The Philosophy of Freedom

Rudolf Steiner

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The Philosophy of Freedom

By Rudolf Steiner

Translated from the German by Ruth Martin

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Contents

Translator's Foreword

Written in 1894, *The Philosophy of Freedom* is one of Rudolf Steiner's earliest works, and the one that – even at the end of his long career – he believed would be most read after his death. Although Steiner had always taken an unorthodox approach to his education, pursuing his own interests and developing a fascination with spirituality that would only grow as his career progressed, at this point in his life he was steeped in the philosophy of the German Enlightenment. He had defended his doctoral thesis three years previously, a work on epistemology which had included discussion of both Kant and Fichte's theories of knowledge. He was also living in Weimar, where Goethe had made his home for more than fifty years until his death in 1832, and editing Goethe's scientific writings for publication as part of a new *Complete Works*.

Steiner's interests later drew him further towards spirituality, mysticism, and the occult, as well as the education of young minds. Like Goethe, for whom he retained a deep reverence, he was a polymath. In later life, he also revised *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and a new edition was printed in 1918 which omitted the first chapter, sought to clarify some of his theoretical points, and took account of the notes made on the original by Eduard von Hartmann, a philosopher who was a great influence on him. Interesting as Steiner's revisions are, the 1894 edition – on which this translation is based – is written with remarkable clarity and readability for its time, and shows us the seeds of Steiner's later thoughts.

This book was intended to be read by everyone, not just scholars or students of philosophy, and it is this intention, first and foremost, that I have sought to reproduce. Older English translations, including the first by Professor and Mrs. R. F. Alfred Hoernle in 1916, are available and will provide readers with a sense of the book's age, the conventions of scholarly writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the typical vocabulary and syntax of those times. While I have not made a deliberate effort to modernise the prose – except in one specific area, as I

explain below – clarity has been my watchword throughout. The book is a guide for educated laypeople, covering some of the most fundamental principles of knowledge and how we interact with the world around us. It is meant to be useful, and I hope that is what I have preserved in this new translation.

In German, the revised edition of 1918 retained its original title – *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* – but Steiner considered *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* to be a better title for the revised English translation, which was published with his approval in 1922. 'Freedom' is not an exact equivalent of the German 'Freiheit', and Steiner wanted to stress that freedom was an activity. Truly free action required self-knowledge and thought; freedom was not a static state that people living in the 'free world' could take for granted. But the connotations of words change through time, and in the twenty-first century 'spiritual activity' is liable to be taken as something more narrowly religious or mystical than the process that Steiner describes in this book.

The translation of German philosophy into English has a long history, and most of the major German philosophers have some terminology associated with them as a result

of choices made by their early English translators. Kant's 'thing-in-itself' (*Ding an sich*), or Freud's 'ego' and 'id' (*Ich and Es*) are prominent examples of this phenomenon. These choices present a challenge for a translator of someone like Rudolf Steiner, who situates his own argument in the wider philosophical landscape by quoting German thinkers including Kant, Schopenhauer, and Eduard Hartmann. *Vorstellung* is a particular challenge here. It is often translated as 'idea', but Steiner uses it more specifically, to refer to the image created in the mind by uniting the content of a sense perception with a concept taken from the world of ideas. I have therefore translated *Vorstellung* as 'mental image' throughout this book – except where Steiner quotes Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung.* This has in the past been translated as *The World as Will and Idea*, and *The World as Will and Representation*. Neither will do for Steiner's meaning, but *The World as Will and Mental Image* would be a strikingly unusual translation of Schopenhauer's text. I have therefore allowed the discrepancy to stand.

For the most part, however, I have taken the same tactic as previous translations in my use of philosophical terminology. *Wahrnehmung* and *Begriff* become the much neater English pair 'percept' and 'concept', a choice that all

Steiner's other translators have made. And while 'percept' – as a term for the content of a sense perception – may not be in the vocabulary of every educated layperson, Steiner does explain his specific use of it within the text. Where I have taken a different tactic from other translations is in the use of gendered language to refer to hypothetical human subjects. For example, the first page of the 1916 translation has: 'Each one of us must choose his hero in whose footsteps he toils up to Olympus'; I have rendered the sentence as: 'Everyone must choose their heroes, and toil up the paths to Mount Olympus in their footsteps.' To modern readers, this persistent hypothetical 'he' is a far heavier presence than it would have been in Rudolf Steiner's day. Steiner's language simply reflects his time, rather than his stance; in fact, his observations about the position of women in society are notably progressive. I would like today's readers to have a similar experience of the text to those who read the German original in the late nineteenth century.

– Ruth Martin

The Science of Freedom

CHAPTER ONE

The Aims of All Knowledge

I believe I am correctly identifying an essential feature of our age when I say that the cult of human individuality is presently on course to become the centre of all interest. An energetic effort is being made to defeat any and all authorities. In order to be valid, things must be rooted in individuality. And anything that hinders a person in developing their powers is rejected. We no longer think that, 'Everyone must choose their heroes, and toil up the paths to Mount Olympus in their footsteps.' We refuse to have ideals forced upon us; we are convinced that nobility dwells within each of us, something worth cultivating if only we can penetrate far enough into the core of our being. We no longer believe in a norm we should all strive to meet. In our view, the perfection of the whole rests on the perfection of each individual. We do not wish to achieve things that other people can do equally well, but things that are possible

only for us, based on our unique nature, our own modest contribution to the development of the world. Never has the artist paid less attention to the norms and rules of art as they do now. Each artist claims the right to make art that is all their own. Some dramatists prefer to write in dialect over the normal language that grammar dictates.

I can find no better expression for these phenomena than this: they proceed from the individual's urge for freedom, which has risen to its highest pitch. We do not wish to be dependent on any trend or movement, and where we must be dependent, we tolerate it only if it coincides with our individual interest.

An age such as ours can only desire to create truth from the depths of human nature. Of Friedrich Schiller's famous two paths...

> *Truth we both seek; you outside, in the world, I inside*
> *In the heart, and thus we both shall find it.*
> *A healthy eye will find the Creator outside;*
> *A healthy heart will mirror the world inside.*

...the present day tends to see the second as more useful. A truth that comes to us from without always carries an imprint of uncertainty. We may only believe in truths that appear to each of us inwardly. And only truth can bring us security in the development of our individual powers. A person tormented by doubt feels their powers depleted. Nor will they find any aim for their activity in a world that is puzzling to them.

We no longer want to believe; we want to *know*. Belief requires the acknowledgement of truths that are opaque to us. And the individual resists what is opaque and wants to experience everything in the very core of their being. We are satisfied only by knowledge that is subject to no external norm, but derives from the interior life of the personality.

Nor do we want any of the knowledge that has been set in stone in petrified school rules, and preserved in compendia that are valid for all time. We each think ourselves justified in starting with our immediate experience, and working up from there to the knowledge of the whole universe. We strive for certainty in knowledge, but each in our own way.

Our scientific doctrines should not now be presented as if recognising them were a matter of absolute necessity. None among us would give such a title to a scientific text as Johann Gottlieb Fichte once did: 'A crystal-clear report to the general public on the true nature of the latest philosophy. An attempt to force the reader to understand.' In our own age, no one should be forced to understand. If someone does not feel a specific, individual need to take a particular view, then we do not demand it of them. And nor do we wish to drum knowledge into children who have not yet matured; instead, we seek to develop their abilities, so that they will want to understand, rather than be forced to.

I am under no illusions regarding this characteristic of my age. I know that many people increasingly live mass-produced lives free of individuality. But I also know that many of my contemporaries are attempting to live in the spirit I have outlined. It is to them that I would like to dedicate this text, which is not intended to show the 'only possible' path to truth, but to describe the path taken by one who is dedicated to truth.

The text leads first into abstract territory, where a thought must take on sharp contours in order to come to definite

points. But the reader will also be guided out of arid concepts into concrete life. I am of the firm opinion that one must raise oneself into the ethereal realm of abstraction if one is to experience all the facets of existence. A person who knows only how to enjoy things with their senses does not know life's delicacies. The oriental[1] scholars make their students spend years living an austere and ascetic life before telling them what they themselves know. The West no longer requires devout rituals or asceticism from its scholars, but it does expect a willingness to withdraw from the immediate impressions of life for a short time, and enter into the world of pure thought.

The different realms of life are many. And, for each, specific sciences are developed. But life itself is one, and the deeper the sciences delve into a particular area, the more they distance themselves from a consideration of the living world as a whole. There must be a kind of knowledge that seeks those elements within the individual sciences that will lead us back to the fullness of life. Specialised scientific researchers want their findings to give them an awareness

1 The original text uses a term commonly translated as 'oriental', reflecting early twentieth-century academic usage.

of the world and its workings, but the aim of this text is a philosophical one: science itself should become organic, living. The individual sciences are precursors to the science that we are striving for here.

There is a similar relation in the arts. The composer bases their work on the theory of composition, which is the sum of knowledge one needs before one can begin composing. In the act of composition, the laws of theory serve the reality of life. And philosophy is an art in exactly the same way. All the true philosophers have been *concept artists*. They have taken human ideas as their material, and scientific methods as their artistic technique. Through this method, abstract thought acquires concrete, individual life. Ideas become life forces. And then we have not merely gained a knowledge of things; we have made knowledge into a real organism with control over itself. Our real, active consciousness has placed itself above a mere passive absorption of truths.

How philosophy as art relates to human freedom, what the latter is and whether we are blessed with it or can become so, are my book's principal questions. All other scientific explanations are given purely because they provide enlightenment on these questions, which to my mind are the most

crucial for humanity. These pages will provide a 'philosophy of freedom'.

All science would be nothing more than the satisfaction of idle curiosity, if it did not strive to reach the heights of existential value for the human personality. The sciences attain true value only when they present the human significance of their results. The individual's ultimate aim cannot be the cultivation of a single mental faculty, but the development of all the abilities that slumber within us. Knowledge is only valuable because it contributes to the *all-round* development of human nature as a whole. This book therefore does not address the relationship between science and life with the intention of making people bow down before an idea and place their powers in its service, but in the hope that they will master the world of ideas and use it to achieve their human aims, which go beyond the purely scientific. One must face the idea as a master, or find oneself becoming its servant.

CHAPTER TWO

Conscious Human Action

Are humans free in our thoughts and actions, or subject to a rigid necessity? On few other questions has so much reasoned thought been expended. The idea of freedom has found great numbers of both warm adherents and dogged opponents. There are people who in their moral zeal will declare anyone who denies such an obvious fact as freedom to be of limited intelligence. On the opposing side, others spy the pinnacle of unscientific thinking in those who believe the laws of nature do not apply to the realm of human action and thought.

Freedom is declared by turns to be humanity's most precious possession, and the worst possible illusion. Endless sophistry is used to explain how human freedom can accord with the functioning of the natural world, of which humans are, after all, a part. No less effort is expended by the other

side in trying to understand how such a delusion could have come about. We are dealing here with one of the most important questions of life, of religion, practice and science – and this is felt by everyone whose character is not defined by the very opposite of thoroughness. And it is one of the sad signs of how superficial today's thought has become that a book attempting to shape a 'new faith' based on the results of more recent research in the natural sciences – *The Old Faith and the New* by David Friedrich Strauss – contains nothing on this question beyond the words: 'We need not here enter a discussion of the question of free-will. Every philosophy deserving the name, has always considered the reputed indifferent freedom of choice as an empty phantom; but the moral worth of human principles and actions remains untouched by that question.'[2] I do not quote this passage here because I believe the book it is taken from is of special significance, but because it seems to express that opinion on freedom to which the majority of our thinking contemporaries manage to rise.

2 Strauss, *Der alte und der neue Glaube* (*The Old Faith and the New*), 1872, trans Mathilde Blind, p64.

In these times, everyone who claims to have outgrown their scientific short trousers seems to know that freedom cannot consist in choosing one of two possible courses of action entirely at will. They insist that there is always a quite specific reason why, when faced with several possible courses of action, we will carry out a particular one.

This seems plausible. And yet so far, those who oppose freedom have attacked only freedom of choice. Even Herbert Spencer, a man whose views are growing in popularity with every passing day, says as much: 'That every one is at liberty to desire or not to desire, which is the real proposition involved in the dogma of free will, is negatived as much by the analysis of consciousness, as by the contents of the preceding chapters.'[3]

Others proceed from the same principles in opposing the concept of free will. The germ of all disquisitions on this topic can be found in Baruch Spinoza. His clear and simple case against the idea of freedom has been repeated countless times since, though mostly wrapped up in the most hair-splitting theoretical doctrines, so that it becomes

3 Spencer, *The Principles of Psychology*, Part IV, chap 9, para. 219.

difficult to recognise the simple train of thought that truly matters.

In a letter of October or November 1674, Spinoza writes:

'I say that a thing is free, which exists and acts solely by the necessity of its own nature. Thus also God understands Himself and all things freely, because it follows solely from the necessity of His nature, that He should understand all things. You see I do not place freedom in free decision, but in free necessity. However, let us descend to created things, which are all determined by external causes to exist and operate in a given determinate manner. In order that this may be clearly understood, let us conceive a very simple thing. For instance, a stone receives from the impulsion of an external cause a certain quantity of motion, by virtue of which it continues to move after the impulsion given by the external cause has ceased. The permanence of the stone's motion is constrained, not necessary, because it must be defined by the impulsion of an external cause. What is true of the stone is true of any individual, however complicated its nature, or varied its functions, inasmuch as every individual thing is necessarily determined by some external cause to exist and operate in a fixed and determinate manner.

Further conceive, I beg, that a stone, while continuing in motion, should be capable of thinking and knowing, that it is endeavouring, as far as it can, to continue to move. Such a stone, being conscious merely of its own endeavour and not at all indifferent, would believe itself to be completely free, and would think that it continued in motion solely because of its own wish. This is that human freedom, which all boast that they possess, and which consists solely in the fact, that men are conscious of their own desire, but are ignorant of the causes whereby that desire has been determined. Thus an infant believes that it desires milk freely; an angry child thinks he wishes freely for vengeance; a timid child thinks he wishes freely to run away. Again, a drunken man thinks that from the free decision of his mind he speaks words which afterwards, when sober, he would like to have left unsaid. So the delirious, the garrulous, and others of the same sort think that they act from the free decision of their mind, not that they are carried away by impulse. As this misconception is innate in all men, it is not easily conquered. For although experience abundantly shows that men can do anything rather than check their desires, and that very often, when a prey to conflicting emotions, they see the better course and follow the worse, they yet believe themselves to be free; because in some cases their desire for a thing

is slight, and can easily be overruled by the recollection of something else, which is frequently present in the mind.'

