our knowledge and beliefs. This is the picture of 'the given' that McDowell paints for us.

McDowell admits that this idea of the given is appealing, but insists that it is nevertheless useless because it must serve as a justification for thoughts and ideas in our system of conceptual knowledge and, by its very nature, the given cannot do that. The given is an "...extra-conceptual impingement from the world," it is raw intuition involving no conceptual organization and thus it is not rational. This is problematic because it is supposed to serve as a justification, but by its very nature it is not a reason. McDowell complains that epistemologists who rely on a theory of the given as a justification (a grounding) for knowledge have extended the interconnected reasons beyond the conceptual realm:

The idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to

allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought.³⁸

But the non-conceptual cannot serve as a reason for the conceptual. If our knowledge, as a matter of thoughts and ideas that are conceptual, depends on a web of justifications, those justifications must all be rational, and so have content that is also conceptual:

...we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities.³⁹

If the given is non-conceptual, it cannot serve as a justification for our system of knowledge and belief. At best, it can cause us to think certain things, in which case it is acting as a brute force from an alien realm. And in this case we can, at best, consider ourselves blameless for what we think since we are not responsible. In McDowell's terminology, the given offers 'exculpations' for our thinking. But an exculpation is hardly a justification, and does not fulfil the requirement of supplying a warrant related to a system of knowledge in which we exercise the freedom of being responsible for our system of organized thought. The given, as an extra-conceptual impact, cannot stand in a justificatory relation to a system of warranted thought, since it could only offer us a reason involving absence

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 7.

of blame, but not a reason involving responsibility.

Exculpations are not justifications.

The whole picture of mind and world offered by a theory relying on the given is itself problematic, according to McDowell. In this picture, there is a sphere of the conceptual (our knowledge, thoughts, beliefs) and there is a space of reasons that extends beyond and outside the conceptual. There is a boundary or limit to the space of reasons and the given, as an impingement from the world, is something that crosses this boundary. For McDowell, this cannot give an account of the grounding of knowledge:

...this picture secures that we cannot be blamed for what happens at that outer boundary, and hence that we cannot be blamed for the inward influence of what happens there...But it is one thing to be exempt from blame...it is quite another thing to have a justification.⁴⁰

The given, (as a raw datum from the world), is unacceptable to McDowell because it cannot count as a reason in a system of knowledge in which we have the responsibility for what we think. If it is a pure impact on our senses from the world, (which is the traditional picture of the given), it is non-conceptual, and thus not in relation to our activity in empirical thought and judgement, which is conceptual. But to reject the idea of the given is also problematic. If there is no given, what, then, will offer constraint from an external set of conditions on our thinking, in order to make it meaningful? We cannot have just a

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 8.

self-contained sphere of knowledge, a conceptual realm. McDowell says that this is what makes the given so attractive; it seems to fulfil the need for an external constraint. But once we realize that it cannot offer justifications, we conclude we must reject the idea of a given and are thus driven back to the idea of a self-contained conceptual sphere. But this, in turn, is unacceptable. And so we fall into the 'intolerable oscillation' between a theory of the given and a theory of a self-contained conceptual sphere (coherentism), and neither is satisfactory.

McDowell's Alternative - Conceptual Content

After outlining this dilemma, McDowell proposes an alternative view of the relation of mind to world. He claims that our experience of the world, involving so-called 'impingements' on our sensibility, is not a matter of 'receiving' a 'bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given.' Rather, it is a 'kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content.'⁴¹ For McDowell, experience is a state in which we take in that 'things are thus and so.' In other words, experience is experience of facts, not of non-conceptualized phenomena, and so experience is conceptual through and through.

If one's view of experience is of something already conceptual, this has implications for the larger picture of reality and knowledge that one has. How does McDowell's view of experience fit into the rest of the picture he presents us?

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 9.

To begin, McDowell is, as mentioned above, primarily concerned with 'the way thought bears on reality.' This means that he is making a claim about how minds 'grasp' reality by means of thoughts that somehow reach out and apprehend 'what there is.' The mind grasps the world using thoughts that have a bearing on reality, in the same way that an explorer in a wilderness gets her bearings using a compass. The magnetic needle in the compass points north responding to a feature of actual physical reality (it follows a magnetic force field). In the same way, our thoughts take in the states of things that comprise the world. Our thoughts and the states of things are both conceptual, much as the needle of the compass and the force it responds to are both magnetic.

McDowell claims that a picture involving cooperation between understanding and sensibility is the correct one for a theory of empirical knowledge. Using Kant's terminology, McDowell refers to this picture as one that involves the cooperation between the spontaneity of our understanding and the receptivity of our mind.⁴² It is crucial for McDowell's solution to the problem of mind and world that receptivity is not a separate thing and its role in the co-operative venture of empirical knowledge cannot even be considered as somehow autonomous, something that works on its own or has a distinct part to play. Receptivity, says McDowell, "...does not make an even notionally separable

⁴² McDowell uses the term 'spontaneity' in order to indicate that the notion of responsible freedom is preserved.

contribution to the co-operation."⁴³ In this co-operation, spontaneity has a bearing on receptivity because receptivity is already conceptual.

To explicate his view of receptivity as a state in which our concepts are already involved, McDowell contrasts it with the view he opposes. The theory of the Given utilizes a picture of our knowledge as a system of concepts that has an outer limit, a boundary. An impression, which is a bit of experiential intake, would be a bare given of phenomena or data that has an impact or impingement on our sphere of empirical knowledge. When we trace our justifications, our reasons, back to the ultimate grounds for our knowledge, we follow a path that leads out to the edge, the boundary, of our reasons. We would find the ultimate reason at this edge, and it would be caused by a bare impact of sensibility. This bare impact would not have any conceptual content, but would somehow provide a cause for our conceptual understanding. McDowell considers this view, for reasons already outlined in his argument, to be deficient in that it would mean our receptivity provides only exculpations, not justifications. He presents his alternative:

In the view I am urging, the conceptual contents that sit closest to the impact of external reality on one's sensibility are not already, *qua* conceptual, some distance away from that impact. They are not the results of a first step within the space of reasons, a step that would be retraced by the last step in laying out justifications, as that activity is conceived within the dualism of scheme and Given. This supposed

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 9.

first step would be a move from an impression, conceived as the bare reception of a bit of the Given, to a judgement justified by the impression. But it is not like that: the conceptual contents that are most basic in this sense are already possessed by impressions themselves, impingements by the world on our sensibility.⁴⁴

And how are the impressions themselves in possession of conceptual content? Is it that our mind, in its capacity of 'grasping' or having a bearing on the world, exercises a faculty of determining reality conceptually? McDowell says definitely not, because that would be a form of idealism, and idealism is a closed system in which there is no external constraint on thought. McDowell says it is wrong to talk of 'exercising' conceptual capacities at all, because this implies either some sort of mental determination of reality (idealism) or some application of concepts to a bare given that is not conceptual. Instead, in experience, the state of apprehending that 'things are thus and so' is passive. The way McDowell explains this passivity is:

In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter.⁴⁵

So the picture McDowell presents us with is this: in receptivity, our experience is a state of passively registering the fact that a thing is thus and so. Things are blue or green or loud or cold or what have you, and it is not under our control to make them so

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 10.

or represent them thus, but rather we passively 'take in' these conceptual items. Does this mean, then, that we are not using our understanding in experience, and that our experience, being passive, has no part in the spontaneity of our knowledge? Not at all, replies McDowell, because the conceptual items of our experience are part of the larger network of our conceptual sphere, and the conceptual capacities of our receptivity are the same as the conceptual capacities found in the judgements of our faculty of spontaneity (understanding). The very capacities by which there is registered in our receptivity the facts that things are thus and so are the same capacities that we use in judging that *this* is a certain shade of blue and no other, that the loudness is from our neighbour's radio, and so on. In other words, the passive experience of the conceptual content of receptivity involves capacities that are the same as the active, rational capacities of our judgements and reasoning. Passive receptivity involves the same conceptual capacities as active thought. Thus, the contents of our passive receptivity are in rational relation to our spontaneity (understanding) because the same conceptual repertoire is involved. This means that our spontaneity (understanding) is involved in our system of epistemological knowledge 'all the way out' to our receptivity (experience) because the whole system is conceptual and thereby rationally inter-related.

It is interesting to compare McDowell's claim that experience is passive yet involves conceptual capacities with

Lewis' argument that experience *must* involve the activity of mind (mind must be active in the experience), in order for there to be any meaningful experience of reality. Lewis argues that the mind must be active, relating the immediate given of presentation to the 'more' that resides in all the possible experience constituting knowledge of the object of the presentation (if I were to bite the apple, it would taste sweet, if I were to turn it around, it would be red and bulgy on the other side, etc.). If the mind is not actively engaged in the complex interpretation of the presentation, putting it in the relational framework of all the hypothetical experiences that constitute knowledge of the object involved, then experience would involve nothing more than the specious present, a "meaningless and indescribable cross-section of the flux of experience." Lewis argues that "...[f]or the merely receptive and passive mind, there could be no objects and no world."⁴⁶

For McDowell, however, the claim that experience is passive is necessary in order to avoid the accusation of idealism. But his notion of passivity reduces to the claim that

...one's control over what happens in experience has limits: one can decide where to place oneself, at what pitch to tune one's attention, and so forth, but it is not up to one, having done all that, what one will experience. This minimal point is what I am insisting on.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Lewis, Mind and the World Order, p. 137.