Since this view is expressed clearly and in definite terms, it is easy to discover the fundamental error in it. Just as a stone will necessarily move in a particular way when pushed, a person will necessarily act in a particular way when driven to by some cause. It is only because a person is conscious of their actions that they think themselves the free initiator of the same. In this, they overlook the fact that they are driven by a cause that they are bound to obey. The error in this train of thought is quickly found. Spinoza, and all who think like him, overlook the fact that a person can be conscious not only of their actions, but of the causes by which they are driven. No one will dispute that a baby is unfree when desiring milk, or that a drunken man is unfree when he says things he later regrets. Both are unaware of the causes acting deep within their organism, by which they are irresistibly compelled. But is it justified to lump actions of this kind in with others, in which a person is aware not only of their actions, but the reasons for them? Are human actions then all of a piece? Can the deed of a soldier on the battlefield, and of a scientific researcher in the laboratory, and of a statesman engaged in highly complex diplomacy,

be placed on the same scientific level as that of a baby who desires milk? It may be true that the solution to a problem is best sought through the most straightforward instance of it. But often enough, an inability to differentiate has brought immense confusion. And the difference between knowing and not knowing why I am doing something is a fundamental one. At first, this seems a wholly self-evident truth. And yet the opponents of freedom never ask the question: is a motivation for my action that I recognise and understand a compulsion in the same sense as the organic process that prompts the baby to cry for milk?

In his *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins* (*Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness*),[4] Eduard von Hartmann claims that human will is dependent on two main factors: motivation and character. If you consider all humans to be the same, or rather their differences to be negligible, then their will appears determined by external forces, ie, the circumstances in which they find themselves. But if you consider that various people are only prompted to action by an idea if their character is such that an idea will cause

4 Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins* (*Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness*), 1879, p451.

them to desire something, then humans appear determined by internal and not external forces. People now believe – because according to their character, they themselves must choose to make an externally imposed idea their motive for action – that they are free and therefore independent from external motivations. But the truth is, in the words of von Hartmann, that, 'Even if we ourselves raise up ideas to be motivations, this is not done deliberately, but according to the necessity of our characterological predisposition, which is anything but free.' Here too there is no consideration of the difference between motives that I allow to influence me only once I have consciously understood them, and motives that I follow without any clear knowledge of them.

And this leads directly to the standpoint from which our argument will proceed. Can we properly consider the question of whether our will is free in isolation? And if not, then with what other question must it be connected?

If there is a difference between a conscious motivation for my action and an unconscious motivation, then the former must give rise to an action that must be judged differently to one that proceeds from a blind urge. So this difference will

be the first question. And the result of this investigation will then determine how we pose the real question of freedom.

What does it mean to know the cause of one's actions? Too little consideration has been given to this question, because unfortunately something that is an indivisible whole – the human being – has always been rent into two parts. This whole is split into a part that acts, and a part that knows, which is to ignore entirely the most important character here: the person who acts because they know.

Humans are said to be free when they are ruled only by their reason, and not their animal desires. Or: freedom means being able to choose aims and make decisions to direct one's life and actions.

But nothing is won by making claims of this nature. For this is the question at hand: do aims and decisions compel a person to act, in the same way as animal desires? If a rational decision appears in my mind without my assistance, and with the same necessity as hunger and thirst, then I am necessarily compelled to act on it, and my freedom is an illusion.

Another saying goes: freedom does not mean the ability to will what you will, but to *do* what you will. The poet-philosopher Robert Hamerling has expressed this thought with utter clarity in his *Atomistik des Willens* (*Atomism of the Will*):

'Humans may do as they will, this is true – but they cannot will as they will, for their will is subject to motivations! They cannot will as they will? Now, look more closely at these words. Do they make any rational sense? So freedom of will must consist in being able to want something without any reason or motivation? But then what does willing mean, if not doing or striving for one thing over another for a particular reason? Willing something without a reason or motivation means willing something without willing it. The concept of motivation is inextricably bound up with that of will. Without a specific motivation, the will is an empty faculty. Only through motivation does it become active and real. Therefore it is quite right that human will is not "free", to the extent that it is guided most strongly by motivation. On the other hand, we must also concede that it is absurd to speak of this "unfreedom" versus a plausible "freedom"

of the will, which would allow one to want something one does not want.'[5]

Hamerling also speaks only of motivations in general, without taking into account the distinction between unconscious and conscious. If I feel a motivation and am compelled to act on it because it proves the 'strongest' among its kind, then the thought of freedom ceases to have any meaning. How should whether I *can* do something or not mean anything to me, if a motivation is compelling me to do it regardless? But whether I can do something or not when a motivation acts upon me is not the primary issue here; the question is whether the only motivations are those that have this effect of compelling necessity. If I am compelled to want something, then I may be entirely indifferent to whether I can do it. And if my character and the prevailing conditions in my environment thrust upon me a motivation that, when I think about it, proves to be irrational, then I might even be glad if I cannot do what I want to.

However, the issue is not whether I can act upon a decision I have made, but how I come to make that decision.

5 Hamerling, *Atomistik des Willens* (*Atomism of the Will*), 1891, p213f.

Rational thought is what sets humans apart from all other organic beings. Activity is common to both humans and other organisms. Nothing is gained by seeking analogies for human action in the animal kingdom in order to shed light upon the concept of freedom. Modern science loves such analogies. And when it succeeds in finding some human-like element of animal behaviour, it believes it has touched upon the most important question of human science. The misunderstandings to which this opinion leads are shown, for example, in the book *Die Illusion der Willensfreiheit* (*The Illusion of Free Will*), which has the following to say on freedom: 'It is easy to explain why the movement of a stone seems necessary to us, while the will of a donkey does not. The causes that move the stone are external and visible. But the causes that move the donkey's will are internal and invisible. The donkey's skull lies between us and the place where they take effect [...]. One does not see the causal relation, and so supposes it absent. The will, so the explanation then goes, may be what causes [the donkey] to turn around, but the will itself it is not caused by anything; it is an absolute beginning.'[6]

6 Rée, *Die Illusion der Willensfreiheit* (*The Illusion of Free Will*), 1885, p5.

So, here once again human actions in which the person is conscious of the reasons for their action are simply ignored, as Paul Rée explains: 'The donkey's skull lies between us and the place where they take effect.' Judging by these words, Rée has no idea that there are actions, not of a donkey but of humans, in which a motivation that we are aware of lies between us and the action. He proves this again a few pages on, with the words: 'We do not perceive the causes through which our will is determined, and so we think it is not determined by causes.'

But enough of examples proving that many people oppose the idea of freedom without knowing what freedom really is. It is self-evident that an action cannot be free if the person performing it does not know why they are performing it. But what about someone who acts, having thought about the reasons? This leads us to the question: what is the origin and the meaning of thought? If we know what thought means in general, it should be easy to clarify what role thinking plays in human action. 'Thinking is what makes the soul, with which animals are also endowed, into an intellect,' as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel rightly says, and therefore thinking will also give human action its specific character.

I do not mean to claim, however, that all our actions are born solely of sober, rational consideration. Nor have I any intention to class as human in the highest sense only those actions that proceed from abstract judgement. But as soon as our actions rise above satisfying purely animal desires, our motives are always intermingled with thought. Love, pity, and patriotism are mainsprings of action, which cannot be dissected into components of cold reason. It is said that the heart and soul are the driving force here. And this is no doubt correct. But the heart and soul do not *create* the motives for action. They *require* them. Pity swells in my heart when the thought of a person who deserves pity appears in my consciousness. The route to the heart goes through the head. And love is no exception here. If it is more than the mere expression of the base sex drive, then it is founded upon the ideas we have about the object of our love. And the more idealistic those ideas are, the more blissful is that love. Here, too, thought is the father of feeling. It is said that love makes you blind to the weaknesses of the one you love. The reverse might also be claimed: love opens your eyes to someone's advantages. Many pass these advantages by without noticing them. One person sees them, and for that reason love awakens in their heart. What have they

done but have an idea that hundreds of others do not have? These hundreds do not love because they lack the idea.

However we approach the issue, it becomes ever clearer that the question of the essence of human action requires us to first ask that other question about the origins of thought. I will therefore turn first to this question.

The Fundamental Desire for Knowledge

Two souls, alas, are dwelling in my breast,
And one is striving to forsake its brother.
Unto the world in grossly loving zest,
With clinging tendrils, one adheres;
The other rises forcibly in quest
Of rarefied ancestral spheres.[7]

With these words, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe expresses a deep-seated aspect of human nature. Humans are not unified within themselves. They always want more than the world voluntarily gives them. Nature has given us needs, and the satisfaction of these needs is left to our own activity. Plentiful are the gifts we have been given, but more plentiful still are our desires. We seem born to dissatisfaction. And our drive for knowledge is just one particular case of this dissatisfaction. We look at a tree twice. The first time, we see its branches at rest; the second time, they are in motion.

7 Goethe, *Faust: Part I*, trans Peter Salm, ll. 1,112–1,117.

We are not content with this observation. Why does the tree appear still at one time, and swaying at another? And so we ask questions. Each glance at nature germinates an array of questions in our minds. Every phenomenon to which we are exposed brings with it a problem to be solved. Every experience becomes a puzzle. We see an animal like its mother hatch from an egg, and we ask the reason for this likeness. We observe a living creature grow and develop to a particular level of perfection, and we ask what conditions this development requires. Nowhere are we satisfied with what nature displays to our senses. Everywhere, we seek what we call an explanation of the facts.

The extra that we seek in things, above what is immediately given to us, splits our whole being in two; we become aware of a contrast between ourselves and the world. We imagine ourselves as independent beings facing the world. The universe appears to us as two opposing poles: self and world.

We put up this dividing wall between ourselves and the world as soon as the spark of consciousness lights up in us. But we never lose the feeling that we are, after all, part of the world; that a bond exists between us and it, and we are entities not outside but within the universe.

This feeling gives rise to an effort to bridge the divide. And the whole intellectual striving of humanity can be said to consist in this bridging. The story of spiritual and intellectual life is an ongoing search for unity between us and the world. Religion, art, and science all pursue this aim. People of faith seek in divine revelation the solution to the great puzzle that their minds, dissatisfied with the world of mere phenomena, present to them. Artists seek to incorporate ideas of themselves into their work, to reconcile their inner lives with the external world. They too feel dissatisfied with the world of phenomena and seek to imbue it with the *something more* from within themselves that transcends this world. Thinkers seek the laws of phenomena, striving to penetrate with their minds what their eyes observe. It is only when we have made the content of the world into the content of our thought that we can rediscover the connection we ourselves have broken. We will see later that this aim is only achieved when the task of the scientific researcher is grasped much more deeply than is often the case. The whole relationship I have outlined here can be seen in a phenomenon of world history: the opposition between a unified conception of the world (or monism) and the two-worlds theory of dualism.

Dualism directs its gaze solely at the separation between self and world created by human consciousness. All its striving is an impotent struggle to reconcile these opposites, which it calls first mind and matter, then subject and object, then thought and appearance. It feels that there must be a bridge between these two worlds, but is unable to find it. Monism directs its gaze solely at unity, and seeks to deny or obfuscate the opposites that are there. Neither of these two views can be satisfactory, because they do not do justice to the facts. Dualism sees mind (self) and matter (world) as two fundamentally different entities, and therefore cannot comprehend how they might interact. How should the mind know what is happening in matter, when its nature is entirely foreign to the mind? Or how, in these circumstances, should mind act upon matter, and turn its intentions into actions? The most preposterous theories have been put forward to answer these questions.

But to this day, monism is not much better. It has so far tried three ways to overcome its difficulties: by denying mind and becoming materialism; by denying matter and seeking salvation in spiritualism; and by claiming that even in the world's simplest beings, matter and mind are inseparable, for which reason one should not be at all surprised that

these two modes of being are present in humans, since they are nowhere found separately.

Materialism can never provide a satisfactory explanation of the world. Every attempt at an explanation must begin with thoughts about the world's phenomena. Materialists therefore begin with the thought of matter or material processes. And already they are faced with two different factual realms: the material world, and their thoughts about it. They seek to comprehend the latter by regarding thought as a purely material process. They believe that thinking is a process in the brain roughly analogous to digestion in the animal organs. Just as they ascribe mechanical, chemical, and organic effects to matter, so they credit matter, under certain conditions, with the ability to think. They forget that they have merely shifted the problem to a different location. They claim that it is matter, and not the self, that has the ability to think. And with this claim they arrive back where they started. How does matter come to reflect on its own being? Why is it not simply content to accept its own existence? The materialists have turned away from the specific subject, from our own self, to focus on an unspecific, nebulous entity. And here they are confronted with the

same puzzle. The material view does not solve the problem; it merely relocates it.

What about the spiritualists? They deny matter (the world) and view it only as a product of mind (the self). They imagine that the whole world of phenomena is merely spun out of the mind. This worldview gets into a tight spot almost at once, when it attempts to develop any concrete phenomena out of the mind. This is possible neither in knowledge nor in action. To really know the external world, one must turn one's gaze outward and borrow from the store of experience. Without this, the mind cannot form any content. Similarly, when we act, we must turn our intentions into reality with the help of material objects and forces. We are thus reliant on the external world. The most extreme spiritualist, or idealist if you like, is Fichte. He tried to deduce the whole structure of the world from the 'self'. And what he really succeeded in doing was constructing a brilliant mental image of the world without any empirical content. Just as it is impossible for the materialist to decree the mind away, so the spiritualist cannot be rid of the external world.

A remarkable variety of idealism is the view of Friedrich Albert Lange, as set out in his widely read *History of*

Materialism. He assumes that materialism is quite right to declare all worldly phenomena, including our thinking, to be the product of purely physical processes; but matter and its processes are themselves a product of our thinking. 'The senses give us [...] *effects* of things, not true pictures nor things in themselves. But to the mere effects belong also the senses themselves, together with the brain and the molecular movements which we suppose in it.'[8] Our thinking is therefore created by material processes, and these are created by our thinking. Lange's philosophy is thus nothing but a conceptual version of the story of the valiant Baron Munchhausen, who held himself aloft by his own hair.