⁴⁷ McDowell, Mind and World, footnote p. 10

In other words, there is no activity of mind required to interpret given data from reality because, in experience, one finds oneself 'saddled with content' which is there not as a result of one's control. This content is conceptual (as it would be if it had been interpreted), and thus not in need of active interpretation *in reception*. The activity of mind insisted on by Lewis would be a secondary stage involving the active application of conceptual judgement, according to McDowell. Furthermore, McDowell's data of experience would be a matter of thinkable contents, whereas for Lewis, experience of reality involves two inextricably intertwined elements which can, nonetheless, be separated by analysis: namely, the given and ineffable presentation, and the element of conceptual interpretation. The difference between Lewis and McDowell, therefore, breaks down to a difference of when and how active conceptualization of experience takes place, and whether the content of experience is only one thing (conceptual content) or one thing that can be abstracted into two elements, the given and the interpretation.

The crucial point for McDowell is that our receptivity is passive, and the contents of this receptivity are in rational relation to our whole space of reasons. McDowell emphasizes that we must not think of the sphere of our understanding (our conceptual sphere) as having a limit or a boundary, "...with a reality outside the boundary impinging inward on the system."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Also, he discusses the problem of the boundary in relation to the need to ground empirical knowledge throughout a sphere of justification. He talks about how we can "...point out from the sphere of thinking, at features of the world." There is a problem (invoking the myth of the Given) *only* if "...we suppose this pointing would have to break out through a boundary that encloses the sphere of thinkable content."⁴⁹

In this context, he explains what he means by 'experience'. For McDowell, experience is "...receptivity in operation"⁵⁰, and also, "...experiences in general are states or occurrences in which conceptual capacities are passively drawn into operation."⁵¹ However, he expresses a different view of experience in this statement:

Experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content.⁵²

It is essential that the experience is an impression made by the world on our senses, but it is also important that the experience is an "...awareness of something independent of the experience itself."⁵³ In his emphasis on the independence of the contents of experience (in order to avoid a charge of idealism) McDowell

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 32.

has offered an ambiguous explanation of experience itself. He refers to it both as an act and as the object of an act: it is 'a state', 'receptivity in operation', 'awareness', in other words something more like an act than a thing, but it is also the 'impressions', the 'contents', the 'products of receptivity.' This is a problem in McDowell's account of experience (which is it: the act or the object?), which I will return to later. But for now, the question is how can the 'stuff' of experience be something independent of thought and at the same time be made up of the same stuff as thought, namely, conceptual contents?

The answer, according to McDowell, requires a clearer understanding of the word 'thought.' This is an ambiguous word, in that it can refer to an act or it can refer to the content of an act. (But we have seen that McDowell has ignored a similar ambiguity in the word 'experience'). The content of our receptivity (our experience) *is* outside the sphere of our thinking and judging (the act) but it is *not* outside of what is *thinkable*. The content of experience is a thinkable content. This means that impressions of the world on our senses are thinkable contents, and our thinking can find its justification in these rational items. McDowell says that we must maintain that reality is independent of our thinking, and it cannot be so if the impressions made by reality on our receptivity are equated with our thinking (our spontaneity). In his words, we would "...slight the independence of reality if we equated facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities - acts of

thinking", and also "...if we equated perceptible facts in particular with states or occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in sensibility -- experiences." But, he says, we maintain the independence of reality if we say "...that perceptible facts are essentially capable of impressing themselves on perceivers in states or occurrences" in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation -- namely, experiences.⁵⁴ In short, we cannot equate perceptible facts with experiences (as acts or states), but we can admit that they impress themselves on us in experience.

But do we not have just another expression of dualism here? The world, according to McDowell, impresses itself on our faculties of receptivity in experience, and so we have two things: the world 'out there' and our conceptual sphere 'in here'. To avoid this dualism, McDowell claims that 'thinking' and 'thought' have the same nature. He says that the world's impressions on our receptivity are not 'made of a different sort of stuff' than the stuff of our conceptual sphere. Our receptivity receives impressions that comprise facts, thinkable contents, and this means that the world comes to us as something conceptual. Since this is not a different 'stuff' from our thinking, the world's impressions on our receptivity are in rational relations to our understanding, the spontaneity of our knowledge. Thus our experience is awareness of something independent of experience, and yet it is comprised of something

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 28.

that comes in the same mode of being as the whole system of our thoughts -- namely, thinkable contents.

Problems and Criticisms

Has McDowell made a convincing case for his view that experience involves conceptual contents? There are some problems with his explanation. Michael Williams points out that McDowell has not kept his own picture free of the very error that he sets out to criticize when he talks of experiences that are ultimate in the order of justification. According to Williams:

...this talk of 'ultimate contents' and 'manifest facts' shows that McDowell has not fully broken with the Myth of the Given. Rather, he adds the proviso that what is given has to be infused with meaning, if it is to exert rational control over our beliefs. 'Thinkable contents' are what must be given, and if we want to avoid a collapse into idealism we must allow such contents to belong to the world. Thus the world comes to be populated with *quasi*-linguistic objects.⁵⁵

Williams believes that McDowell's argument is saddled with the problems that plague foundationalist views. As soon as we require ultimate justifications for our beliefs, we are stuck with the problem of explaining the relation between our experience of the world and our knowledge. The problem is always one of explaining the nature of experience. We have seen that McDowell gives definitions of experience that involve an act-object ambiguity, and that this adds up to an unsatisfactory account of the nature of experience and the role that it plays.

⁵⁵ Williams, "Exorcism and Enchantment," in the Philosophical Quarterly, January 1996: p. 106.

Is experience a state or operation of receptivity, in which case we can locate it somehow 'in' or of ourselves? Or is it the 'impressions of the world' or the content of receptivity, in which case it is somehow 'of' a reality external to ourselves? In experience, do we reach out to reality or does it come flooding in to us? These questions echo the problem of experience being 'my experience' or being 'the experienced world.' McDowell's answer can be inferred from his claim that the problem of mind and world is a matter of how thought bears 'on' reality. He does not say that it is a matter of the relation of thought 'to' reality. Thus it would seem that McDowell is arguing in favour of the view that experience imposes a structure on the world, not that it just receives the world or is in a neutral relation to the world. (Even when McDowell talks about experience being a passive reception of impacts from the world, the status of these impacts is not delved into; rather, it is the 'how' of the receptivity that is his focus of interest). This explains McDowell's preoccupation with concepts and conceptual contents. He claims that experience is a state or occurrence involving thinkable contents (or quasi-linguistic entities, as Williams puts it) which implies a minimal, even perfunctory, attention on the part of McDowell to the rôle of the world somehow having an impact on our senses which our experience registers. His claim that experience be an awareness of something independent of the experience itself rings hollow here. If experience is not a matter of registering impressions 'caused'

by the world (in other words, the Given) but is rather a matter of passive states involving thinkable contents, then our acts (which are not really acts but are occurrences or states) of experience (our conscious experience) and the contents of our experience are the same thing. Since the contents of experience must belong to the world if we are to avoid idealism, it follows that the world, experience, and the conceptual sphere are all made up of the same thing, i.e. thinkable contents. This bears an uncanny similarity to the claims of Bradley and James when they maintain that conscious experience and the object of experience (the content) are not distinct things in immediate experience, although McDowell's motives are fundamentally different from Bradley's and James'.

McDowell's discussion of the problem of mind and world frames the discourse on experience in a contemporary context. In my conclusion, I will rely on a number of his ideas to show how a theory of immediate experience can incorporate some of McDowell's insights.

CHAPTER 5 - SYNOPSIS AND SYNTHESIS

The Problem

So far, we have been looking at a particular philosophical question, namely, is there immediate experience? In the course of looking at this question, the views of a number of philosophers have been examined, philosophers who have written about a primordial state of pre-conceptual experience or who have considered experience as the immediate perception of, or contact with, the world.

Throughout the survey of this topic, we have found it necessary to examine related issues such as what constitutes experience in general, how does experience bring the world into relation with our knowledge, what is the given, and does our knowledge of the world rest on basic, non-inferential experiences that serve as justifications for our whole system of knowing.

But these questions are the surface beneath which lies a deeper, more fundamental issue. This more fundamental problem arises out of the fact that in our ordinary experience, in those conscious states where we work and eat and talk to each other and go shopping and drive cars and so on, it appears that we are beings who perceive, are aware, think and in other ways 'know' the world, and on the other side there seems to be a world somehow 'out there,' outside of ourselves, outside of our perceiving, thinking and knowing, a world which we somehow 'find' or which is given to us, but which is forever separate from us,

our conscious thinking, or our minds. This is a problem in that we are led to ask, what is the relation between these two things, mind and world, and how can we claim we truly 'know' the world?

Knowledge of the world is a problem if the world is a different 'stuff,' not the same material as our thoughts of the world, because then it seems we cannot know the world (in McDowell's terms, the world cannot be in rational relations to our minds, cannot connect to the 'space of reasons'). But also, knowledge is a problem because, unless the world *is* something other than, and outside of, our minds, then we cannot be said to 'know' it. That is, for something to constitute a case of 'knowledge about,' there must be a cognitive consciousness apprehending an object of the knowing, and the object of knowledge must be 'outside' of the knowing of it in order for it to be knowledge at all.

So the problem is that, in order for our knowledge to be genuine knowledge, not to be, as Lewis says, 'contentless and arbitrary'¹, there must be two things, mind and world (and the relation between them):

...unless the content of knowledge is recognized to have a condition independent of the mind, the peculiar significance of knowledge is likely to be lost. For the purpose of knowledge is to be true to something which is beyond it.²

¹ Mind and the World Order, p. 39.