The third form of monism sees the two substances, mind and matter, united even in the most basic entity (the atom). But all this achieves is to transfer the question that really arises in our consciousness to a different arena. How does the basic entity come to express itself in a twofold way, if it is undivided?

8 Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart* (*The History of Materialism and Criticism of Its Present Importance*), 1866, trans Ernest Chester Thomas, p230.

Against all these standpoints one must set the fact that the original and fundamental opposition is encountered first in our own consciousness. It is we who detach ourselves from the topsoil of nature and place the self in opposition to the world. In his essay *Nature*, Goethe gives classical expression to this fact: 'We live in [nature's] midst and know her not. She is incessantly speaking to us, but betrays not her secret.' But Goethe sees the other side, too: 'Mankind dwell in her, and she in them.'[9]

And while it is true that we have estranged ourselves from nature, it is also true that we feel we are in her and part of her. It can only be her life that also lives in us.

We must find our way back to her. A moment of consideration can show us this path. We may have torn ourselves away from nature, but we must still have carried something of her away with us in our own being. Seek out this natural element in ourselves, and we will rediscover the connection. Dualism neglects to do this. It takes humans' inner life to be purely spiritual and quite divorced from nature, and then

9 Huxley, 'Nature: Aphorisms by Goethe', *Nature*, issue 1, 4 Nov 1869. The original essay, *Die Natur*, is often attributed to Goethe, but was probably written by Georg Christoph Tobler around 1782.

tries to couple the two together. No wonder it cannot find the coupler. We can only discover nature outside us when we have recognised it within us. That common element within us will be our guide. And thus our path is laid out. We have no desire to speculate about the interplay of nature and mind. But we do wish to dig down into the depths of our own being, to find those elements we have brought along in our flight from nature.

The investigation of our own being must provide the solution to the puzzle. We must reach a point where we can say: here we are no longer a mere 'I'; here is something more than 'I'.

I am aware that some who have read this far will not find my arguments in keeping with 'the current science'. To them, I can only reply that, so far, I have not wanted to engage with any kind of scientific results, but with the simple description of what everyone experiences in their own consciousness. And if in the process a sentence here and there has strayed into attempts to reconcile that consciousness with the world, the only purpose of this is to clarify the real facts. I have therefore placed no value on using terms such as 'self', 'mind', 'world', 'nature' etc in

such precise ways as psychology and philosophy usually do. Everyday consciousness does not recognise the strict definitions of science, and thus far my focus has been on the everyday. Objecting that my arguments do not correspond to science is akin to complaining that someone has recited a poem without providing aesthetic and theoretical criticism after every line. My concern here is not how science has interpreted consciousness, but how I experience it myself at every hour of my life.

CHAPTER FOUR

How Thought Helps Us to Understand the World

While observing how a billiard ball, when struck, transfers its motion to another ball, I exert no influence on this observed process. The direction and the speed of the second ball is determined by the direction and speed of the first. As long as I remain a mere observer, I can only say something about the motion of the second ball once it has happened. But it is a different matter when I begin to consider my observation. Consideration allows me to form concepts out of the process. I link the concept of an elastic ball to certain other mechanical concepts, and take into account the particular circumstances that prevail in this case. And in this way, I seek to add to the process that takes place without my involvement a second process, which takes place in the conceptual sphere. The latter is dependent upon me. And this can be deduced from the fact that I can content myself with the observation and not seek any concepts if I have no

need to. But if this need is present, then I am only content when I have brought together the concepts: ball, elasticity, motion, impact, velocity etc, which all have a particular relationship to the observed process. I can be certain that the observed process takes place independently of me; I can be just as certain that the conceptual process cannot play out without my involvement.

We will leave for now the question of whether this action on my part is truly independent, or whether the modern physiologists are right when they say that we cannot think as we please; we have to think as the thoughts and connections currently present in our consciousness dictate.[10] For the time being, it is enough to state the fact that we feel always compelled to seek out concepts and conceptual connections related to those objects and processes that exist without our involvement. Whether this conceptual activity is truly our own, or whether it is prompted by an unalterable necessity, is something to be considered later. There is certainly no question that it initially appears to us as our own activity. We know very well that concepts are not given to us along

10 Ziehen, *Leitfaden der physiologischen Psychologie* (*Guide to Physiological Psychology*), 1893, p171.

with the objects to which they pertain. And my taking action may be an illusion, but it is still how things appear from immediate observation. The question now is: what do we gain by adding a conceptual counterpart to a process?

There is a fundamental difference between the way the parts of a process relate to one another in my mind before and after I have found the corresponding concepts for them. Mere observation can follow the parts of any given process in sequence, but until concepts are applied to them, the connection between them remains obscure. I see the first billiard ball moving in a certain direction and at a certain speed towards the second; I cannot tell in advance what will happen after the impact, but can only watch how it plays out. If we imagine that, at the moment of impact, someone blocks my view of the scene, then – as a mere observer – I will be ignorant of what happens next. It is a different matter if I have found the right concepts for this nexus of relationships before my view was blocked. In that case, I can say what is occurring even without being able to see it. A process or object merely observed does not reveal anything about its connection to other objects or processes. This connection only becomes visible when observation is combined with thought.

Observation and thought are the two points of departure for all human mental striving, insofar as we are conscious of it. The workings of common sense and the most complex scientific researches both rest on these two foundational pillars of the mind. Philosophers have proceeded from various fundamental opposites: idea and reality, subject and object, appearance and the thing-in-itself, I and not-I, idea and will, concept and matter, force and material, conscious and unconscious. But it can be easily shown that behind all these opposites must lie that of observation and thought, since this is the most important pairing to humans.

Whatever principle we might wish to put forward, we must prove that it has somewhere been observed by us, or express it in the form of a clear thought that can be considered by someone else. Every philosopher who begins to speak about their founding principles must avail themselves of concepts, and therefore thought. And in so doing, they indirectly admit that thinking is the precondition for their activity. We will leave for the moment the question of whether thought or something else is the principal factor in the development of the world. But it is clear from the outset that the philosopher cannot come to know anything about the world without thinking. Thought may play a secondary

role in forming phenomena, but in forming a view of them, its role is certainly the primary one.

The way we are organised is what prompts our need for observation. Our thought about a horse and the horse as object appear to us as two separate things. And this object is only accessible to us through observation. We cannot form a concept of the horse by simply staring at one, and we are equally unable to summon a corresponding object through mere thought.

Observation in fact precedes thought in chronological terms. For thinking is something we must learn through observation. The first lines of this chapter essentially described an observation: we set out how thought is sparked by a process and goes beyond what is given without the further involvement of the process. It is observation through which we first become aware of everything that enters the realm of our experience. Sensations, percepts, intuitions, emotions, acts of will, dreams and imaginings, projections, concepts and ideas, all illusions and hallucinations come to us through observation.

As an object of observation, thought alone is fundamentally different from all other things. The observation of a table or a tree occurs as soon as these objects appear on the horizon of my experience. But I do not observe my own thoughts about these objects at the same time. I observe the table and think about the table, but I do not observe that thought in the same moment. If I am to observe my thought about the table as well as the table itself, I must first remove myself to a standpoint outside my own activity. While the observation of objects and processes, and my thoughts about them, are quite everyday components that make up my ongoing life, the observation of thought is a kind of exception. This fact must be considered when it comes to determining the relationship of thought *as an object of observation* to all other objects. One must be clear that, in observing thought, we are engaging in a process which is normal for the contemplation of all other objects in the world, but which is not normally applied to thought itself.

Some might object that what I have said here about thinking also applies to feeling and the mind's other activities. When we feel pleasure, for example, this too is sparked by an object, and while I observe this object, I am not observing the feeling of pleasure. But this objection is founded on

an error. Pleasure does not relate to its object in the same way that the concept formed by thinking does. I am fully conscious that the concept of a thing is formed through my activity, while the way an object produces pleasure is similar to how, for example, a falling stone produces a change in an object it falls on to. Pleasure is presented as an object of observation in exactly the same way as the process that causes it. The same cannot be said of concepts. I can ask: why does a process create a feeling of pleasure in me? But I cannot ask: why does a process cause a particular number of concepts in me? That would simply make no sense. The contemplation of a process is not the same as the effect that process has on me. If I know the corresponding concepts for the change caused by a stone thrown at a window pane, it teaches me nothing about myself. But I may well learn something about my own personality if I know the feeling that a particular process awakens in me. If I should say of an observed object: *this is a rose*, then I am not saying the least thing about myself. But if I say of the same object: *it pleases me*, then I have characterised not only the rose, but also myself in relation to the rose.

There can therefore be no talk of setting thought and feeling on an equal footing as objects of observation. And the

same can easily be said of the human mind's other activities. Unlike thought, they belong on a level with other observed objects and processes. Thought is unique in being an activity focused only on the observed object, and not on the thinking person. This can be seen even in the way we express our thoughts about a thing, as opposed to our feelings or acts of will. When I see an object and recognise it as a table, I generally will not say: *I am thinking about a table*, but: *this is a table*. Though I might well say: *I am pleased with this table*. In the former case, my aim is certainly not to express a relationship between myself and the table; in the latter, this relationship is precisely the point. When I say that I am thinking about a table, I am already entering the above-mentioned exceptional state of turning into an object of observation something that is always part of our mental activity, but not as an observed object.

This is the unique nature of thought: that the thinking person forgets about it while they are doing it. It is not thought that occupies them, but the object of thought that they are observing.

The first observation we will make about thought, then, is that it is the unobserved element of our usual mental life.

The reason we do not observe thought in the course of our day-to-day lives is simply because it is our own activity. The things I do not bring forth myself enter my field of observation as objects. I see them as independent of me; I am confronted with them, and must accept them as the precondition of my thought process. While I am thinking about an object, the object occupies my mind; my attention is turned towards it. This occupation is contemplative thought. My attention is directed towards the object, and not towards my own activity. In other words: while I am thinking, I do not look at my thought, which is of my own making, but at the object of thought, which is not of my making.

I am even in the same situation when I enter that exceptional state of contemplating my own thought. I can never observe my thought as it happens; I can only turn the things I have experienced during my thought process into the object of thought after the fact. If I wanted to observe my current thinking, I would have to split myself into two personalities, one thinking and the other watching myself think. This I cannot do. I can only perform this process as two separate acts. The thinking that is to be observed is never a current activity. For this purpose, it does not matter whether I am observing my own earlier thought, or follow-

ing the thought process of another person – or finally, as in the above case of the movement of billiard balls, describing an imagined thought process.

Two things are incompatible: active production and reflective contemplation. Even the first Book of Moses knows this much. On the first six days, God created the world, and only once it existed did the possibility of reflecting on it also exist. 'And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.' So it is with our own thought. If we want to observe it, it must first exist.

The reason it is impossible for us to observe our thought as it happens is also the reason we can know it more intimately and immediately than any other process in the world. We ourselves create it, and so we know the characteristics of its course, the precise way in which what we are considering happens. What is given to us in the usual spheres of observation – the nexus of objects and each object's relationship to the others – we know only in a mediated way. But when it comes to thought, our knowledge is immediate. In my observation of thunder and lightning, I do not know at once why one follows the other; but I do know why my thinking links the concepts of thunder and lightning, from the

content of the two concepts. And of course, it makes no difference whether or not I have the correct concepts of thunder and lightning. The connection I have between the two is clear to me in and of itself.

This transparent clarity with regard to our thought process is quite independent of our knowledge of the physiological basis of that thought. I am speaking here of thought insofar as it results from the observation of our mental activity. How one material process in my brain causes or influences another while I am thinking is not a consideration here. My observations on thought have nothing to do with which process in my brain links the concepts of thunder and lightning; I am looking at what it is that causes me to relate the two concepts in a specific way. My observation tells me that in connecting one thought to another, I am guided by their content, and not by material processes in my brain. For a less materialist age than our own this remark would of course be entirely superfluous. But in our present time, when there are people who believe that if we know what matter is, we will also know how matter thinks, it is worth saying that we are able to speak of thought without at once colliding with the physiology of the brain. It will be difficult for very many people today to conceive of thought

in its purest form. Anyone who immediately counters the notion of thought that I have developed here with Pierre John George Cabanis' pronouncement: 'The brain secretes thought just as the liver secretes gall, the saliva glands saliva etc' simply does not know what I am talking about. They are attempting to discover thought through a process of mere observation, in the same way we do with other objects in the world. But they cannot treat thought in this way because, as I have shown, it evades normal observation. Anyone who cannot see past materialism lacks the ability to enter the exceptional state described above, which allows a person to become conscious of what in all other mental activity remains unconscious. It is as impossible to speak about thought with someone who does not have the goodwill to take up this standpoint as it is to speak about colours with a blind person. This interlocutor should not imagine that we take physiological processes to be thought. Such a person cannot explain thought, because they do not even see it.

But for those who are able to observe thought – as every normally organised person is, if they have the will to do it – this observation is the most important they can carry out. For they are observing something they themselves have created: not an object initially unfamiliar to them, but their

own activity. They know how this thing they are observing has come about. They have an insight into the relationships and connections. They have gained a fixed point from which to seek an explanation of the rest of the world's phenomena, and their hope in finding that explanation is justified.

The feeling of having this fixed point prompted the founder of modern philosophy, René Descartes, to base the whole of human knowledge on the principle: 'I think, therefore I am.' All other things, all other events, exist without me; I do not know if they are true, or if they are delusions or dreams. There is only one thing I know with absolute certainty: my thought. It may originate elsewhere, from God or some other source, but I am certain it is in my mind and I am producing it. At first, Descartes had no justification for ascribing any other meaning to his principle. All he could claim was that, within the world, I apprehend myself in my thinking, which is the activity most unique to me. The meaning of the conclusion 'therefore I am' is the subject of fierce debate. But it can only have meaning under one condition. The simplest statement I can make about a thing is that it is, it exists. How this existence is to be more precisely defined cannot be said of anything that enters the horizon of my experience in that moment. Every object's relationship to

others must be investigated in order to determine the sense in which it can be said to exist. An event I have experienced can be a sum of percepts, but also a dream, a hallucination etc. In short, I cannot say in what sense it exists. I will not be able to deduce this from the event itself, but will discover it when I consider that event in relation to other things. Then again, I cannot know any more than how it stands in relation to these things. My search only reaches firm ground when I can create the sense of an object's existence out of the object itself. And as a thinker I am such an object, since I give to my existence the definite, self-contained content of thought activity. Now I can proceed from this point and ask: do other things exist in the same or a different sense?