² *ibid.*, p. 191.

But if the content is independent of, something other than, or 'outside' of mind, how can it enter into a relation with the rational sphere, and how can it be, itself, a reason for the mind's knowledge of it? If the object is made of a different 'stuff' than mind, if it is not itself some kind of rational material (as thought is), how can it partake of the rational? How can it be a reason if it is not the stuff of reason?

We have a primary difficulty when we try to explain how mind knows the world. For knowledge, we need a dichotomy between mind and world, and yet that dichotomy is intolerable in that it renders knowledge impossible.

A theory of experience is essential to our examination of this problem. In order to clear up philosophical problems concerning knowledge, we must utilize what Lewis calls the 'datum of philosophy' which is generally recognized to be experience. Experience is the source of our knowledge of mind and world, and of the reconciliation of the problem whether knowledge depends on dualism or is vitiated by it.

In particular, a theory of immediate experience has been proposed as a solution to the problem of the dichotomy of mind and world, that is, as a way to get rid of the dichotomy in so far as it is unworkable and yet takes into account that it is necessary for knowledge. Immediate experience offers a possible explanation of how knowledge can fulfil the need to be about a world external to the experiencing subject, and yet not involve an unworkable dichotomy of mind and world.

Synopsis of Views of the Problem

To elaborate on this problem, I have surveyed those philosophers in recent history who are representative of various views on experience and the paradox of the dichotomy. When we summarize their approaches to the problem, we find that the description each gives of the dichotomy is somewhat different. But though their descriptions differ, the problem remains the same.

Green, for example, notes that reality is supposed to be what is independent of our minds. He says that we think

...of the understanding as specially an agency of our own, and of the objective world as specially that which is presented to us independently of any such agency; as that which we find and do not make, and by which we have to correct the fictions of our own minds.³

However, this antithesis between 'the known or knowable world and the subject capable of knowing it' is, Green claims, quite untenable. The known or knowable world is known as related objects of experience, but the relations that unite the objects of experience exist in the consciousness (of these relations) which makes experience consist of related objects for the knowing subject. To claim the world is independent of mind renders knowledge inexplicable because

...[i]t leaves us without an answer to the question, how the order of relations, which the mind sets up, comes to reproduce those relations of the material world which are assumed to be of a wholly different origin and nature.⁴

³ Green, Prolegomena to Ethics, p. 16.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 36.

In other words, mind and world (knower and known) are supposed to be two different things in order for what is known to be independent of the knowing of it, so that it is not just a 'fiction'. And yet, this dichotomy of mind and world is untenable because the relations established in the content of knowledge are not the same as the relations in the world which is known (they have a different origin and nature). This dichotomy is acknowledged by Green to appear to be necessary and yet to render knowledge impossible.

James' objection to the dichotomy of mind and world is somewhat different. He has his own theory of knowledge, which he opposes to those explanations of his contemporaries in which

...the consciousness is one element, moment, factor...of an experience of essentially dualistic inner constitution, from which, if you abstract the content,⁵ the consciousness will remain revealed to its own eye.

James finds such dualism problematic and flatly denies that 'consciousness,' as an entity, exists. He argues that we cannot abstract from our experience so that our consciousness will stand revealed to its own eye. Experience, in its 'pure' state, is not like that: it is not a dualism of consciousness plus content. Viewing experience dualistically results in the impossibility of explaining "the paradox that what is evidently one reality should be in two places at once, both in outer space and in a person's mind."⁶ We can see how this paradox is related to the problem

⁵ James, Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 8.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 11.

as I have described it. If there is one reality, and yet it is supposed to be both in space and in a person's mind at the same time, how can it be one thing and yet have two natures? And for the problem of knowledge, how can these things comprising two natures be in a relation to each other such that one of them (consciousness) can be said to know the other (objects in space)? Despite this problem, James admits that dualism is considered necessary to common sense because

...[w]ere there no perceptual world which...by being 'stronger' and more genuinely 'outer' (so that the whole merely thought-of world seems weak and inner in comparison), our world of thought would be the only world, and would enjoy complete reality in our belief.

He acknowledges the necessity of a dualism of inner (thought) and outer (objects of perception) to guarantee the reality of the perceived world and not confine reality merely to the world of our thought. He also claims that "...conceptual knowledge is made such wholly by the existence of things that fall outside of the knowing experience itself -- by intermediary experiences and by a terminus that fulfills..."⁸ However, he argues against the immanent dualism of experience to posit an alternative theory, in which experience is latterly viewed as knowing subject or as thing known according to context. He says this gives a better account than one which relies on the primordial dualism of experience thereby dividing reality into two exclusive natures.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 67.

Bradley's concern is not with the problem of knowledge in the face of the paradox of the dichotomy. He is more concerned with our understanding of reality, and since we often find error and illusion in our endeavour to know the real, we are obviously limited to appearance and not reality. His first principle is that the real is whatever does not involve contradiction. In this sense, he is also concerned with the difficulty of knowledge because it involves a contradiction.

Bradley characterizes dualism (the dichotomy of mind and world) as the view that there are two regions, one comprising ourselves and our experience (knowledge) and the other made up of things in themselves:

...we have on one side phenomena, in other words, things as they are to us, and ourselves so far as we are anything to ourselves; while on the other side are Things as they are in themselves and as they do not appear; or if we please, we may call this side the Unknowable.⁹

The implausibility of this view is obvious, according to Bradley. It leads to the absurdity that, if it is true, then truth is unknowable, and so we cannot know that it is true, leading to the fact that it would render itself impossible. Dualism thus involves a contradiction and cannot explain the real; and yet we have the problem of how we know reality, which for Bradley means the problem of the nature of judgement. He says that in judgement, "...we find always the distinction of fact and truth, of idea and reality." This is necessarily so because,

⁹ Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 110.

"...[t]ruth and thought are not the thing itself, but are of it and about it."¹⁰ The division between thought and its object is, for Bradley, essential for thought, but is nevertheless impossible, because it leads to absurdity. This absurdity constitutes the fundamental problem of the dichotomy of mind and world being seemingly necessary¹¹ and yet untenable.

Price does not consider the dichotomy of mind and world to be problematic. He claims that sense-data are the indubitable items presented to our consciousnesses (they are the given) in our sensory experience of the world. Hence, they are the foundations for our beliefs about material things, and the dualism implied in such an account does not bother him. Price denies that sense-data are physical things, because then they would not have the character they have. They could not 'present' the world to us, and we see that they do not necessarily 'belong' to a material object, as is evident from illusions and hallucinations. But they also are not 'mental' because they must be other than mind in order to present the world to mind. Price says, (for example), that "...being striped is not at all like the being aware of what is striped."¹² Price sees no problem in

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 148.

¹¹ But not necessary for knowledge. Bradley would claim that this division does not give ultimate knowledge, because ultimate knowledge is knowledge of the Absolute, (if knowledge of the Absolute is possible). Thus, we can only approximate ultimate knowledge or, in his terms, achieve a 'degree of truth.'

¹² Price, Perception, p. 118.

the dualism of mind and world because for him sense-data provide the bridge between the two:

...a sense-datum is...not an event inhering in any one thing, because it is so intimately related to several different things at once: on the one hand, to the thing to which it 'belongs' and which it enables us to be perceptually conscious of; on the other, to the brain and mind of the sentient.¹³

Price accepts the dichotomy between mind and world and proposes sense-data as the neutral stuff given to us in our experience of the world.

Lewis directly addresses what he calls the relativity of knowledge (that is, that the object of knowledge depends on the mind) and how this relativity can be compatible with the independence of the object. For Lewis, the problem is this:

If the real object can be known at all, it can be known only in its relation to a mind; and if the mind were different the nature of the object as known might well be different. Nevertheless the description of the object as known is a true description of an independent reality.¹⁴

The object known must be independent of mind, and yet known only in relation to mind, making the dichotomy necessary, and yet in need of explanation to reconcile the apparent paradox. Lewis gives an analysis of the two elements of cognitive experience, namely the given and its interpretation, in order to show that knowledge requires the data of sense to supply the content, but that this content would be meaningless without the interpretation

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁴ *op. cit.*, p. 155.

or construction imposed by mind, and so the two are necessarily related.

Sellars, as we have seen, attacks sense-datum theories involving a 'given'. He says that, according to classical sense-datum theories, the given is supposed to be non-epistemic (i.e., an object or phenomenon which is independent of mind), and yet it is supposed to be the foundation of knowledge. How, Sellars asks, can our knowledge depend on, or come out of, an act of sensing particulars? If sensing is taken to be a knowing, then it depends on previous knowledge for us to have a sensation and know that it is the sensation that we take it to be. But then sensing would depend on knowledge, not the other way around. In order for knowing to depend on sensing, the sensing would have to be non-cognitive (because knowing is supposed to depend on something non-inferential). But if it were non-cognitive, then we could not know that the sense-data we are sensing *is* the sense-data we take it to be. In other words, how can epistemic facts be analyzed into non-epistemic facts?

Sellars makes the point that the object known must be in relation to the 'space of reasons', that knowledge is, through and through, conceptual, and that the perceptual depends on the conceptual, not the other way around. However, our perceptual knowledge is of physical objects in the world that cause us to have 'impressions,' and so he affirms the dichotomy. But our perceptions are 'in the space of reasons' because they are

conceptual, making the dichotomy harmless. In this way, Sellars attempts to straddle the dichotomy.

McDowell claims that the main problem facing philosophy today is the alternation between a theory involving a coherentism and a theory that utilizes a given. He admits the appeal of the given for a theory of knowledge because, "...judgements of experience must be grounded in a way that relates them to a reality external to thought...", and "...there must be such grounding if experience is to be a source of knowledge."¹⁵ Thus the world must be, somehow, external to thought (mind) if there is to be knowledge at all, and the dichotomy appears necessary. On the other hand, the dichotomy poses problems in that, if the given comes from a realm outside thought, the given only ensures that we cannot be blamed for its influence on our thought, but it cannot serve as a justification (in McDowell's words, it undermines our freedom and our responsibility in our cognitive acts). Thus, McDowell admits the necessity of the dichotomy and yet, if it leads to the theory of the given, it results in something useless for its purpose.

In this overview of approaches to the problem, we find certain similarities. That is, the problem is framed in terms of a necessary dichotomy of 'knower' and 'known' so that knowledge can be truly 'knowledge about,' acknowledging the dependence that the object of knowledge has on mind and yet asserting its

¹⁵ Mind and World, p. 5.

independence, and trying to come to grips with problems inherent in a dualism of mind and world.

I will now turn to solutions proposed and some of the problems involved in them.

Some Solutions - What Works and What Doesn't

In order to reconcile the need for a dichotomy of mind and world with its untenability for knowledge, we must look to a theory of experience. It is in experience that we find the relation of mind and world, and experience is, as Bradley says, the "...present foundation of my known world" and "...that...with which knowledge begins."¹⁶

There is a problem at the outset that needs to be addressed, and that is the problem of what is meant by the term 'experience'. As many philosophers have acknowledged, there is an ambiguity and unclarity about 'experience' that makes it difficult to analyze. Green, as we have already seen, cautions that "...experience is a term used in very different senses."¹⁷ For him, experience is taken to be conscious experience, and thus he does not include states in which something has occurred to a subject in such a way that there is no awareness of the occurrence (or the state). Following Green, we will also limit the term 'conscious experience' to 'experience of matters of fact

¹⁶ Essays On Truth and Reality, p. 159-160._

¹⁷ Prolegomena to Ethics, p. 19.

*recognized as such.*¹⁸ But the very fact that the term 'conscious experience' involves an adjective, 'conscious,' to modify the term 'experience,' implies that there is another kind of experience that is not conscious. For now we will leave it open whether there is a wider meaning for the term 'experience.'

The word 'experience' is also a problem for McDowell, as I indicated in chapter four. Sometimes he refers to experience as receptivity or awareness, which implies that it is an occurrence or state of the consciousness 'having' the experience (and actually *is* the 'having'), and sometimes he refers to it as 'impressions' or 'the content of receptivity', implying that it is the stuff or the object 'had' in this state. This ambiguity is, of course, at the heart of the matter, since it underlies the problem whether experience comprises an object independent of mind or is a process of rational understanding in an act of awareness. As T.S. Eliot observes, we can handle it "...as an adjective of either subject or object side, as *my* experience, or as the experienced world."¹⁹

But the dualism implied in this ambiguous account of experience is the very problem that must be overcome. If experience is to be identified with a content, the 'object of experience,' then there is a need to account for its being something from outside our rational sphere which is alien and

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Knowledge and Experience, p. 19.

non-epistemic and hence, not something that could form part of our rational understanding. If experience is identified with an act or state of the experiencing subject, then we must find some way to ensure that experience is not a self-contained system, a 'frictionless spinning in a void' as McDowell calls it, with no external constraints. We must account for the fact that if experience is going to ground our knowledge, it must be experience 'of' something, and thus we must explain how the world, independent of the conscious experiencer, exercises an external control on our understanding. In a theory of experience, the explanation of the nature of 'experience' must reflect the fact that knowledge depends on a dichotomy between mind and world, and yet cannot be explained in terms of this dichotomy.

We will now try to assemble a view of experience taking into account the problem of the dichotomy and synthesizing common elements from the survey of views on the topic. We will begin with the most recent of the solutions proposed to this problem, namely, McDowell's. As we have seen, McDowell claims that experience is not a matter of an extra-conceptual given, but rather, it is a "kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content". He also says that impressions, the "impingements by the world on our sensibility", already possess conceptual content. By this he means that our experience is not of a bare datum, but is of a fact of the form "that things are thus and so", which constitute thinkable contents. In this way,

the content of experience will be conceptual, and so our receptivity will not be outside the space of reasons (the sphere of concepts). At the same time, our receptivity will be passively taking in contents from an external world, and so there will still be a constraint on our knowledge from outside that knowledge.

But McDowell's theory would not be acceptable to other philosophers, some of whom would maintain that there *is* a given of unconceptual sense-data in the face of McDowell's criticism. Defending his theory of the given from just such an argument as McDowell's, Price says that such arguments against the given claim that everything we apprehend is always a fact. As we have seen, he characterizes this form of the 'anti-given' argument as saying that "...you cannot apprehend a round red patch without apprehending that it is red and round and has certain spatial relations."²⁰

This does sound like a version of the argument that our experience is 'that things are thus and so.' And Price does not think it is a relevant argument. It does not prove that there is no given at all, it only proves that "...nothing stands *merely* in the relation of givenness to the mind, without also standing in other relations: i.e., that what is given is always also 'thought about' in some sense or other of that ambiguous phrase."²¹ In

²⁰ Perception, p. 7.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 7.

other words, Price agrees that what is given to the mind may be in the form of a fact, 'that things are thus and so', but this does not deny that there *is* a given, it just stipulates what form that it must take.

If Price were challenged by McDowell, he would retort that McDowell has not himself escaped the appeal of the given, and his 'impingements from the world' already possessed of conceptual content are just another version of the given. We have seen that Michael Williams makes much the same observation when he says that McDowell has not fully broken with the Myth of the Given.

McDowell would not consider his use of the given to be a problem, because he believes that he has modified it in order to serve the purpose for which it was intended. For him it is not something that is extra-conceptual or experienced outside the space of reasons. He says he has a "different notion of givenness, one that is innocent of the confusion between justification and exculpation."²² Perhaps McDowell's different notion of givenness is innocent of this problem, but does it escape implying a problematic and unnecessary dualism?

McDowell says that the contents of experience are already conceptual, are 'thinkable contents'. Are these thinkable contents, then, what reality is made up of? When I enter a room and see that the cat is on the mat, is the reality here made up of a fact, 'the cat is on the mat', or is it made up of a living

²² Mind and World, p. 10.

furry cat and a mat and a room and other objects around them? It seems there is still some explanation needed to account for the relation between facts that constitute the contents of thought and facts that are the organized non-mental objects in the world.

McDowell admits the need for our judgements to be related to a reality 'external to thought'. He also claims that the objects of the world are not thoughts, but they are 'thinkable'. In this way, he asserts that the world is rationally related to our minds in experience, because our thoughts are in relation to the thinkable contents of receptivity. However, the idea of these 'thinkable contents', these facts that make up the world, can still be puzzling. There is the question of whether "...the world is made up (not of the sort of thing one can think, but rather) the *sorts of things one can think about*."²³ In other words, even if we grant that the world is made up of facts, how can they be the same facts that make up the contents of our thoughts? The contents of our thoughts are facts in the sense of things that we can think, whereas the world would be made up of facts in the sense of things that we can think about.

There are two ways of looking at facts. In one way, facts are items of true beliefs (things that are known to be true) and in another way, they are the actual objects that altogether make up reality. It is not clear if the contents of our experience are items of true belief or the organized non-mental objects of

²³ Paul M. Pietrowski, Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 1996; p. 628.

the world in McDowell's account, but he appears to want to collapse them into one. He maintains "...[t]hat things are thus and so is the content of the experience..." and he follows this with "...that things are thus and so is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are."²⁴ In other words, facts are constitutive both of our experience and of the world. And yet, McDowell wants to maintain that reality is independent of thought and our conceptual sphere is informed by this reality; there is still a dualism of mind and world in McDowell's account. This dualism is uncomfortable because what our minds know by means of experience, i.e. that things are thus and so, and what constitutes the world, i.e. that things are thus and so, appear to be the same. How can there be two distinct things, the conceptual sphere and the world, if they are essentially the same thing, i.e. 'that things are thus and so'?

If our experience and the world are made of the same stuff, why not take this view to its logical conclusion and consider the possibility that experience and the world are not in need of relation because essentially they are the same thing? If the world is made up of facts, and experience is equated with the contents of experience (which happen to be facts), then the world and experience are the same. This is a possible way to reconcile the various problems involved in McDowell's account of 'thinkable

²⁴ Mind and World, p. 26.

contents', but it is highly unlikely that he would ever equate reality with experience. McDowell appears to need the dualistic nature of experience, as both an act on our part or a state of ourselves and as the content comprising the impingements of the world, in order to make his point that we exercise the responsible freedom of the spontaneity of our judgement (our thought has a bearing on the world), and yet assert that the world exerts a rational control on our thought in experience. I think he would dislike an account that claimed experience to be reality, because it would, in the context of his explanation, deny us our freedom.

Nevertheless, McDowell's account leaves us with what is arguably an uncomfortable dualism because it is not easily reconciled with the apparent identity of the content of experience with the world. Also, as I shall discuss in the next section, perhaps his explanation of how concepts mediate the relation of mind and world is unnecessary. He is one of those philosophers who sometimes talk about experience as *my* experience and sometimes as the experienced world. But this ignores the fact that experience is *one thing*. T.S. Eliot says that when philosophers apply these metaphors, they are employing a "construction out of experience" and "importing meanings which hold good only *within* experience".²⁵

²⁵ Knowledge and Experience, p. 19.