When one makes thought the object of observation, one adds something to the rest of what is observed in the world that otherwise escapes attention. But that does not change our approach to other objects. The number of objects observed is increased, but not the method of observation. While we are observing things, an overlooked process is added to the rest of what is happening in the world – in which I now also count observation. Something different from all other processes is going on, but is not taken into account. However, when I consider my thought, nothing

is overlooked. For what now hovers in the background is simply more thought. The observed object is qualitatively the same as the activity focused upon it. And this again is a unique characteristic of thought. When we make it an object of contemplation, we are not compelled to do so with the help of something qualitatively different; we can remain within the same element.

If I weave my thoughts around an object that exists independently of me, I am going beyond my observation, and the question is then: what gives me the right to do this? Why do I not simply allow the object to act upon me? By what means is it possible for my thought to be related to the object? These are questions that everyone must ask themselves when they contemplate their own thought processes. They fall away when we contemplate our thought itself. We are adding to our thought nothing that is foreign to it, and so do not have to justify any such addition.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling says: 'To know nature is to create nature.' Anyone taking literally these words from the rash natural philosopher will quite probably have to do without any knowledge of nature for the rest of their lives. For nature is there, and in order to create it a second

time, one must know the principles according to which it came into being. If one wishes to create nature, one must study the conditions of its existence from the nature that is already there. But this preliminary study for creation would constitute a knowledge of nature, even if after successful study the creation were to be omitted entirely. Only a nature that was not already present could be created without first knowing it.

What is impossible in nature – creation before knowing – is what we do when we think. Were we to wait until we knew thought before thinking, we would never think at all. We must resolutely start thinking in order to arrive at the knowledge of what we have done in retrospect, by means of observation. When we want to observe thought, we must first create an object ourselves. The existence of all other objects is taken care of without our intervention.

Someone might easily counter my statement that we must think before we can contemplate thought, with another that appears equally valid: we cannot wait to digest until after we have observed the process of digestion. This would be

an objection similar to the one made by Blaise Pascal[11] to Descartes, when he claimed that one might also say: *I go for a walk, therefore I am*. And certainly, I must resolutely start digesting before I have studied the physiological process of digestion. But this could only be compared to the contemplation of thought if the contemplation of the digestive process was accomplished by more eating and digesting, not by thinking. There is a good reason why digestion cannot be the object of digestion, but thought can very well be the object of thought.

There is no doubt, then, that in thought, we have caught hold of one corner of world events in which we must be present for it to happen. And that is the fundamental point here. This is the very reason why things are so mysterious to me: because I am so uninvolved in how they are made. I am merely confronted with them; but when it comes to thought, I know how it is done. There is therefore no more essential point of departure for the contemplation of everything that happens in the world than thought.

11 The objection referred to here appears in Thomas Hobbes' *Objections to the Meditations*, not in Pascal. The example commonly cited is: 'I am walking, therefore I am a walk.'

Here, I would like to mention an error commonly made in regard to thought. It consists of saying: thought, as it is in itself, is nowhere presented to us. The thought processes that connect the observations of our experiences and spin them into a web of concepts are not at all the same as the thoughts that we subsequently extract from the objects of observation and make into the objects of our contemplation. What we first unconsciously weave into things is quite different from what we then consciously extract.

Anyone coming to this conclusion fails to understand that it is not possible to elude thought. I cannot remove myself from thought when I want to contemplate thought. Distinguishing preconscious thought from subsequent conscious thought means forgetting that this distinction is an entirely external one, which has nothing to do with the matter itself. I do not make one thing into another just by contemplating it. I can well imagine that a creature with sense organs differently constituted to mine and an intelligence that functions differently would have quite a different notion of a horse to my own – but I cannot think that my own thought becomes different when I observe it. I myself am observing what I myself have done. We are not speaking here of how my thought would appear to an intelligence

different from my own, but of how it appears to me. But in any case, the image of my thought in another intelligence cannot be a truer picture than my own is. If thought was presented to me not as my own activity, but the activity of a being alien to me, then although I could say something definite about how that thought appeared to me, I could not know it fully on its own terms.

So far, I have found not the slightest reason to view my own thought from a different standpoint. I consider all the rest of the world with the help of thought. So why should I make an exception for my own thinking?

I thus consider myself sufficiently justified in taking thought as my point of departure for contemplating the world. When Archimedes invented the lever, he believed that with its help he could lift the whole cosmos off its hinges, if he could only find a point to brace his instrument against. He needed something self-supporting, not borne up by anything else. In thought we have a principle that is self-supporting. Let us attempt to understand the world starting from here. We can understand thought by thinking. The only question is whether we can understand other things by the same means.

I have until now spoken of thought without giving consideration to its vehicle, human consciousness. Most present-day philosophers will object that before there can be thought, there must be consciousness. And so the starting point must be consciousness, and not thought. The latter cannot exist without the former. To these people, I must say: if I want an explanation of how thought and consciousness are related, I have to think about it. And I am thus placing thought first. Now, admittedly, someone might retort that, while the philosopher who wants to understand consciousness uses thought to do so, and thus places thought first, in the normal course of life, thought is created within consciousness, and so consciousness comes first. Were this answer given to the creator of the world, who intended to create thought, it would doubtless be justified. Naturally, one cannot create thought without first creating consciousness. But philosophers do not concern themselves with creating the world, only with understanding it. They therefore need to seek the point of departure for *understanding* the world, not creating it. I find it quite peculiar when people remonstrate with philosophers for placing correct principles above all other things, and not addressing themselves immediately to the objects they want to understand. The world-creator must know first and foremost how to find a vehicle for thought,

but philosophers must search for a firm basis from which to understand what is in front of them. What use is it to begin with consciousness and make it the object of contemplative thought, if we have not first considered how far it is possible to gain knowledge of things through contemplative thought?

The first thing is to consider thought with absolute neutrality, unrelated to a thinking subject or an object of thought. For subject and object are themselves concepts, formed by thinking. There is no denying that thought must be comprehended before we can comprehend anything else. Anyone who does deny this overlooks the fact that humans are not the first link in the chain of creation, but the last. And so, in explaining the world through concepts, one cannot proceed from the earliest elements of existence chronologically, but from what is most immediate, most intimately given to us. We cannot place ourselves with a single leap at the beginning of the world in order to start our contemplation; we must proceed from the present moment, and see if we can climb from the later back to the earlier. As long as geology attributed the present state of the earth to invented revolutions, it was groping around in the dark. Only when it decided to begin with the processes presently occurring on

the earth and work backwards to draw conclusions about the past did it gain any firm ground. As long as philosophy accepts all possible principles – atom, motion, matter, will, the unconscious – it will be floating in the air. Only when philosophers see the absolute last as their first can they reach the goal. And this absolute chronological last, the point to which world development has brought us, is thought.

There are people who will argue that we cannot know with any certainty whether our thought is correct in itself, and thus the starting point remains a doubtful one. This is no more rational than it would be to doubt whether a tree is correct in itself. Thought is a fact, and it is meaningless to speak of a fact as true or false. At most, I can doubt whether thought is used correctly, just as I can doubt whether a certain tree provides wood suitable for making a useful device. Showing the degree to which thought is used rightly or wrongly in the world will be the task of this treatise. I can understand someone harbouring doubts that the world can be understood through thought, but it is incomprehensible to me that someone could doubt the correctness of thought in itself.

CHAPTER FIVE

The World as Percept

Thought gives rise to *concepts* and *ideas*. Words cannot explain what a concept is. Words can only alert a person to the fact that they have concepts. When someone sees a tree, their thought reacts to the observation; the object is joined by an ideal counterpart, and the subject considers the object and the ideal counterpart as a pair that belong together. When the object vanishes from the subject's field of vision, the ideal counterpart is all that remains. The latter is the *concept* of the object. The more our experience expands, the greater the sum of our concepts becomes. But concepts never stand alone and separate from one another. They join together into a logical whole. The concept 'organism', for example, connects to 'systematic development, growth'. Other concepts formed from particular objects are subsumed completely into one another. All the concepts that I form of lions are subsumed into the overall concept 'lion'.

In this way I join the individual concepts together to make a closed conceptual system, in which each has its specific place. Ideas are not qualitatively different from concepts. They are just fuller, more replete and expansive concepts. And at this point, I must emphasise that I have designated thought as my point of departure, not concepts and ideas, which can only be won through thinking. Thought has to come first. What I have said about the nature of thought – that it is determined by nothing outside itself – cannot simply be carried over to concepts. (I choose to mention this because it is where I differ from Hegel. He regards the concept as something primary and original.)

Concepts cannot be acquired through observation. We know this from the mere fact that, as humans grow up, they form the concepts that apply to objects around them slowly and by degrees. Concepts are added to observation.

A much-read contemporary philosopher (Spencer) describes the mental process that we go through when we observe thus:

'If, when walking through the fields some day in September, you hear a rustle a few yards in advance, and on observing

the ditch-side where it occurs, see the herbage agitated, you will probably turn towards the spot to learn by what this sound and motion are produced. As you approach there flutters into the ditch a partridge; on seeing which your curiosity is satisfied – you have what you call an *explanation* of the appearances. The explanation, mark, amounts to this – that whereas throughout life you have had countless experiences of disturbance among small stationary bodies, accompanying the movement of other bodies among them, and have generalised the relation between such disturbances and such movements, you consider this particular disturbance explained on finding it to present an instance of the like relation.'[12]

On closer inspection, the matter is revealed to be quite different to how it is here described. When I hear a sound, I first seek the concept for this sound. This concept is what then points me beyond the sound. Anyone who does not think further than this merely hears the sound and is content with that. But when I think about it, it becomes clear to me that I must regard the sound as an effect of something. And only when I have linked the concept of effect to the

12 Spencer, *First Principles,* Part I, para 23.

percept of the sound am I moved to look beyond the single percept and seek the cause. The concept of effect prompts the concept of cause, and then I seek the object that is the cause, and find it in the partridge. But these concepts, cause and effect, can never be acquired through simple observation, however many cases I observe. Observation triggers thought, and it is thought alone that directs me to connect one experience to another.

To demand of a 'strictly objective science' that it takes its content only from observation, is to demand that it forgoes all thought. For the nature of thought is to go beyond what is observed.

Now we have reached the point where we must turn from thought to the thinking entity. For it is the thinking entity that brings thought and observation together. Human consciousness is the arena where concept and observation meet and are linked. And in saying this, we have characterised (human) consciousness. It is the mediator between thought and observation. When it observes an object, it regards the object as given; when it thinks, it regards itself as being active. It considers the object as object, and itself as the thinking subject. When its thought is directed towards the

object, it is conscious of the object; when thought is directed towards itself, it is self-conscious. Human consciousness must necessarily also be *self-consciousness*, because it thinks. For when thought is focused on its own activity, it makes an object of its unique, essential nature, of itself as a subject.

Here, we must not overlook the fact that thought is what allows us to designate ourselves as subject and contrast ourselves with objects. And so thinking can never be understood as a merely subjective activity. Thought transcends subject and object. It generates these two concepts as it does all others. And thus, when we as thinking subjects relate a concept to an object, we should not consider this relationship to be merely subjective. It is thought, and not the thinking subject, that makes this connection. The subject does not think *because* it is a subject; it sees itself as a subject because it is able to think. The activity of consciousness, when it thinks, is therefore not merely subjective – in fact it is neither subjective nor objective, and transcends these concepts. I must never say that I, an individual subject, think; rather, that subjectivity exists by the grace of thought. Thought is an element that takes me outside myself and relates me to objects. But at the same

time, it separates me from them, by placing me in contrast to them as a subject.

The double nature of humankind rests on this: our thought encompasses ourselves and the rest of the world, but at the same time, our thought determines us to be individuals in contrast to things.

The next step is to ask ourselves: how does the other element – which we have so far described merely as the object of observation, and which encounters thought within our consciousness – arrive in the latter?

In order to answer this question, we must exclude from our field of observation everything that has come into it by means of thought. For at any given moment, the content of our consciousness is always already woven through with concepts in a huge number of ways.

Let us imagine that a being endowed with a fully developed human intelligence is created from nothing and confronted with the world. Before it starts to think, all it will perceive there is pure observation. All that the world will show this being is an aggregation of unconnected sensory informa-

tion: colours, sounds, experiences of pressure, warmth, taste, and smell; feelings of pleasure and displeasure. This aggregation is the content of pure, thoughtless observation. In contrast to it stands thought, which is ready to commence its activity when it finds a point of application. Experience teaches us that it soon will. Thought is capable of spinning a thread from one observed element to another. It links certain concepts to these elements and thereby creates a relationship between them. We have already seen how a noise we encounter is linked to another observation when we determine the first to be an effect of the second.

If we now recall that the activity of thought is not to be understood as subjective in any way, we will not be tempted to believe that such connections formed by thought have only a subjective validity.

The task now is to find, through contemplative thought, the nature of the relationship between the above-mentioned immediate content of observation and our conscious subject.

Since language is used in varying ways, it seems advisable for me to reach an agreement with my readers on the use of

a word I must employ in what follows. The immediate sensory data mentioned above, insofar as the conscious subject has knowledge of these through observation, are what I will call *percepts*. It is the observed object, and not the process of observation (perception), that I will call by this name.

I choose not to use the term 'sensation', because this has a specific meaning in physiology, narrower than the percept in my sense. I can describe a feeling within myself as a percept, but not as a sensation in the physiological sense. If I am to gain knowledge of my feeling, it must first become a percept for me. And the way we gain knowledge of our thought through observation is such that we may also call thought a percept, when we first become conscious of it.