We will now examine a possible theory of immediate experience that reconciles the unity of experience with the dichotomy of mind and world necessary for 'knowledge about.' This will not rely on the view that concepts mediate the relation between mind and world, but on the view that the relation between mind and world is a conceptual construction derived from, and originating in, immediate experience.

A Synthesis of Views of Immediate Experience

In this section, I will examine 'immediate experience' as possibly giving an account of experience that avoids a problematic dualism and yet forms the basis of the dichotomy of mind and world necessary for knowledge. To do this, I will incorporate features of Bradley's and James' views, discuss how immediate experience is organized according to context in the process of becoming relational experience, and look at how immediate experience is non-relational despite the fact that it grounds relational experience.

Immediate experience, as Bradley describes it, is such that "...there is no distinction between my awareness and that of which it is aware."²⁶ James designates it "...the instant field of the present", and says that "...[i]t is only virtually or potentially either object or subject as yet."²⁷ Hence, there

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 159.

²⁷ Essays in Radical Empiricism, p. 23.

is no distinction between mind and world in immediate experience and thus, no dualism that needs to be overcome.

But if there is no dualism of mind and world, how does the world exert a constraint on our thinking, so that our knowledge is truly 'about' a world external to thought?

It is here that McDowell's insight (about the necessity of experience being already possessed of conceptual content) comes into play. Immediate experience does not remain immediate very long. In the context of the whole of our experience, there is a focus of attention which is grounded in, and supplemented by, the merely immediate. This focus of attention is the realm of perception and conception, but it is antedated by, and has as its basis, immediate experience. The whole of experience is the totality of both immediate and selected 'ordinary' experience that forms the focus of attention. Immediate experience is a unity of experiential act and object of experience, an undifferentiated much-at-once, and a non-relational co-existing mass. Out of this mass is selected specific perceptual material which forms the focus of attention, some of which is habitually present and thus forms the basis for more conscious attention. This selection out of the original immediate experience, the attending to aspects of it, or the construction of 'my experience' and 'the experienced world' that is abstracted out of immediate experience, depends on the context. We select or attend or become aware of the constructed dichotomy because the

experience occurs in a context which determines what other experiences it will be related to:

Subjectivity and objectivity are not attributes of primeval experience, but rather the results of a later classification. This classification is a result of our interests and temporary purposes; according to the context, different sets of relations come into play...We relocate experiences and group them with different sets of associates according to our practical or intellectual ends.²⁸

So the original immediate experience, in which there is no subject-object dichotomy, no awareness of 'my conscious experience' as distinct from 'the object I am conscious of in experience', is split up and put into a relational framework, for practical reasons, because that is the way we need to conceive reality in order to survive, to manage, or just to make sense of it. And the reason it is possible for immediate experience to undergo this splitting up, by means of the mediation of concepts, into consciousness and the content of consciousness, experiencing subject and the object the experience is 'of', (mind and world), is because it is capable of being conceptualized in the first place. Immediate experience is made up of thinkable contents, things that we can eventually actively apply concepts to because its content, although pre-conceptual, is incipiently conceptual (it is conceptualizable). But we are not aware of this character of experience in its immediate state. It is only after immediate experience has been classified, split up, put into a relational framework, and thus no longer immediate, that we are aware of it

²⁸ Seigfried, *ibid.*, p. 45.

as determined conceptually. Also, after experience has been conceptualized, the conceptual content, (which was pre-conceptual in its immediate state) is actualized as conceptual content. This is how immediate experience can have pre-conceptual content that is nevertheless conceptual. But the point is, it could not be determined conceptually if it were not already something with conceptual content, something 'conceptualizable'. You cannot think something that is not thinkable, and you cannot apply concepts to something (experience) that is not conceptualizable.

Immediate experience is mediated by our concepts into normal relational experience (in which we are aware of mind and world, subject and object, consciousness and content) because it is conceptualizable. Although we are not aware of it as such *in* immediate experience, we can infer that immediate experience has thinkable content and is conceptualizable because it has been mediated by concepts when it is organized into normal discursive experience. This agrees with McDowell's claim that experience possesses conceptual content, but with the modification that it is *immediate* experience that possesses conceptualizable content whereas mediated experience (normal relational experience) has had concepts actively applied to it to become conscious experience comprised of the dichotomy of mind and world. This way, we avoid any awkward dualism in primordial experience; it is only after the experience has been put in a relational framework (mediated) that we are conscious of a dichotomy. As it is in its immediate state, experience is not dualistic, it just *is*. The

dichotomy of mind and world is there only after an act of attention or construction thus construes it, and actualizes it as conceptualized, relational experience.

This is not to say that mind and world are not there *before* the act of attention and conceptualizing distinguishes them. But mind and world are not there *as such*, as something dichotomized, but are, rather, a unity or whole of experience. As Bradley would say, our attention has not made the object of our experience:

My present attention is in my power, but there are certain things, I find, that will not follow from my present attention. And, generalizing this, I conclude that, *prima facie* and apart from special evidence, attention does not alter its object.²⁹

Thus we can maintain that what is found in conceptualized experience (in the relational framework) was there in pre-conceptualized form in immediate experience, but was not there *as such*, that is, as we find it after it has been conceptualized. Mind and world exist in immediate experience but not as a dichotomy of mind (as something distinct from world) and world (as something distinct from mind).

The content of immediate experience and the content of conceptualized, relational experience is the same content except for the form it takes. In immediate experience, there is one mass or flux of undistinguished content. In conceptualized experience, there is the subjective sense of 'having' the

²⁹ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 164.

experience separate from all the different objects that make up the content of the experience that one is having; there is consciousness and content, there is mind and world. They were there in pre-conceptualized experience but in a different state, just as small blocks of stone cut out of a large block were 'there' before the large block was cut up but in a different form, as the united whole of the large block, rather than as each one a distinct small block, apart from all the other blocks that originally composed the one large stone. In this way the dichotomy exists only in conceptualized relational experience, but what is experienced as dichotomized was always there in a unity prior to the dichotomy.

A critic of immediate experience might point out that this theory has the same problem as Price's conception of the 'given'. Price defended his view from the criticism that attention changes the object of perception; he says that the *object* is not changed, only the mode of apprehension is changed. But his argument is unconvincing because it leaves us with the sceptical view that the object we know by attending to it may not be the same object that is 'given' to us. And if the objects of immediate experience are in a non-dichotomized unity which is broken up in conceptualized experience to yield many things in relation, how can we be sure that reality as it is in immediacy is the same as reality as it is in conceptualized experience? Doesn't conceptualization alter the object?

The answer is that there is *no* isolated, distinct 'object' in immediate experience and so the object of conceptualized experience cannot be different from itself in immediacy. In Price's theory, the object that is 'given' and the object that is attended to are supposed to be the same, but there is a dualism of subject and object in both cases. The object is given to a passive subject in the first case and the object is actively apprehended by the subject in the second case, and we can never be certain that the active apprehension has not altered the object. But there is no dualism of subject and object in immediate experience, there is only experience. The objects of conceptualized experience cannot be different from what they were in immediacy, just as the smaller blocks cut out of a large block of stone cannot be different blocks from what they were before they were cut out. The blocks were part of the large block before they were cut out, but they weren't 'there' as cut-out smaller blocks. Likewise, the objects in relation in conceptualized experience cannot be different from the objects in the unity of immediate experience as a result of a change in the mode of relation since immediate experience is a non-relational whole.

The statement that immediate experience is a non-relational whole requires further explanation. If the objects of conceptualized experience are not different from what they were in immediacy, how can there be no relations in immediacy? When we experience objects in conceptualized, mediated experience,

they are experienced as being in relation to each other. If immediate experience is non-relational, there would not be distinct objects in relation to other distinct objects and it should be the case that what is experienced immediately cannot be the same as that which is experienced conceptually. Hence, the objects in conceptualized experience cannot be the same as they were in immediacy because they were not experienced as parted and joined by relations (which is the condition of our experiencing them as objects).

The key to understanding how immediate experience is a non-relational whole whose content, when experienced conceptually, consists of objects in relation, is to remember that immediate experience is a *whole*. It is true that a whole is made up of its parts, but we must ask about the relations involved between the parts that go together to make a whole and the relation that exists between the whole and its parts. These relations, I will argue, are not standard, and can be viewed as not being relations at all.

To explain the relation of the parts that make up a whole, and the relations of the whole to its parts (and, conversely, the parts to the whole), requires a digression. The problem of relations has often been seen in terms of the question whether they are external or internal. I will not delve into the history of this debate but will concentrate on relevant aspects. More specifically, I will rely on Timothy Sprigge's modifications to the theory of internal relations, in which he claims there is a

division between two senses of that term: these two senses are 'ideal relations' and 'holistic relations.' Ideal relations are those in which terms are in relation as a matter of the essential character or nature of the terms. That is, because of the essence or inherent properties of the terms, they exist in relation to each other. Sprigge's example of this is the relation of 'being brighter than.'³⁰ A piece of red cloth is brighter than another piece of red cloth because of the properties of the cloth and the brightness of the shades of red involved. That is, the inherent properties of the two pieces of cloth ground the relation between them, and the relation is determined by these inherent properties.³¹ But Sprigge's idea of holistic relations is of more significance for an explanation of the non-relational character of immediate experience. Sprigge gives this definition:

By a holistic relation, I mean one the holding of which between existences is a matter of their jointly forming, or along with other existences helping to form, a more comprehensive existence in which they are each components, and to the over-all character of which each makes a distinctive contribution.³²

In a holistic relation, the terms in relation form a unity, and the unity is a more genuine individual than any of the terms alone, abstracted and considered to be distinct entities.