The naive person regards their percepts, which to them seem immediate, as things that exist quite independently of them. When they see a tree, they believe at once that it stands in the place where their gaze is directed, in the form they can see, with the colours of its various parts etc. When the same person sees the sun appear in the morning as a disc on the horizon and follows the course of this disc, they are of the opinion that it exists in this way (in itself) and proceeds as they observe it. They will persist in this

belief until encountering another percept that contradicts it. The child who as yet has no experience of distances reaches for the moon, and only judges it correctly when a second percept comes into conflict with the first. Every addition to my store of percepts forces me to adjust my image of the world. This can be seen both in daily life and in the intellectual development of humanity. The image that the ancients had of the Earth's relationship to the Sun and the other heavenly bodies had to be replaced with a new one by Copernicus, because it did not accord with percepts that were previously unknown. When Dr Franz performed an operation on a man who was born blind, the latter said that before the operation, percepts he had acquired through touch had given him a completely different image of how large objects were. His sight-percepts then had to correct his touch-percepts.

What is it that forces us to continually correct our observations?

A moment's consideration provides the answer to this question. If I stand at one end of an avenue, the trees distant from me at the other end appear smaller and closer together than those where I am standing. My perceptual image

changes when I change the place from which I make my observation. The form in which it is presented to me therefore depends on a condition belonging not to the object, but to me, the perceiver. The avenue itself is completely unaffected by where I am standing. But the image I have of the avenue is fundamentally dependent upon it. The sun and the solar system are likewise unaffected by the fact that humans are looking at them from the earth. But the image of them that humans have is determined by their place of residence. The way our image of something depends on the place from which we observe it is the easiest dependency to recognise. The matter becomes more difficult when we realise that our world of percepts also depends on the organisation of our body and mind. The physicists show us that when we hear a sound, the air vibrates in the space where we hear it, and the particles that make up the body in which we seek the sound's origin also make a vibrating motion. If our ear is organised in the normal way, we perceive this motion only as sound. Without such an ear, the whole world remains ever silent to us.

Physiology tells us that some people perceive nothing of the magnificent array of colours that surround us. Their perceptual image contains only shades of light and dark.

Others lack an ability to see only one colour – red, for example. This colour is absent from their image of the world, which is therefore different to that of the average human. I may call the way my perceptual image depends on my point of observation a mathematical dependency, and the way it depends on my organisation a qualitative dependency. One gives me my percepts' size relations and relative distances, and the other gives me their quality. My ability to see a red surface as red – a qualitative determination – depends on the organisation of my eye.

My perceptual images are therefore initially subjective. Recognising the subjective character of our percepts can easily lead us to doubt whether they are in fact based on anything objective. If we know that a percept – the colour red, for instance, or a particular sound – is not possible without our organism being equipped in a specific way, we might believe that this percept has no substance without our subjective organism, that it has no kind of existence without the act of perception whose object it is. A classic proponent of this view is George Berkeley, who was of the opinion that, from the moment humans become aware of the significance of the subject for perception, they cannot

believe in a world that exists without a conscious mind. He says:

'Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind that man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, viz., that all the choir of heaven and the furniture of the earth – in a word, all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world – have not any subsistence without a mind; that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently, so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit.'[13]

In this view, nothing of the percept remains if you subtract the act of perception from it. There is no colour if none is seen, no sound if none is heard. And nor do extension, shape and motion exist outside the act of perceiving. Nowhere do we see extension or shape alone; they are always coupled with colour or other properties that are inarguably dependent on our own subjectivity. If the latter were to

13 George Berkeley, *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge,* Part I, section 6.

vanish when they are not being perceived, then so must the former, which are tied to them.

One might object that, even if shape, colour, sound etc have no existence except when perceived, there must yet be things that exist without consciousness and that are similar to conscious percept-images – and the above-described view counters this objection by arguing that a colour can only be similar to a colour, and a shape similar to a shape. Our percepts can only be similar to our percepts, and not to any other kind of thing. Even what I call an object is nothing but a group of percepts connected in a particular way. If I take away from a table its shape, extension, colour etc – in short, everything that is just my percept – nothing is left. This view logically leads to the claim that the objects of my percepts are only there in relation to me, and only insofar as and for as long as I am perceiving them; they vanish when I stop perceiving, and have no meaning without it. I know of no objects outside my percepts, and can know of none.

It is impossible to counter this claim while I am merely considering the fact that the percept is partly determined by the organisation of myself as subject. But the matter would appear very different if we could determine the part

that perceiving plays in the formation of percepts. Then we would know what happens to the percept as it is being perceived, and could also determine what properties it must have before it is perceived.

With this, our focus would move from the object of perception to its subject. I perceive myself, as well as other things. The percept of myself is firstly composed of what is permanent, in contrast to perceptual images which are always coming and going. The percept of the self enters my consciousness as a companion to all other percepts. When I am absorbed in the percept of a given object, I am temporarily conscious only of this. And then it is joined by the percept of my self. I am now conscious not only of the object, but also of my personality, distinct from the object and observing it. I do not just see a tree; I also know that I am the one seeing it. I also recognise that something is happening within me while I observe the tree. When the tree disappears from my field of vision, a remnant of this process remains: an image of the tree. During my observation, this image has become tied to my self. My self has been enriched; it has taken in a new element. I call this element my *mental image* of the tree. I would never be able to speak of mental images without the percept of my self. Percepts would come and go;

I would let them pass. It is only because I perceive my self, and notice that its content changes with every percept, that I am forced to connect the observation of the object with my own altered state and speak of my *mental image*.

I perceive the mental image in myself in the same way I perceive colour, sound etc in other objects. I can now also make a distinction, and call these other objects that stand in contrast to me the external world, while the content of my self-perception is my internal world. The misconception of the relationship between mental image and object has brought about the greatest misunderstandings in modern philosophy. The percept of a change in us, the modification that my self undergoes, has been pushed into the foreground, and the object that caused this modification is completely lost from view. People have claimed that we do not perceive the object, only our mental images. I supposedly know nothing about the table itself, which is the object of my observation, but only of the change that happens within me while I am perceiving it. This view must not be confused with Berkeley's, mentioned above. Berkeley claims that the content of my percept is subjective, but he does not say that I can only know my mental images. He confines my knowledge to my mental images because he is of the opinion that

there are no objects outside the formation of mental images. What I see as a table is, in Berkeley's sense, no longer there as soon as I stop looking at it. Berkeley therefore regards my percepts as being created directly by the power of God. I see a table because God calls forth this percept in me. As a result, Berkeley knows no other real entity beside God and the human mind. What we call the world exists only inside our minds. And what the naive person calls the external world, physical nature, is simply not there. This view stands in contrast to the Kantian view that prevails in our times, which limits our knowledge of the world to our mental images, not because it is convinced that things cannot exist outside them, but because it believes us to be organised in such a way that we can only know the changes to our own selves, and not the things that cause these changes. If I know only my own mental images, it does not mean that they have no independent existence, but that the subject cannot take this existence directly into itself, other than by 'imagining, simulating, thinking, recognising, or perhaps failing to recognise, through the medium of its own subjective thought'.[14] This view believes it is saying something

14 Liebmann, *Zur Analysis der Wirklichkeit* (*On the Analysis of Reality*), p28.

absolutely certain, something that is immediately apparent without requiring any proof.

'The first fundamental principle that the philosopher must bring to clear consciousness consists in the recognition that our knowledge initially extends no further than our own mental images. These are the only things we experience and know immediately; and because we experience them immediately, even the most radical doubt cannot snatch away that knowledge. By contrast, the knowledge that goes beyond my mental images – I take this expression in the widest sense here, to include all mental activity – is not protected from doubt. At the start of our philosophising we must therefore proclaim all knowledge that goes beyond our own mental images as open to doubt.'[15]

This is how Johannes Volkelt begins his book *Kants Erkenntnistheorie* (*Kant's Theory of Knowledge*). But what he is proclaiming here, as if it were an immediate and self-evident truth, is in fact the result of the following thought process: the naive person believes that a perceived object also exists outside their consciousness. But physics,

15 Volkelt, *Kants Erkenntnistheorie* (*Kant's Theory of Knowledge*), 1879.

physiology, and psychology teach us that we must be organised in a particular way to acquire our percepts, and it follows that we can know nothing of things but what our organisation transmits. Our percepts are therefore modifications of our organisation, not things in themselves.

The thought process outlined here has been characterised by von Hartmann as one that must convince us of the principle that we can have immediate knowledge only of our mental images.[16] Outside our organism, we find vibrations of bodies and air that reach us as sound, and so it is argued that what we call sound is nothing but a subjective reaction of our organism to that movement in the outside world. In the same way, we find that colour and warmth are only modifications of our organism. And we do take the view that these two kinds of percepts are produced in us through the effect of the movement of the ether, an infinitely fine material that fills the atmosphere. When the movements of this ether stimulate the nerves in my skin, I have a percept of warmth, and when they strike the optic nerve, I perceive light and colour. Thus light, colour, and

16 See Hartmann, *Das Grundproblem der Erkenntnistheorie* (*The Fundamental Problem of Theory of Knowledge*), 1889, pp16–40.

warmth are the answers that my sense nerves give to external stimuli. Nor does the sense of touch reveal to me the objects of the external world; it only tells me the state of my own body. The physicist believes that the body is made up of incredibly small components – molecules – and that these molecules do not touch but keep a distance from one another. Empty space therefore exists between them. And this allows them to act on each other by means of attracting and repelling forces. When I bring my hand close to a body, the molecules of my hand in no way directly touch those of the body; a certain distance remains between body and hand, and what I experience as the resistance of the body is nothing more than the repelling force its molecules exert on my hand. I am quite simply outside the body and perceive only its effect on my organism.

These considerations are complemented by the theory of 'specific nerve energies' advanced by Johannes Peter Müller. This asserts that each sense will only respond to outside stimuli in one particular way. If something acts upon on the optic nerve, it will produce a percept of light, no matter whether the stimulus to the nerve was something we would call light, or a mechanical pressure or an electrical storm. The same external stimulus will produce different percepts

in different senses. It thus seems to be the case that our senses can only transmit what is happening in themselves, and nothing of the outside world. Each determines the percept according to its own nature.

Physiology shows that there can also be no talk of having immediate knowledge of how objects act upon our sense organs. When physiology traces the processes in our bodies, it finds that even in the sense organs, the effects of external movement are changed in manifold ways. We see that most clearly from our eyes and ears. Both are very complex organs, which change external stimuli quite fundamentally before transmitting them to the relevant nerve. From the peripheral end of the nerve, the already changed stimulus is carried further to the brain. And here, the central organs must be stimulated. From this we may conclude that the external process has undergone a whole series of transformations before reaching our consciousness. What happens in the brain is connected to the external process by so many intermediate processes that we can no longer think of the two as being similar. What the brain finally transmits to the mind are neither external processes nor processes in the sense organs, but only what has taken place in the brain. But even the last of these is not perceived directly by

the mind. What we ultimately have in the conscious mind is not brain processes, but sensations. My sensation of red is in no way similar to the process that takes place in the brain when I sense red. The latter only appears as an effect in the mind and is only caused by the brain process. And it is for this reason that von Hartmann says: 'The things that the subject perceives are thus always just modifications of the subject's own psychic state, and nothing else.'[17] But when I have sensations, these are far from being grouped with what I perceive as *things*. It is true that only individual sensations can be communicated to me through my brain. The sensations of hardness and softness are brought to me by the sense of touch; sensations of colour and light are brought by my eyesight. But these are united in one and the same object. And this union must be performed by the mind. Which is to say that the mind puts together the sensations transmitted by the brain, to make up bodies. My brain conveys individual sensations of sight, touch and hearing through quite different routes, which the mind then compiles into the mental image of a trumpet. What is really the final stage of a process (the mental image of a

17 Hartmann, *Das Grundproblem der Erkenntnistheorie* (*The Fundamental Problem of Theory of Knowledge*), 1889, p37.

trumpet) is the first thing given to my consciousness. And nothing remains in this image of what is external to me and originally made the impression on my senses. The external object has been completely lost on its way to the brain, and from the brain to the mind.

In the history of the human mind, it would be difficult to find another edifice of thought put together with such ingenuity, but which on closer inspection crumbles into nothing. Let us take a closer look at its construction. One's initial point of departure is what is given to the naive consciousness: perceived things. Then one shows that all the qualities of these things would not exist for us if we had no senses. No eyes: no colour. This means that colour is not yet present in what meets the eye. It is only generated through the interaction of eye and object. The object itself is colourless. But the colour is not present even in the eye; there is a chemical or physical process that carries information from the eye to the brain, and triggers another process there. Still, this is not colour. Colour is only produced in the mind through the process in the brain. And still it does not enter my consciousness, but is transferred by the mind onto an object. Now I finally perceive it. We have come full circle. We have become conscious of a coloured object. That

is the first thing. Now the thought process begins. If I had no eyes, I would regard the object as colourless. So I cannot attribute the colour to the object. I go looking for it. I seek it in the eye, in vain; in the nerve, in vain; likewise in the brain. I find it in the mind – but not connected to the object. The coloured object I find only where I started. The circle is complete. What the naive person thinks is outside in the world, I believe to be the creation of my mind.

As long as one stops there, everything seems to be in perfect order. But the business must be begun again from the beginning. Until this point I have been dealing with a thing, an external percept, of which as a naive person I had an entirely false idea. I thought it had an objective existence, just as I perceived it. Now, however, I see that in the process of forming a mental image of the object, it vanishes, and is only a modification of my mental state. So do I still have any right to use it as a point of departure for my contemplations? Can I say that it acts upon my mind? From now on, I must treat the table – which I previously believed was acting on me and producing a mental image of itself in my mind – as a mental image itself. Logically, however, my sense organs and the processes that take place within them are then also merely subjective. I have no right to speak of a

real eye, only my mental image of an eye. It is the same with the nerve pathways and the brain processes, and no less with the processes in the mind itself, through which things seem to be constructed out of the chaos of manifold sensations. If I presuppose that the first full circle of thought is correct, and run through the elements of my act of knowledge once more, the latter emerges as a gossamer web of ideas, which cannot act upon one another. I cannot say: my mental image of the object acts upon my mental image of the eye, and this interaction produces the mental image of colour. But nor do I need to. For as soon as it becomes clear to me that my sense organs and their activities, my nerve and soul processes, can only be given through perception, the above-described thought process is revealed as wholly impossible. It is correct to say that I cannot perceive anything without the corresponding sense organ. But there can equally be no sense organ without perception. I can proceed from my percept of the table to the eye that sees it, to the nerves in the skin that touch it, but what occurs in these I can only know from perception. And there I soon realise that the process that happens in the eye has not the slightest similarity to what I perceive as colour. I cannot annihilate my colour-percept by pointing out the process that takes place in the eye when I perceive a colour. Nor do

I find the colour anywhere in the nerve and brain processes; I merely connect new percepts within my organism to the first, which the naive person sites outside their organism. I merely move from one percept to another.

Quite apart from this, the whole argument has a crack in it. I am capable of tracing the processes in my organism right through to those in my brain, even if my assumptions become increasingly hypothetical as I approach the central processes in the brain. The path of *external* observation ends with the processes in my brain – specifically with those I would perceive if I could explore the brain using the equipment and methods of physics, chemistry etc. The path of *inner* observation begins with sensation and runs to the construction of things out of the material of sensations. Where the brain process ends and sensation begins, the path of observation is interrupted.

This way of thinking, which calls itself critical idealism, in contrast to the standpoint of the naive consciousness – or 'naive realism' in its own terms – makes the mistake of characterising one percept as a mental image, but accepting the other just as naive realism does, though this is a worldview it has apparently refuted. It proves that percepts are mental

images by accepting the percepts of one's own organism as objectively valid facts, in a naive way, and to cap it all, ignores the fact that it is conflating two separate areas of observation, between which it can find no connection.

Critical idealism can only refute naive realism by accepting the objective existence of its own organism, in naive-realist fashion. As soon as it becomes aware that the percepts of one's own organism are exactly the same as the percepts accorded objective existence by naive realism, it can no longer rely on the former as a secure foundation. It must then also regard its subjective organisation as a mere complex of mental images. But in so doing, it can no longer think of the content of the perceived world as a product of our mental organisation. One must accept that the mental image of colour is only a modification of the mental image of the eye. So-called critical idealism cannot be proved without borrowing from naive realism. The latter can only be refuted by uncritically accepting the validity of one's own assumptions in another area.

This much, then, is certain: investigations within the realm of percepts cannot prove the validity of critical idealism, or strip percepts of their objective character.

It is less legitimate still to present the principle: 'the perceived world is my mental image' as self-evident and requiring no proof. Arthur Schopenhauer begins his major work *The World as Will and Idea* with the words:

'"The world is my idea": this is a truth which holds good for everything that lives and knows, though man alone can bring it into reflective and abstract consciousness. If he really does this, he has attained to philosophical wisdom. It then becomes clear and certain to him that what he knows is not a sun and an earth, but only an eye that sees a sun, a hand that feels an earth; that the world which surrounds him is there only as idea, ie, only in relation to something else, the consciousness, which is himself. If any truth can be asserted a priori, it is this: for it is the expression of the most general form of all possible and thinkable experience: a form which is more general than time, or space, or causality, for they all presuppose it...'[18]

The whole principle founders on the fact mentioned above, that eye and hand are no less percepts than the Sun and the

18 Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Idea*), 1819, trans Haldane and Kemp, p3.

Earth. And one could, in Schopenhauer's sense and borrowing from his own expressions, object to his argument by saying: my eye, which sees the Sun, and my hand, which feels the earth, are my 'ideas' just as much as the Sun and the Earth themselves. It is immediately clear that, in so doing, I reverse the principle. For only my real eye and my real hand could be modified by the mental images of Sun and Earth, and not my mental images of eye and hand.

Critical idealism is completely unsuited to gaining an insight into the relationship between percept and mental image. It cannot make the distinction made on p67 between what happens to the percept during the act of perception and what must be inherent in it before it is perceived. To do this, we must forge a different path.

CHAPTER SIX

Knowing the World

From the preceding considerations, it follows that it is impossible to prove, by means of investigating the content of our observation, that our percepts are mental images. This proof supposedly consists in showing that, when the process of perception happens in the way one imagines it does – according to naive-realist assumptions about the psychological and physiological constitution of the individual – then we are dealing not with things-in-themselves, but merely with our mental images of things. And when naive realism, taken to its logical conclusion, yields results that are the exact opposite of its presuppositions, then we must regard these presuppositions as unsuitable for the foundation of a worldview, and drop them. Nor can we be allowed to reject the presuppositions and still hold what follows from them to be valid, as the critical idealists do.

Their claim, 'the world is my idea', is the foundation for the above line of argument.[19]

The correctness of critical idealism is one thing; the persuasiveness of its proofs is another. The former will be evaluated later on. But its proofs are not persuasive at all. When one builds a house and during the construction of the first floor, the ground floor collapses, the first floor will go with it. The relationship between naive realism and critical idealism is like that of the ground floor to the first.

Anyone who takes the view that the whole perceived world is just a mental image of the world, the effect of things unknown to me acting upon my soul, will locate the real question of knowledge not in mental images present only in the mind, but in things that lie beyond our consciousness and are independent of us. Such a person will ask: how much of the latter can we know – in a mediated way, since these things are not immediately accessible to our consciousness? They will then pay no heed to the connection between percepts within consciousness, but focus instead on the causes

19 Von Hartmann gives a detailed account of this argument in his book *Das Grundproblem der Erkenntnistheorie* (*The Fundamental Problem of Theory of Knowledge*), 1889.

that transcend consciousness and exist independently of it. In that person's view, percepts vanish as soon as the senses turn away from things. They believe our consciousness works like a mirror, from which the images of specific things vanish the moment its reflective surface is turned away from them. But if someone sees only a reflection, and not the thing itself, they will have to learn indirectly about how the latter is constituted from the behaviour of the former. This is the standpoint of modern science, which uses percepts only as a means for obtaining information about the movement of matter that lies behind them, and which is the only truth. If critical idealist philosophers admit any existence as valid, then their striving for knowledge through the medium of mental images is solely aimed at this existence. Their interest leaps over the subjective world of mental images and launches itself at what creates them.

But critical idealists can go so far as to say: I am trapped inside my world of mental images and cannot escape from it. When I think of a thing that lies behind that world, this thing is also nothing but a mental image of mine. The idealists can then either completely deny the thing-in-itself, or say that it has no meaning at all for humans and is thus as good as non-existent, because we can know nothing of it.

To a critical idealist of this kind, the whole world appears as a desolate dream, in the face of which any search for knowledge would be completely meaningless. For them, there can be only two kinds of people: those who are trapped, believing their web of dreams to be real things, and wise people who can see how insubstantial this dream world is, and who must gradually lose all pleasure in continuing to pay attention to it. From this standpoint, one's own personality can become a mere dream image. Just as the dream image of oneself appears among the other images of our dreams as we sleep, in our waking minds the mental image of the self is added to the mental image of the external world. We then have in our consciousness not our real self, but only our image of that self. And anyone who denies that things exist, or denies that we can know something of them, must now also deny the existence or rather the knowledge of their own personality. The critical idealist then arrives at the claim: 'All reality is transformed into a wonderful dream, without a life that is dreamed of, and without an intellect that dreams; into a dream that coheres within a dream of the self.'[20]

20 See Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menchen* (*The Vocation of Man*), 1800.

Whether the person who believes they recognise immediate life as a dream suspects nothing behind this dream, or relates their mental images to real things, life itself must lose all scientific interest for them. Those who believe that the universe accessible to us goes no further than this dream must regard all science as an absurdity, while for those who believe themselves entitled to deduce things from mental images, science consists of the investigation of these 'things-in-themselves'. The first worldview can be called absolute *illusionism*, and the second is called *transcendental realism* by its most systematic proponent, von Hartmann.[21]

These two views share with naive realism an attempt to gain a foothold in the world through an examination of percepts. But within this realm they can nowhere find firm ground.

21 'Transcendental' means a knowledge conscious that nothing can be directly stated about things-in-themselves, but which draws indirect conclusions from subjective knowledge about what is unknown and beyond subjectivity (the transcendent). In this view, the thing-in-itself lies outside the realm of the world we can know immediately, ie, is transcendent. But our world can be transcendentally related to the transcendent. Von Hartmann's view is termed realism because it looks beyond the subjective – the ideal – to the transcendent and real.

One of the most important questions for a follower of transcendental realism must be: how does the self create the world of mental images out of itself? The theory of a world of mental images given to us, which vanishes as soon as we close off our senses to the external world, can only be accepted as part of a serious quest for knowledge if it is the means by which to indirectly investigate the self as a thing-in-itself. If the things of our experience were mental images, then our everyday life would be like a dream, and discovery of the true facts like awakening. Our dream images interest us only while we are dreaming, and consequently we gain no insight into the nature of dreams. At the moment of waking, we stop questioning the internal connections between our dream images, and address ourselves to the processes of physics, physiology and psychology in which they are rooted. The philosopher who takes the world to be their mental image can have just as little interest in the internal connections between elements of that image. If this philosopher should consider the self to have a valid existence, then they will not ask, how does one of my mental images connect to another, but what is happening in the independently existing mind while my consciousness contains a specific sequence of mental images? When I dream that I am drinking wine, which makes my throat burn, and

am then woken by a cough[22], the dream story ceases to have any interest for me in the moment of waking. My attention is then all on the physiological and psychological processes through which the cough was symbolically expressed in the dream image. In a similar way, as soon as the philosopher is convinced that the given world is a mental image, they must make the leap at once from images to the real souls behind them. The matter is worse, admittedly, if illusionism utterly denies the existence of the self-in-itself behind the mental images, or holds it to be unknowable. Such a view can very easily be arrived at: the state of dreaming can be contrasted with the state of waking consciousness, in which we have the opportunity to see through the dream and relate it to real circumstances – but there is no comparable state related to our waking consciousness. Adherents of this view fail to see that there is in fact something that relates to mere perception in the same way that experience in waking life relates to dreams. That thing is thought.

The same failing cannot be attributed to the naive person. They give themselves over to life and believe that things are real, just as they are presented in experience. But taking the

22 See Weygandt, *Entstehung der Träume (The Making of Dreams)*, 1893.

first step beyond this standpoint means asking how thought relates to the percept. It does not matter whether this percept, as it appears within me, exists both before and after I form a mental picture: if I want to say something about it, this can only be done with the help of thought. When I say 'the world is my idea', I have expressed the result of a thought process, and if my thought cannot be applied to the world, then this result is an error. Thought inserts itself between the percept and every kind of pronouncement about it.

The reason why thought is most often ignored in the consideration of things has been addressed already, in Chapter three. It lies in the fact that we can direct our attention towards the object we are thinking about, but not simultaneously towards the thought about it. The naive consciousness thus treats thought as something that has nothing to do with objects, but stands quite apart from them, considering the world. The image that the thinker creates of the world's phenomena is not considered to be a part of them, but exists only in a person's head; the world itself is complete even without this image. The world is entirely finished, complete in all its substances and forces, and then humans create an image of this finished world. The question one must ask

those who believe this is: what right do they have to declare the world finished without thought? Does the world not bring forth thought in human heads with the same necessity as it brings forth blossoms on a plant?

Plant a seed in the ground. It puts out roots and shoots. It grows and develops leaves and flowers. Place yourself in front of the plant. In your mind, it is connected to a particular concept. Why is this concept any less a part of the plant than leaf and flower? You will say: the leaves and flowers exist even without a perceiving subject, while the concept appears only when a human is looking at the plant. Very well. But the plant grows flowers and leaves only when the seed has earth to grow in, and air and water in which leaves and flowers can unfurl. The concept of the plant is created in just the same way, when a thinking consciousness approaches it.

It is quite arbitrary to consider what we learn of a thing through perception alone to be a totality, a whole, and to regard what is generated by contemplative thought as an addition that has nothing to do with the thing itself. If I am given a rosebud today, the first image that presents itself to my perception is a closed bud. If I place the bud in water,

then tomorrow I will have a completely different image of my object. If I do not turn my eye away from the rosebud, I will see today's state turn into tomorrow's through countless, continuous intermediate steps. The image that presents itself to me at a particular moment is just a chance snippet from an object in a process of continual becoming. If I do not set the bud in water, then a whole series of states dependent on water will not develop. Equally, I can be prevented from observing the flower tomorrow and be left with an incomplete picture for that reason.

To declare of a single image presented at a particular time: *this is the thing*, would be an entirely subjective opinion based on chance and circumstance.

It is just as inadmissible to claim that the sum of percepts of a thing is the thing. It is entirely possible that a mind might receive a concept at the same time, undivided from the percept. It would never occur to such a mind to see the concept as something that was not part of the thing. It would have to ascribe to the concept an existence inextricably tied to the thing.

I would like to clarify this statement with a further example. When I throw a stone horizontally through the air, I see it in a series of different positions, one after another. I link these positions into a line. In mathematics I learn the shape of various lines, including a parabola. I know the parabola as a line made by an object travelling in a certain way according to mathematical laws. When I investigate the conditions under which the stone moves as it is thrown, I find that the line it makes is identical to what I know as a parabola. The fact that the stone moves in a parabola is a result of the given conditions, and necessarily follows from them. The shape of the parabola is part of the whole phenomenon, like everything else that is considered about it. The mind described above, which does not have to take a detour through thought, would not only see a number of visual percepts in different positions, but also – and inseparable from the phenomenon – the parabolic course taken by the stone, which we only add to the phenomenon by thinking.

The fact that objects first appear to us without the corresponding concepts is not a property of the objects themselves; it is a result of the way our minds are organised. Our whole being functions in such a way that for every real

thing, the elements of it to be considered come to us from two sides: from *perception and thought*.

The way I am organised to understand things has nothing to do with the nature of things themselves. The split between perception and thought only appears at the moment when I, the observer, am confronted with things. But which elements are part of things and which are not certainly cannot depend on how I acquire knowledge of these elements.

Humans are limited beings. First, a human being is a thing among other things. Our existence belongs to space and time. And so only a limited portion of the whole universe is ever given to each of us. But this limited portion is joined to others in both space and time. If our existence were linked to things in such a way that each world event was at the same time *our* event, then there would be no difference between us and things. But then nor would we see any individual things. All events would constantly flow together. The cosmos would be a unity and a whole complete in itself. The current of events would never be interrupted. Our limitation allows us to differentiate between individual things that are, in reality, not individual. Nowhere, for example, is the quality 'red' present in isolation. It is surrounded on

all sides by other qualities, of which it is part, and without which it could not exist. But we find it necessary to pick certain sections out of the world and consider them in isolation. When faced with a multicoloured whole, our eyes can only comprehend single colours one after another; and in a coherent conceptual system, our mind can only comprehend single concepts. This separation is a subjective act, and occurs because we are not identical with the world process, but are a thing among other things.