³⁰ Sprigge, The Vindication of Absolute Idealism, p. 181.

³¹ Sprigge's conception of 'ideal relation' is similar, if not equivalent, to the sixth sense of 'internal relation' given by Ewing in his book Idealism: A Critical Survey, pp. 126-130.

³² Sprigge, *ibid.*, p. 187.

Sprigge's example is two lines that form a right angle, perhaps as found in a triangle. He claims that, what we are perceptually aware of when presented with two lines forming an angle is the over-all shape of the angle itself. The angle is 'a more comprehensive existence' than either of its components, that is, each line considered alone. We can also consider an example of Bradley's, namely, a green leaf.³³ When we are perceptually aware of the leaf, we are aware of it as a whole entity, not as a relation between its green-ness and its shape. The leaf is a more genuine individual than its components, and the components form this more comprehensive entity, the green leaf.

To acknowledge Sprigge's conception of holistic relations is not to admit that there *are* relations in immediate experience which happen to be holistic relations. This would make immediate experience somehow relational, defeating the claim that it is non-relational. However, the appeal to holistic relations is useful for explaining how something which is first experienced as a whole can, through analysis and abstraction, be experienced as consisting of terms in relation. If it is granted that much of experience consists of presented wholes that are more comprehensive than the parts that make them up, the way is paved for an understanding of immediate experience as the whole of

³³ "I do not understand how any thinking person can maintain that in the objects, which in sensuous perception we take as one, the unity is throughout experienced as relational and that, say, in a green leaf the green-ness and the other perceived qualities are not unified apart from relational couplings." Bradley, Collected Essays, p. 656.

experience, prior to and the basis of experience of its abstracted parts.

Holistic relations hold between parts of presented unities in our experience. But what about the whole of immediate experience? If the whole of experience is, at first, a seamless flux out of which there are later carved things in relation, what is the relation between this whole of immediate experience and the conceptualized experience realized through analysis? It appears that our conceptualized experience consists of a great many unities, themselves consisting of components in holistic relations, and all these unities in relation to each other. Whether there are any true 'external' relations in conceptualized experience will not form part of the present discussion. What I wish to consider is the relation of the unities, as abstracted component parts of the whole of experience, to the whole.

Here again I will follow Sprigge, who considers a whole as not really being in relation to its parts, nor the parts as being in relation to the whole. This is because the parts that make up the whole *are* that whole, and so the relation of whole-part or part-whole would have to be a relation of identity to self. It is doubtful that we can consider a thing to be in relation to something if that something is not 'something else.' It is acceptable that χ can be in relation to γ , and that χ can be in relation to χ' , but it doesn't make sense to say that χ is in relation to χ . For example, a chair can be in relation to a table, and a chair can be in relation to itself after it has been

painted a different colour (in which case the chair has become a different version of itself) but it makes no sense to consider the chair in relation to itself as the same thing that it is. Relationship holds between terms which are, in some way, different from each other (even if the difference is a matter of the selfsame thing being a different version of itself). If it is true that a relation holds between a term and something else, then

...noting how a thing is made up of its parts, or how it has a character contributed by or constituted by some particular single part, is not noting how it stands to something else, but noting its own inherent character...Noting how a triangle is composed of its sides and the space they enclose is simply noting what it is.³⁴

Immediate experience is a whole which, when it has been broken up in conceptual experience into the discrete items in relation that make up its parts, is not related to the conceptual experience of its parts. That is, there is no standard relation between immediate experience and conceptualized experience of all that constitutes the parts of experience. Rather, in conceptual experience, we are aware of the parts that compose the whole and are, as Sprigge says, "...simply noting what it is." This is not a standard relation because the parts are not something different from the whole but are, rather, its components and thus its own inherent character.

In immediate experience itself, are there relations between the parts that compose it? It is claimed that immediate

³⁴ Sprigge, *ibid.*, p. 201.

experience is non-relational and yet, in conceptual experience, there is awareness of the parts that, originally, constituted the immediacy. How can immediate experience be non-relational and yet be made up of parts that must, somehow, have been in relation to constitute the original experience?

The answer is that, immediate experience, in its immediacy, is a whole of experience that does not consist of an awareness of component parts making up the more comprehensive whole. It is composed of a co-existing mass in which everything is given conjointly, but not as distinct things in connection to each other. It requires a shift of attention to transmute the experience from an awareness which is a whole to an awareness of parts as separate items. To illustrate this, we can return again to the example of the triangle: noting the triangle is different from noting three lines connected to each other at the corners and enclosing a particular space. It requires a dramatic shift of attention to stop being aware of the triangle as a whole and become aware of each line separately and the space enclosed by the three lines. In the same way, immediate experience is a whole in that it involves awareness of the totality and requires a shift of attention to take in the component parts. This shift of attention is, as has already been stated, accomplished according to the context in which immediate experience is conceptualized to become relational experience. But in the whole of immediate experience, there are no terms and relations as *such*. It is experience as a whole, as a totality, much as

experience of a triangle when it is first present to perception is experience of the totality, 'triangle,' not of three lines in relation enclosing a space. There are no relations *experienced as such* in immediate experience; it is feeling that is comprised of a co-existing mass forming a non-relational whole.

There is an obvious advantage to this view; there is no need to posit a relation between mind and world that might be saddled with an uncomfortable dualism. If there is no division into mind and world in immediate experience, if immediate experience just is a seamless felt whole with no distinctions, then there is no need for a relation that mediates the division between thought and thing. The content of experience does not need to be in a rational relation to mind (the realm of reason) because they are one and the same thing *in* immediate experience and there is no problem how the one thing can be in relation to the other.

Obviously, then, the content of experience is not the deliverance of an extra-conceptual reality. The object of awareness is not a 'given' in this, or in any other, sense, *in* immediate experience. Consciousness and the content are one and the same thing, the whole of experience itself, in immediate experience, and not experienced as separate things. So the content cannot be *given* to consciousness in immediate experience. It is only after the experience has been put into a relational framework that the content appears to be something given to consciousness.

A theory of immediate experience avoids problematic accounts involving a dichotomy. But how can it provide an explanation in which reality external to our thought has exercised a constraint on our thinking? How can we claim that knowledge is 'true to something which is beyond it' and yet maintain that there is immediate experience in which there is no dichotomy of mind and world?

Bradley has said that immediate experience is a 'knowing and being in one with which knowledge begins.' But there is not knowledge of reality, as such, in immediate experience. This is because there is no separation of thought and thing in this experience. So there is no relation between a knowing subject and the object of knowledge. Immediate experience, itself, does not involve knowing (as such), so how can it be that with which knowledge begins?

The answer is that, although there is no knowledge as such in immediate experience, when we attend to our experience and put it into a relational framework, it resolves itself into all the experienced phenomena that we are conscious of as experienced phenomena, and also into our consciousness of the phenomena. In this way, immediate experience is analyzed into knowing subject and object of knowledge, in the mediation that applies concepts to experience. Since immediate experience is conceptualizable, we can apply concepts to it to put it into a relational framework and experience it as consciousness and content, mind and world. It is in this mediated relational state that we experience the

world as something external to our thought, and thus, as something that our knowledge is about. Immediate experience is the beginning of our knowledge, although there is no knowledge as such in immediate experience, because immediate experience is the primordial source for the conceptualized experience in which there is knowledge. The way experience is organized when concepts are applied reflects what exists in immediate experience, although we are not conscious of it as discrete phenomena in relation to mind *in* immediate experience, and are only conscious of it as such in relational experience. However, what our knowledge is about (the experience of a world external to thought) and our knowing of it had their original in a state of immediate experience in which they were not discriminated but were part of a felt whole of reality.

Thus we see that a theory of immediate experience supplies the answer to many of the leftover puzzles of the relation of mind and world. There is no dualism in immediate experience, no dichotomy of mind and world that makes it difficult to explain how mind can know world if they are two different kinds of stuff. This also makes it easier to explain that the facts that constitute the world and the facts that are the contents of our experiences are the same. If there is no dichotomy in immediate experience, then it just follows that the facts of experience and the world are one and the same. But also, we can infer that an external reality has put a constraint on our thought because that is what we experience when immediate experience has been put into

a relational framework. In relational experience, we experience the world as an object of our knowledge, grounding our knowledge, after immediate experience has been organized into consciousness and content. And because our experience has been mediated by concepts into knowing subject and object known, we conclude that immediate experience had the original of this state of affairs, even though we were not aware of it as such. This grounding of knowledge in a reality external to our thought will be further developed below when we ask how we can have knowledge of immediate experience.

On Our Knowledge of Immediate Experience

If immediate experience is a felt whole in which there is no subject-object distinction, and there is no knowledge as such in immediate experience, how can we possibly know it?

This has been a problem for any defender of a theory of immediate experience (and many advocates of a 'given' of sense-data). If it is ineffable, what can be said about it? To paraphrase Bradley, once we make an object of immediate experience, we have made it into something it is not and it is no longer itself. And since something must be an object in order for us to know it (to be an object of our knowledge) we can never know immediate experience because it can never be an object.