Now everything comes down to determining the position of the thing that we ourselves are in relation to other things. And by this I mean more than mere self-awareness. The latter rests on perception just as the awareness of other things does. Self-perception gives me a number of qualities that I unite to form my overall personality, just as I unite the qualities yellow, metallic, hard etc to form 'gold'. Self-perception does not take me beyond the realm of what belongs to me, and should be distinguished from thinking self-determination. I place a single external percept into the context of the world by thinking, and percepts of myself are placed into the world process by the same means. My self-percepts contain me within certain limits; my thinking roams beyond them. In this sense, I am a double being. I am

contained within the sphere that I perceive as my personality, but am capable of an activity that determines my limited existence from a higher sphere. Thinking is not individual in the way that sensing and feeling are; it is universal. It gains an individual character in each of us only by being related to our individual feelings and sensations. Individual people differ from one another in the special colouring their minds give to universal thought. A triangle has only one concept. Whether the human consciousness of A or B comprehends the triangle makes no difference to the content of this concept. But each of these minds will comprehend it in an individual way.

This thought is opposed by a human prejudice that is difficult to overcome. It cannot admit that the concept of a triangle in my head is the same as it will be in my neighbour's. The naive person takes themselves to be the creator of their concepts. They therefore believe that each person has their own. Overcoming this prejudice is one of the fundamental challenges of philosophical thought. The single unified concept of the triangle does not become a multiplicity by being thought of by many people, because the thought of many people is itself a unity.

Thought is the element that fuses our particular individuality with the cosmos to create a whole. When we sense and feel (perceive) we are individuals; when we think, we are the all-in-one being that permeates everything. This is the deeper foundation of our double nature: we see an absolute power forming within us, a power that is universal, but we come to know it not at the centre of the world, from where it radiates out, but at a point on the periphery. If the first were the case, then in the moment we first become conscious, we would understand the whole puzzle of the world. But since we are at a point on the periphery and our own existence is confined within specific limits, we must discover the realm outside our own being with the help of thought, which is the universal life of the world projected into us.

It is because the thought in our minds reaches beyond our specificity and into universality that we have the drive to attain knowledge. Creatures without thought do not possess this drive. When they are confronted with other things, these things prompt no questions. They remain external to such creatures. In thinking beings, external things provoke a concept. We receive the concepts of things from within rather than without. Knowledge is what balances and unites the two elements, the internal and the external.

The percept is thus not finished and complete in itself; it is one side of the total reality. The other side is the concept. The act of knowledge is the synthesis of percept and concept, and only these two together make up the whole.

The preceding comments prove that it is preposterous to seek some commonality between the world's individual beings other than the ideal content that thinking offers us. All attempts to find unity in the world beyond this coherent ideal content, which we acquire through contemplative thought about our percepts, must fail. No personal God, no force or matter, no will without idea (as per Schopenhauer and von Hartmann) can serve as a universal unifying factor. These phenomena belong only to the limited sphere of our observation. We perceive personality only in ourselves, and force and matter only in external things. As for the will, it can only be the active expression of our limited personality. Schopenhauer wants to avoid making 'abstract' thought the unifying factor and seeks instead something that presents itself to him as immediately real. This philosopher believes that we can never come to grips with the world if we regard it as external.

'In fact, the meaning for which we seek of that world which is present to us only as our idea, or the transition from the world as mere idea of the knowing subject to whatever it may be besides this, would never be found if the investigator himself were nothing more than the pure knowing subject (a winged cherub without a body). But he is himself rooted in that world; he finds himself in it as an individual, that is to say, his knowledge, which is the necessary supporter of the whole world as idea, is yet always given through the medium of a body, whose affections are, as we have shown, the starting-point for the understanding in the perception of that world. His body is, for the pure knowing subject, an idea like every other idea, an object among objects. Its movements and actions are so far known to him in precisely the same way as the changes of all other perceived objects, and would be just as strange and incomprehensible to him if their meaning were not explained for him in an entirely different way. [...] The body is given in two entirely different ways to the subject of knowledge, who becomes an individual only through his identity with it. It is given as an idea in intelligent perception, as an object among objects and subject to the laws of objects. And it is also given in quite a different way as that which is immediately known to every one, and is signified by the word will. Every true act of his

will is also at once and without exception a movement of his body. The act of will and the movement of the body are not two different things objectively known, which the bond of causality unites; they do not stand in the relation of cause and effect; they are one and the same, but they are given in entirely different ways – immediately, and again in perception for the understanding.'[23]

Based on this argument, Schopenhauer believes himself justified in finding the 'objectivity' of the will in the human body. He is of the opinion that a reality, the thing-in-itself *in concreto*, can be felt immediately in the body's actions. The objection we must make to this argument is that we only become conscious of our body's actions through self-perception, and as such they are no better than other percepts. If we want to *know* their nature, we can only achieve this through contemplative thought, which is to say by fitting them into the ideal system of our concepts and ideas.

The opinion most deeply rooted in naive human consciousness is that thinking is abstract, without any concrete

23 Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Idea*), 1819, pp128–29.

content. It can at most provide an 'ideal' counter-image of the unified world, but not the world itself. Those who make this judgement have never been clear about what a percept is without a concept. Let us look at this world of percepts: it is a mere collection of one thing beside another in space, and one thing after another in time, an aggregate of unconnected items. Nothing that appears and then exits from the stage of perception is related to anything else. The world is a multiplicity of objects of equal value. None plays a greater role than any other in the mechanisms of the world. In order for us to realise that this or that fact has greater significance than another, we need to consult our thinking. Without functioning thought processes, an animal's most rudimentary organ with no significance for its life appears to have the same value as the most important body parts. The significance of isolated facts, both in themselves and in relation to the rest of the world, only becomes apparent when thought weaves its threads from one entity to another. This activity of thought has *content*. For it is only through very specific, concrete content that I can know why the snail is on a lower organisational level than the lion. The mere sight of it, the percept, gives me no content that might inform me about the perfection of its organisation.

Thought brings this content to the percept, from the subject's world of concepts and ideas. In contrast to the content of percepts, which are given to us from outside, thought content appears internally. The form in which it initially appears we will call intuition. Intuition is to thought what observation is to the percept. Intuition and observation are the sources of our knowledge. An observed thing in the world is foreign to us until we have the corresponding internal intuition to supply the piece of reality missing from the percept. Full reality remains a closed book to anyone incapable of finding the right intuitions for things. Just as colourblind people see only differences in shade without colour qualities, those without intuitions can observe only unconnected perceptual fragments.

Explaining a thing, making it *intelligible*, simply means placing it in the context from which it has been torn by the above-described organisation of our minds. No thing exists in isolation from the rest of the world. All separation is valid only subjectively, because of how we are organised. For us, the world as a whole is split into above and below, before and after, cause and effect, object and idea, matter and force, object and subject etc. The separate items that we take in through observation are all linked one to another

by the coherent, unified world of our intuitions – and when we think, we fuse back together what we have separated through perception.

An isolated object is a puzzling thing. But this isolation is brought about by us, and can be reversed within the world of concepts.

Nothing is directly given to us except by thought and perception. Now the question arises: how should perception be interpreted, in light of our arguments? We have recognised that the proof offered by critical idealism for the subjective nature of perception collapses in on itself – but seeing the error in the proof does not mean that the theory itself rests on an error. In laying out its proof, critical idealism relies on naive realism, rather than proceeding from the absolute nature of thought, and follows naive realism to its logical conclusion, disproving itself in the process. But what if the absolute nature of thought is recognised?

Suppose that a particular percept – eg, red – appears in my consciousness. As I continue to observe, this percept proves to be connected with others – eg, a particular shape and certain percepts of temperature and touch. I call these

connected percepts an object in the world of the senses. Now I can ask myself: what else exists in the space where the above percepts appeared? I will find mechanical, chemical and other processes there. Now I go further, investigating the processes that occur between the object and my sense organs. I will find processes of motion in an elastic medium, which in their essence have not the slightest thing in common with the original percept. I get the same result when I explore the onward transmission from the sense organs to the brain. In each of these areas, I have new percepts – but thought is the medium that weaves together all these percepts separated by space and time. The vibrations of the air conveying sound are given to me as a percept just as the sound itself is. Only thought joins them all together and shows how they relate to one another. We cannot say there is anything outside what we immediately perceive, other than the ideal nexus of percepts (as revealed by thought). Thus any relationship of perceived object to perceiving subject that goes beyond mere percept is ideal, meaning it can only be expressed conceptually. Only if I could perceive how the object of perception acts upon its subject, or vice versa, if I could observe how the perceptual image is constructed by the subject, could I say what modern physiology and the critical idealism based upon it

say. This view confuses an ideal relationship (of the object to the subject) with a process that could only be spoken of if it could be perceived. The statement 'No colour without a colour-sensing eye' cannot therefore mean that the eye produces colour, only that an ideal connection, which can be known through thought, exists between the percept 'colour' and the percept 'eye'.

Empirical science claims to have established how the properties of the eye and those of colour relate to one another, and the mechanisms of the sight organ through which the colour percept is transmitted etc. I can trace the way one percept follows another, their spatial relation to others, and then express this conceptually; but I cannot perceive how a percept comes out of what cannot be perceived. All efforts to seek relationships between percepts other than those of thought are doomed to fail. So what is a percept? Put so generally, this question is absurd. A percept always appears as something very specific, as concrete content. This content is given to us immediately, and amounts to nothing more than what is given. In relation to this given content, one can only ask what it is *beyond* the percept, ie, for thought. The question about the 'what' of a percept can only be directed to the corresponding conceptual intuition.

From this point of view, we cannot even ask the question of a percept's subjectivity in the critical-idealist sense. We can only call something subjective when it is perceived as belonging to the subject. It is impossible for any process that is 'real' in the naive sense to form a link between subject and object – by which we mean a perceptible process. Only thought can do this. And so what appears to be outside the percept of the subject is objective for us. The percept of myself as subject will remain perceptible to me when the table that was just now standing before me has vanished from my sphere of observation. The observation of the table has produced a change in me, which also remains. I retain an image of the table, which is now tied to my self. Modern psychology calls it a memory-picture. And this is the only thing that can justifiably be called a mental image of the table. It is the perceptible change in my own state caused by the presence of the table in my field of vision. And this does not mean a change in some 'self-in-itself' behind the percept of the subject, but a change in the subject-percept itself. The mental image is therefore a subjective percept, in contrast to the objective percept I have while the object is present in my perceptual field. Conflating the subjective and objective percept is what leads to idealism's misunderstanding that *the world is my idea*.

We must now define the term ‘mental image’ more precisely. What we have written about it thus far is not the concept itself, but only points the way to where it may be found in the perceptual field. The precise concept of the mental image will allow us to gain a satisfactory understanding of how mental image and object are related. This will then lead us over the border where the relationship between subject and object descends from the purely conceptual field of knowledge into concrete, individual *life*. Once we know what we are to make of the world, it will be an easy matter to focus our attention accordingly. We can only be fully active once we know the object towards which we are directing our activity.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Human Individuality

Philosophers find that the principal difficulty in explaining mental images is that we ourselves are not external things, and yet our mental images are said to have a form corresponding to them. But, on closer inspection, we see that no such difficulty exists. We may not be external things, but we belong to one and the same world as them. The part of the world that I perceive as my subject is permeated with the stream of all that happens in the world. When I perceive things, I am initially trapped inside the boundaries of my own skin. But what is inside that skin is part of the cosmos as a whole. And because there is this relation between my organism and the objects outside me, there is no need for something of the object to slip into me or make a mark on my mind like a signet ring on wax. It is entirely inappropriate to ask how I gain knowledge of the tree that stands ten paces from me. The question is based on the view

that the limits of my body are absolute barriers, through which information about things can filter. The forces at work inside my skin are the same as those on the outside. I really am things – when 'I' is not taken to mean the subject-as-percept, but myself as a part of all that happens in the world. The percept of the tree and the self are part of the same whole. The general happenings of the world produce both the percept of the tree in the one instance, and the percept of myself in the other, in the same way. Were I a world-creator rather than a world-knower, then object and subject (percept and self) would be created in the same act. For they are mutually dependent. As a world-knower, I can only use thought to find what the two have in common, and see them as belonging together; for thought generates the concepts that relate one to the other.

The so-called physiological proofs of the subjectivity of our percepts are the most difficult to refute. When I exert pressure on my skin, I experience it as a pressure sensation. I can perceive the same pressure through the eye as light, and through the ear as sound. An electric shock will be registered by the eye as light, the ear as noise, the skin nerves as a jolt, the nose as a smell of phosphor. What follows from this fact? Only this: I perceive an electric

shock (or a pressure) and then a light quality, or a sound, or a certain smell etc. If no eye were present, the percept of the mechanical jolt would not be accompanied by a light quality; without the organ of hearing, there would be no sound etc. What right do I have to say that without the perceiving organs, the whole process would not exist? To take the fact that an electrical process produces light in the eye and conclude that, outside our organism, what we sense as light is just a mechanical movement, is to forget that this is merely replacing one percept with another, and not moving beyond perception. It is as easy to say that the eye perceives a mechanical movement in its surroundings as light, as it is to claim that the change in an object in accordance with certain laws is perceived by us as movement. When I paint a horse twelve times over on a rotating band, in a series of positions that depict a gallop, I can rotate the band to produce the appearance of movement. All I need to do is look through a slot and see the painted horses pass by at the correct speed. Then I will not see twelve pictures of a horse, but one image of a galloping horse.

The physiological facts mentioned here can therefore shed no light on the relationship between percept and mental image. We must try another approach.

At the moment a percept arrives in my sphere of observation, it also activates thought in me. A component of my system of thought, a particular intuition, a concept, is linked to the percept. When the percept then disappears from my field of vision – what remains? My intuition and its reference to that particular percept, formed in the moment it was perceived. The vividness with which I can later recall this reference depends upon the way in which my mental and physical organism functions. The mental image is nothing other than an intuition related to a particular percept, a concept that was once linked to a percept, and which retains that reference. My concept of a lion is not formed from my percepts of lions. But my mental image of a lion is. I can teach the concept of a lion to someone who has never seen one. But I will not be able to teach them a vivid mental image without them having a percept of their own.