To explain how we know immediate experience, we will begin with a basic assumption: namely, that the world of potential experience is more than what is encompassed in anyone's finite

experience. According to Bradley and James, reality *is* experience, but it is not just *my* experience. In Bradley's words, "...[r]eality is one, and it is experience. It is not merely *my* experience..."³⁵. Green also claims that it is just plain wrong to think that the world begins and ends with my experience. And more recently, McDowell states "...[t]he object of experience, the state of affairs experienced as obtaining, is understood as part of a whole thinkable world."³⁶ The experienceable world, the thinkable content of reality, extends much farther than the limited experience that any one of us has of it. So, often times when we shift our attention from the particular focus we have in our normal relational experience (writing, walking, talking to others, baking a cake, driving a car, what have you) and we open to other parts of our experience, to more of our reality, we find that there are a number of things that were there in our background experience but which we did not notice before we attended to them. They were part of the indiscriminated mass or flux or thinkable content, but we were not conscious of them or aware of them until we attended to them. However, they are the background material for our conscious conceptualized experience.

Normal experience is selective and normally we attend to only a small part of the whole thinkable content of the larger

³⁵ Appearance and Reality, p. 469.

³⁶ Mind and World, p. 36.

world of experience. It depends on its context how the quasi-chaos of immediate experience becomes organized into 'normal' experience:

Context, including the function of particular experiences, determines whether we shall call that experience subjective or objective; experiences do not occur already labeled. Perceptual experience, for example, is both physical and mental, and will be labeled as primarily concerning the one or the other, depending on which context of associates is emphasized.³⁷

The context of associates that determines how we apply concepts to our immediate experience and put it into a relational framework is the whole background of 'felt' reality and potential experience. What we attend to relies on organizing experience out of, and continuous with, a background of felt reality. This background functions as the context of associates by which we further develop what is immediately felt.

But what, exactly, *is* this immediate experience? How can we know there is such a thing, (especially since it can never be an object)? In order to answer this question, we examine our own states of being and awareness. According to Bradley, "...[a]t every moment my state, whatever else it is, is a whole of which I am immediately aware. It is an experienced non-relational unity of many in one."³⁸ If I stop doing and thinking the things that presently occupy my attention and try to examine all that there is for me at this moment, both the

³⁷ Seigfried, *ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁸ Bradley, Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 175.

apprehended world and my own conscious states, I will find a great many things (books, tables, cats, noises, itches) and many 'mental' events (memories, day-dreams, calculations), and all will exist as items in relation to each other and to my consciousness of them. All these things and events were 'there' before I shifted my attention to include them. As things that were 'there' before I attended to them, they constitute the 'background' of potential (non-relational) experience which is an ever-present aspect of my reality although not attended to, and which at any moment I can shift my focus of attention to include. This is my immediate experience, available for conceptualizing and organizing into 'normal' experience, but not yet an object for me. Anyone can realize this whole of a larger world or realm of experience by shifting attention and becoming aware of items out of a 'mass of stuff' in the background.

An illustration will help to bring this out. Suppose you are writing a letter and entirely focused on the ideas you are setting down and perhaps also on the paper and pen you are using. If you stop for a minute and shift your attention, you may become aware of the feeling of the clothing you are wearing, the noise of the wind outside, objects on the periphery of your vision, and so on. You know they were 'there' all along and didn't just come into being the moment you attended to them. But can you really be said to have experienced them before they were part of your conscious experience? The feeling of your clothing, for example: was it part of your experience before you were conscious of the

sensation of them? Many of the philosophers I have surveyed would say no (e.g., T.H. Green would say the only meaningful experience is *cognitive* experience). But when I now attend to the feeling of the clothing I am wearing, the present feeling seems to 'flow' out of an earlier state of feeling which was not an object for me. There is a continuity in the feeling of the clothing (my present object) with earlier states of feeling which were not objective for me. We have experiences like this all the time, we often realize that something was there but we weren't attending to it or conscious of it. This is reflected in statements such as, "I heard that noise in some way or other, but I wasn't really listening to it." Or, "I was aware of it on some level but I didn't really see it." Our experiences seem to flow forward out of some state of feeling in the past, but when we look back at these previous feelings, they did not (at least, not all of them) exist as objects for us. Only those we attend to are objects for us. But if we shift our attention and bring other content out of the 'feeling' into the ambit of our conscious experience, it doesn't 'feel' as if it just sprang into existence. It flows out of an earlier state, and it is continuous with the content of that state, in which it was somehow 'felt' but not as distinct objects. The point is, it could not be what it is for me now, i.e. an object of my relationally organized experience, unless it had come out of, and was still felt as continuous with, the whole, original, non-

differentiated larger world of experience (immediate experience).

T.S. Eliot puts it this way:

...the objects into which feeling is differentiated have a kind of union which they do not themselves account for; they fuse into each other and stand out upon a background which is merely felt, and from which they are continually requiring supplementation. In order that these developments - thought, will, pleasure and pain, objects - may be possible, feeling must have been given...³⁹

In order to defend the existence of immediate experience, the final appeal must be to the experience of each and every 'experiencer'. There are certain generally agreed upon characteristics of anyone's experience that would tend to corroborate a theory of non-relational, pre-conceptualized experience. For example, no one would deny the fact that we are not always self-conscious. Bradley, e.g., says that "...to suppose that we are always self-conscious would to myself seem absurd."⁴⁰ We can, however, in moments of introspection, shift our attention from whatever it is we were involved in (writing, walking down the street, washing the dishes, etc.) and become aware of ourselves as conscious of objects, ideas, memories, sensations, and so on, and we are conscious of these phenomena as not-self and of ourselves as conscious of them. We achieve an awareness entailing self-consciousness in relation to the panorama of objects that we are conscious of. When we become aware of our self-consciousness, we are aware that it is

³⁹ op.cit., p. 20.

⁴⁰ Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 175.

connected to, and emergent from, an ongoing experience in which our 'self' must have somehow figured, but not as something of which we were previously conscious. Thus it was part of the background of feeling or immediate experience; and when we apply concepts to it and put it into a relational framework, it becomes an object for us distinct from other objects and from the background out of which it emerged. Self-consciousness, like other objects of our relational experience, has a continuity with, and 'flows' out of, the background non-relational experience.

How can we know that, in shifting our attention to include more content from the larger world of experience, we are finding something that was always there even though not part of conscious experience? This question relates to one that was asked earlier in the discussion, of how mind and world could exist in immediate experience as a unity, but is, in conceptualized experience, a dichotomy or duality. The answer is that, for one thing, it is generally agreed that we are not creating reality when we apply our concepts to it:

The attention to the feeling presupposes that there is such an object present, and that the attention has not manufactured the object...So that in attending to a sensation or feeling any change of which we are aware besides the change felt in attending may be attributed to the sensation or feeling and held to be independent of the attention...⁴¹

And how do we know that, in attending to something that we were not conscious of before, we are taking up into normal experience

⁴¹ T.S. Eliot, op.cit., pp. 26-7.

something which emerges out of immediate experience? In other words, if we were not conscious of it before, how can we know it was part of any kind of experience at all?

The answer depends on what is meant by immediate experience and whether our account acknowledges that what is attended to now has a continuity with itself in a prior state when it was thinkable content which had not yet become an object of thought. In the view I am proposing, immediate experience is a felt whole of reality and reality is constituted of facts, things that are thus and so and can be conceptualized. When I attend to the feeling of the clothing I am wearing, it is now an object for my conscious experience and I have exercised my conceptual faculties to 'know' it as 'feeling of clothing'. But I don't think I have now brought it into existence by attending to it. It was there before I 'found' it as part of reality, but I found it as a conceptual content which had been put in a relational conceptualized framework. My attention did not alter it, it was the same content before but not yet conceptualized. It was a feeling that had not yet been mediated by concepts, and immediate experience is just that, i.e., a feeling that has not been mediated by concepts but which is conceptualizable. Thus, when we attend to something we were previously not conscious of and make it a part of our 'normal' experience, we know that it always was conceptualizable since we have applied concepts to it. So it must have been thinkable content in a larger world of experience (a whole of feeling), experience not yet mediated and thus

immediate. That seems to be the best explanation for the fact that, when I become conscious of, for example, the feeling of my clothing, it just plain 'feels' continuous with what we infer to have been an earlier state in which it was part of a background whole of feeling, but was not yet an object for my awareness.

Is immediate experience the whole of reality, then, and does it constitute all that there is? It would seem that on my account of immediate experience, the world *is* experience and that experience is all that exists and all that can constitute our knowledge. Does immediate experience as I have explained it constitute a species of idealism?

In answer to this question, I will claim that the view of immediate experience I am proposing is not idealistic but is, rather, a form of direct realism. The totality of immediate experience is a whole of feeling. It is not identical with the idealist's sense of 'experience' for the following reasons. First, immediate experience is not merely perceptual phenomena but also includes what is 'sensed' though not yet perceived. According to Bradley, it includes sensations, feelings, emotions, will, desire, and thoughts. In other words, it includes that which, when it has been attended to, is perceived as many discrete things in relation, but in itself, it comprises a whole of awareness that has not yet been attended to. It is, thus, feeling which is not yet perception or conceptualized experience as objects of my experience. We can compare this with the

definition of idealism which, in general, involves the statement that

...there can be no physical objects existing apart from some experience.⁴²

This definition implies that experience is some state of awareness of physical objects. But if by 'immediate experience' we mean a state that is a whole of feeling, including emotions, will, memory and pre-perceptual sensation, this state is *more* than what is involved in the awareness of physical objects. Furthermore, the awareness of physical objects involves objects in relation to a subject. According to the account of immediate experience I have been using, it is a non-relational co-existing mass which is not the experience of objects by a subject. Thus, immediate experience is not in accord with the idealist's conception of experience.

The second reason why immediate experience is not idealist is that support for idealism does not mesh with an account of the not-yet-conceptualized nature of the immediate. Idealism has been grounded in an epistemological argument to the effect that

...the mere fact of knowledge and thought proves that nothing is conceivable and therefore nothing can exist unless it is the object of a knowing and thinking mind.⁴³

This epistemological argument must coincide with the definition of idealism, which, as we have seen, states that objects do not

⁴² Ewing, Idealism, p. 3.

⁴³ Ewing, *ibid.*, p. 12.

exist apart from some experience, and does not make a statement about knowledge of them. There is a distinction between 'experiencing' and 'knowing' and the two should not be conflated. According to Ewing,

...it seems clear that even of the characteristics of our own experience some are not known. My experience always includes a great diversity of organic sensations and of sense impressions due to my surroundings, but when my attention is concentrated on some object, e.g. on writing this book, I am only aware of these, if at all, as a confused whole and do not know them in detail. I might know some of their characteristics by a simple act of attention, but I do not know them in fact since I am attending to something else.⁴⁴

Experience is more than what is attended to in my focus of conceptual awareness (my knowledge, if you like). What I attend to can be said to be part of what I know, but there is a larger whole which includes much more than what constitutes my attended experience. Immediate experience is this larger whole and thus, does not figure in the idealist's epistemological argument.

Despite this contrast between the idealist's view of experience and the account of immediate experience I have been using, it does appear that there is some congruence of the two. A theory of immediate experience appears to link experience and reality in a manner that conforms to the definition of idealism. This is especially true if one adopts a view of immediate experience like Bradley's. We have seen that he refers to immediate experience as a "...knowing and being in one, with

⁴⁴ Ewing, *ibid.*, p. 39.

which knowledge begins..."⁴⁵ This certainly seems to equate knowledge, or at least the beginnings of knowledge, with experience. If we want further evidence that Bradley is an idealist, we need merely look at his statement that

Sentient experience is reality, and what is not this is not real.⁴⁶

It is true that, according to Bradley, the only reality that we can encounter is experience. It is also true that Bradley holds that experience is reality. But it does not follow that Bradley thinks that everything must be experienced. And this is where Bradley differs from some idealists. He does not claim that reality is solely what is given in experience to an experiencing subject. He draws the distinction between *the experienced* and *experience*. This is because, of course, Bradley would disagree that reality could consist of an object in relation to a subject. For Bradley, reality is more than what is experienced by any single human being, so that reality is transcendent. Experience is primordial, and our sense of self and the objects of our experiencing are abstracted out of, and presented before, a background whole of experience (as a totality). If we adopt this aspect of Bradley's conception of experience as reality, this need not commit us to an idealist view since we can still view reality as independent of the experience (as an object) of any experiencer or group of experiencers.

⁴⁵ Bradley, Essays on Truth and Reality, p. 159.

⁴⁶ Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 127.

It seems that a theory of immediate experience need not be strictly idealist. In the form that I am proposing, reality is not identified with the experience of a mind, or some minds, or even all minds. Without this identification, the proposed theory of experience has a realist component. That is, if experience is reality but is understood to be independent of mind, then an account of immediate experience is in fact a direct realism rather than a standard idealism. This gives us both 'my experience' and 'the experienced world' in one, as a unitary whole in primordial experience. Immediate experience is what is available to me as a finite centre of experience, but it is also the whole experienceable world. It is much more than the feeling of any single one subject of experience; it is the whole of experience, whether it constitutes anyone's experience or not. Thus, immediate experience is the larger world of experience, the unitary whole or totality of experience, and *my* experience, that is, the object of my experiencing, is a finite centre of that which is abstracted from this totality.

In my normal relational experience, in which I feel myself as a subject in relation to the objects given in my experience, the subject-object state is a unity that is comprised of the parts abstracted out of the immediate. As abstracted parts of immediate experience, this state does not have a standard relation to the whole of immediate experience. To return to the discussion of whole and part, since it makes no sense to claim a relation between a thing and itself, a whole is not in relation

to its parts which are, after all, what constitute itself. This means that there is symmetry between immediate experience and conceptualized relational experience. In other words, the situation wherein there is relational experience abstracted from the totality of immediacy is not a state of affairs similar to the situation in which there is a mouse in relation to an elephant, such that the mouse is smaller than the elephant. This would be an asymmetrical relationship because the converse is not true; that is, it makes no sense to say the elephant is smaller than the mouse. Since the abstracted parts of experience are what constituted the whole of the primordial experience, there is no standard relation and there is complete symmetry between the whole and its (abstractly realized) parts.

Knowing the parts, albeit abstractly realized in our ordinary relational experience, is identifying what comprises immediate experience and thus, what constitutes the world of experience.

Conclusion

Ultimately, an idea or theory is considered acceptable if it offers a reasonable explanation and does not involve insurmountable difficulties.

Defending the idea of immediate experience is difficult for a number of reasons. The first is that a theory of immediate experience is unfashionable and history has not favoured philosophers who advocate it. We have seen that the idea of

immediate experience was transmuted in the 1930s so that 'immediate experience' was thereafter equated with 'a given of sense-data.' Writers like Lewis, Sellars and McDowell use the terms 'the given' and the term 'immediate experience' interchangeably. For them, experience is already relational and conceptualized and they do not seriously consider the idea of a whole of experience in which there is no distinction between consciousness and content out of which our 'normal' experience is actualized. In defending immediate experience, one must take care to emphasize that one is not defending a theory of 'the given.' This paves the way for a re-consideration of the idea of primordial experience involving a whole of feeling or flux, prior to discrimination into subject and object.

The second reason why it is difficult to defend the idea of immediate experience is because it is ineffable and can never be an object we can 'know' as such. This is not an insurmountable problem, however, because we can know about it indirectly by inference even if we cannot know it directly. We can infer a background whole of feeling when we recognize that some of the content of normal experience 'feels' continuous with the immediate experience that preceded.

The third difficulty for a defense of immediate experience is probably the most important. One must counter the arguments of the critic who asserts that there is no reason for holding such a theory. This critic might ask why we would want to reconsider a theory of immediate experience. She might point out

that philosophy has gotten along just fine without such a theory for the past sixty years and epistemological questions (which seem to be the questions a theory of immediate experience is designed to answer) have been dealt with in other ways. Philosophy has not seemed to need it, so why revive it?

This criticism boils down to the question, what use is 'immediate experience'? Charlotte Seigfried offers a possible answer in her summary of James' version of immediate experience: "...[p]ure experience is such a fruitful notion because of its explanatory, not its descriptive, power."⁴⁷ The idea of immediate experience is of something ineffable that cannot be an object so it cannot be useful as a description. But although it is limited as a description, it gives a better explanation of primordial experience than the alternative dualistic account involving thought and thing, subject and object, consciousness and content.

This claim can only be supported by an appeal to common conceptions of primordial experience. I will rely on the idea that, at any moment in one's experience, there is more than is actually being attended to. As Seigfried expresses this point:

Experience in its immediacy is too rich and varied to be grasped in its totality; rather, various perspectives allow us to select out of the flux those relations and objects which will form for us a specific context.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Chaos and Context, p. 52.

⁴⁸ ibid., p. 113.

We are familiar with this aspect of our experience. At any moment, there is more in the total field of our experience than those things we are presently attending to. There are any number of tickles, itches, memories, volitions, and perceptions all mixed together. A very small portion of this is grasped in conscious experience. This portion is the object for our consciousness and we are aware of it as the 'content' of the experience we are 'having.' But by shifting our attention we become aware of many other things that constitute a background awareness for conscious experience. This background experience is continuous with the content of our normal ordinary experience and supplies the context within which we experience the conceptualized content of our ordinary experience. It is all the background facts that, when conceptualized, inform our rational sphere. Also it is a flux, continuous and comprising a much-at-once that is itself not a content for our limited consciousness but which supplies material for conceptualized experience.

This view of immediate experience does offer a better explanation of primordial experience than one which claims that it is constituted of distinct items *recognized as such*, or that it is directly experienced as a primordial dualism. My normal experience involves a dichotomy of consciousness and content, thought and thing, but on the 'fringes' of this experience there is a larger world which is continuous with my conscious experience but of which I am not conscious. This larger world flows into my consciousness with any shift of my attention (I

become conscious of, for example, the feeling of my clothes, which is continuous with an earlier state in which the feeling was 'there' but to which I was not attending). This idea of a background flux gives a better explanation than looking at experience merely as many discrete objects that exist for us only when we are conscious of them. The conception of primordial experience as non-dichotomized dissolves the problems inherent in a dualistic explanation. If one holds to a primordial dualism, then it is necessary to explain the relation between mind and world and explaining this relation has been notoriously difficult for philosophy. But the whole problem is dissolved if primordial experience is neutral, non-dualistic, and involves no necessary split between consciousness and content, thought and thing. The dichotomization takes place in the course of conceptualization, when we take experience as an object for our consciousness through an interpretation, based on our interests and dependent on the context of the background totality. This is a better explanation because it avoids the problems of the dichotomy (in primordial experience) and yet allows the dichotomy in our normal experience to account for our knowledge of the world. The paradox is thus explained away.

In the work of philosophers from Green to McDowell, the same problems recur in relation to the paradox of the dichotomy of mind and world. The best explanation appears to be that there is a non-dichotomized primordial experience that can be conceptualized, which constitutes the background for our normal

experience of the world. I have offered an account of immediate experience that contains some modifications in order to incorporate it into contemporary concerns. In this form, I believe it is an acceptable solution to the paradox of the dichotomy of mind and world, and gives a picture of experience in which it is up to us to determine what we experience within the restrictions of discovered reality.

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