So the mental image is nothing other than an individualised concept. And now it makes sense that things in the real world can be represented to us by mental images. The full reality of a thing is given to us in the moment of observation when concept and percept are joined together. The percept gives the concept an individual character, a reference to this specific percept. It lives on in us in this individual form,

which carries within it the unique reference to the percept, and creates the mental image of the thing in question. Should we encounter a second thing linked to the same concept, we recognise it as being of the same type as the first. And should we meet the *same* thing a second time, we find in our system of concepts not only a corresponding concept, but the individualised concept with the unique reference it carries to this object – and we recognise the object.

The mental image, then, stands between percept and concept. It is the specific concept that points to the percept.

I can call the sum total of my mental images my experience. A person with a greater number of individualised concepts will have a richer experience. A person with no capacity for intuition is not equipped to accumulate experience. An object will be lost from their field of vision because they lack the concept that should be related to it. A person with a well-developed capacity for thought, but whose sense-organs are crude and whose perception therefore functions poorly, will find it just as difficult to gather experience. This person will be able to acquire concepts in some way, but their intuitions will lack the living reference to specific things. The thoughtless traveller and the scholar who lives

in abstract systems of concepts are equally incapable of gathering rich experience.

Reality presents itself to us as percept and concept; the subjective representation of reality presents itself as mental images.

If our personality was purely concerned with cognition, then the sum of all objects would be given in percept, concept and mental image.

But we do not content ourselves with using thought to relate percept to concept; we also relate them to our particular subjectivity, to our individual self. And this individual relation is expressed in feelings of pleasure or displeasure.

Thinking and feeling correspond to the double nature of our being, which we have already touched upon. Thought is the element through which we join in the general activity of the cosmos; feeling the element through which we withdraw into the confines of our own being.

Thinking connects us to the world; feeling takes us back into ourselves, and is what makes us individuals. If we

were merely thinking and perceiving entities, our whole lives would flow along in never-changing indifference. If we were merely cognisant of ourselves as a self, we would be completely indifferent to this, too. It is only because with self-knowledge comes a *feeling* of self, and with perception comes feelings of pleasure and pain, that we live as individuals whose existence is not limited to their conceptual relation to the rest of the world, but who see a particular value in themselves.

One might be tempted to discern in the life of feelings an element more richly saturated in reality than is contemplative thought about the world. The problem here is that the life of feeling has this richer meaning only for me as an individual. For the world as a whole, my feelings can only gain value when, as a percept of the self, a feeling is linked to a concept and by this means fitted into the cosmos.

Our life swings continuously back and forth between participation in the general activity of the world and our individual existence. The higher we ascend into the general nature of thought, where individual things ultimately interest us only as examples, specific instances of a concept, the more we lose the character of the specific being, our very

particular, individual personality. The further we descend into the depths of our own life and allow our feelings to colour our experiences of the external world, the more we separate ourselves from universal existence. A true individual would be someone whose feelings reached furthest up into the realm of the ideal. There are people in whom even the most general idea has a personal colouring that links it unmistakably with its author. And others whose concepts come to us without any trace of individuality, as if they had not sprung from a human being, a creature of flesh and blood.

The very creation of mental images gives our conceptual life an individual character. Everyone has their own standpoint from which they view the world. Their percepts are joined to their concepts. They will think of general concepts in a way peculiar to themselves. This is a result of where each of us stands in the world, the perceptual spheres we can access from our position in life. We call the individual's preconditions, as set out here, their *milieu*. This peculiarity is contrasted with another, which is dependent on our organisation. We are each organised, of course, as specific, fully determined individuals. We each link particular feelings of our own with our percepts, at varying degrees of intensity.

This is what makes our own personalities individual. It is what is left when we have accounted for all the particulars of a person's milieu.

A life of feeling without any thought at all would gradually lose all connection with the world. But for anyone invested in completeness, the knowledge of things will go hand in hand with the education and development of their feelings. Feeling is the means by which concepts first gain concrete life.

Are There Any Limits to Knowledge?

We have established that the elements necessary for explaining reality are to be taken from the spheres of both perception and thought. As we have seen, our organisation is such that complete, full reality, including our own subject, initially appears as a duality. Knowledge overcomes this dual nature, by composing the whole from the two elements of reality: percept and concept. Let us call the way in which the world appears to us before it has gained its proper form through knowledge the *world of appearances* – in contrast to the unified whole composed of percept and concept. Then we can say: the world is given to us as a duality, and knowledge converts it into a unity. A philosophy founded on this principle can be called a monistic philosophy, or monism. It stands in contrast to the 'two worlds' theory, or dualism. The latter does not see two sides of the same unified reality, separated merely by our organisation, but two worlds abso-

lutely distinct from one another. It then seeks principles in one world to explain the other.

Dualism rests on a false conception of what we call knowledge. It splits the whole of existence into two realms, each of which has its own laws, and regards these realms as each standing outside the other.

It is a dualism of this kind that gives rise to Immanuel Kant's distinction between the perceived object and the thing-in-itself, which he introduced to science and which science still has not eliminated. We have argued that the nature of our mental organisation is such that a specific thing can only be given as a percept. Thinking then overcomes its specificity by allotting each percept its place in the world according to certain laws. As long as we apprehend the disparate parts of the world as percepts, then in separating them we are simply following a law of our subjectivity. But if we consider the sum of all percepts as one part, and contrast it with another part composed of 'things-in-themselves', our philosophising is a shot in the dark. We are then merely playing a conceptual game. We are constructing an artificial pair of opposites, but without being able to pin down any content

for the second part, since the content of a specific thing can only be created through perception.

Any form of existence that is assumed to lie outside the realm of percept and concept must be banished to the sphere of unjustified hypotheses. This category is where the 'thing-in-itself' belongs. It is completely natural that the dualist thinker cannot find the connection between this assumed, hypothetical principle of the world and what is given to us in experience. The hypothetical principle can only acquire content when that content is loaned from the world of experience, and this fact is obfuscated. Otherwise, it remains a concept without content, an 'unconcept' that is nothing but an empty shell. The dualist thinker will usually claim that the content of this concept is inaccessible to our minds; we cannot know what content is present, only *that* it is present. In both cases, it is impossible to overcome dualism. One might bring a few abstract elements from the world of experience into the concept of the thing-in-itself, but it remains impossible to derive the rich concrete life of experience from a few qualities that are themselves taken from perception. Emil du Bois-Reymond asserts that sensation and feeling are created by the position and movement of the imperceptible atoms that make up matter – and then

concludes that we can never reach a satisfactory explanation of how matter and movement create sensation and feeling, for 'it is thoroughly and forever incomprehensible that a number of atoms of carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen etc should be anything but indifferent to where they are and how they move, where they were and how they moved, and where they will be and move in future. There can be no insight into how consciousness can emerge from their interaction'. This conclusion is characteristic of the whole school of thought. Position and movement are extracted from the rich world of percepts, and transferred to the imagined world of atoms. Then there is wonderment at the fact that this principle borrowed from the world of percepts cannot be used to develop concrete life.

Based on this definition of the dualist's principle, it follows that no dualist can arrive at an explanation of the world from a concept of 'in-itself' completely free of content.

In every case, dualists find themselves forced to erect insurmountable barriers to our faculty of knowledge. Subscribers to a monistic worldview, meanwhile, know that everything they need to explain a given phenomenon in the world must lie in the realm of the latter. All that hinders them

in attaining it are chance spatial or chronological barriers, or deficiencies in their own organisation. And not the organisation of humans in general, but only their specific, individual make-up.

From the concept of knowledge, as defined here, it follows that we cannot speak of there being limits to knowledge. Knowledge is not a general concern of the world, but one that humans must deal with themselves. Things do not demand an explanation. They exist and act upon one another according to laws that may be discovered by thinking. They exist in indivisible unity with these laws. Our selfhood then, confronted with them, at first understands only what we have described as percepts. But the self also has the power to find the other part of reality. Only when the self has united the two elements of reality, which are already an indivisible unity out in the world, is our desire for knowledge satisfied: the self has arrived once more at reality.

The conditions necessary for the attainment of knowledge therefore exist through and for the self. The self asks itself the questions of knowledge. It takes them from the elements of thought, which in themselves are completely

clear and transparent. Were we to ask ourselves questions we cannot answer, it would mean that the content of the question was not clear in all its parts. It is not the world that asks us questions, but we ourselves.

I can imagine that it would be quite impossible for me to answer a question that I find written down somewhere, if I did not know the sphere from which the content of the question was taken. Our knowledge is based upon questions raised when a sphere of percepts, determined by place, time and subjective organisation, is confronted with a sphere of concepts that point to the totality of the world. My task is to reconcile these spheres, both of which are well known to me. There can be no talk of a limit to knowledge here. At one time or another, this thing or that may remain unexplained, because circumstances prevent us from perceiving what is at work there. But what is not found today can be found tomorrow. These barriers are erected by mere chance, and can be overcome with further perception and thought.

Dualism commits the error of transferring the opposition of subject and object, which only has meaning within the realm of perception, to purely invented entities outside it. But the division within the realm of perception remains in

place only as long as the perceiving subject refrains from thinking; thought removes all division, and allows us to see it as a feature of our subjectivity.

Dualists transfer to entities beyond perception determining factors which, even within the realm of perception, have only a relative validity, not an absolute one. In so doing, these thinkers split the two factors relevant to the process of acquiring knowledge, percept and concept, into four: 1) the object-in-itself; 2) the subject's percept of the object; 3) the subject; and 4) the concept that relates the percept to the object-in-itself. The relationship between object and subject is real, and the subject is really (dynamically) influenced by the object. This real process is said to take place outside of our consciousness. But it prompts in the subject a reaction to the action from the object. The result of this reaction is the percept, and this is what enters consciousness. The object has an objective reality (independent of the subject), while the percept has a subjective reality. This subjective reality relates the subject to the object. The latter relation is an ideal one. Dualism thereby splits the process of acquiring knowledge into two parts. The first – creation of the perceptual object out of the thing-in-itself – is considered to take place outside consciousness, and the

second – connecting the percept to the concept and relating this to the object – to take place within it. With these preconditions, it is clear that dualists believe their concepts are only subjective representatives, ambassadors from a realm outside their consciousness. For the dualist, the real, objective process that creates the percept within the subject cannot be directly known, and the objective relations between things-in-themselves are more unknowable still. In the dualist's opinion, humans can only provide conceptual representatives for what is objectively real. The bond of unity connecting things to one another, and connecting them objectively to an individual's mind (as a thing-in-itself) lies outside consciousness in a divine entity-in-itself, of which our consciousness also has only a conceptual representative.

Dualists believe that the whole world would evaporate into an abstract system of concepts if they did not posit real connections alongside the conceptual ones. In other words: the ideal principles that can be discovered by thinking seem quite airy to dualists, who go on seeking real principles to support them.

Let us take a closer look at these real principles. The naive person (naive realist) considers the objects of external experience to be realities. The fact that a person's hands can grasp these things and their eyes see them are proof enough of this reality. 'Nothing exists that cannot be perceived' may be regarded as the naive person's first axiom, which is held to be equally true in reverse: 'Everything that can be perceived exists.' The best proof of this claim is the naive person's belief in spirits and immortality. They imagine their soul as a subtle kind of material substance, which under particular conditions can become visible even to an ordinary person (a belief in ghosts).

For the naive realist, everything beyond this real world, namely the world of ideas, is unreal, and 'merely ideal'. The thought that we add to objects is merely thought about objects. The thought adds nothing real to the percept.

But it is not only in relation to *things* that the naive person holds sensory perception to be the sole proof of reality; they take the same view of *events*. A thing, in their view, can only act upon another thing when a force that can be perceived with the senses comes from one and impacts the other. Ancient Greek philosophers, who were naive realists

in the best sense of the word, imagined the process of seeing as the eye putting out feelers that touched things. Ancient physics believed that bodies exuded very fine particles of matter, which penetrated our minds through our sense organs. This matter was only impossible to see because our senses were too coarse, and the matter too fine in relation to them. In principle, these particles were accorded reality for the same reasons that the objects of the sensory world were, namely due to their form of existence, which was thought to be analogous to that of perceptible reality.

The naive mind does not consider the self-reliant sphere of ideas to be real in the same sense. An object conceived as a 'mere idea' is nothing more than a chimera until sensory perception can convince this mind of its reality. In short, the naive person demands real proof from their senses in addition to the ideal proof of thought. This need is the root of the belief in revelation. God, who is given to us through thought, remains always only an *idea* of God. The naive mind demands a manifestation accessible to sensory perception. God must appear, embodied, and prove His divinity by transforming water into wine, an act verifiable by the senses.

The naive person imagines the acquisition of knowledge itself to be analogous to sensory processes. Things make an impression on the soul, or send out images that penetrate the mind via the senses etc.

What the naive person can perceive with their senses, they take to be real, and the things they cannot perceive (God, mind, knowledge etc) they take to be analogous to what is perceived.

If naive realism wanted to found a science, it could only consist of a precise description of percepts. Concepts are just a means to an end for the naive realist. They are there to create ideal counterparts for percepts. They mean nothing at all for things themselves. For the naive realist, only individual tulips that are seen, or could be seen, count as real; the One Idea of a tulip is an abstraction to this thinker, an unreal thought-image that the mind composes from the features common to all tulips.

With its founding principle that everything perceived is real, naive realism refutes experience, which tells us that the content of percepts is transient. The tulip that I see is real today; in a year's time it will have disappeared into nothing.

What persists is the tulip as a species. But for naive realism, the species is only an idea, not a reality. This worldview thus watches its reality come and go, while what it regards as unreal persists. Naive realism must therefore acknowledge something ideal alongside percepts. It has to accept entities that cannot be perceived with the senses. It reconciles this need and avoids contradiction by thinking of these entities' existence as analogous to that of sensory objects. These hypothetical realities include the invisible forces by which sensory objects act upon each other. One such force is inheritance, in which the qualities of a thing outlast the individual, and through which one individual can generate another similar to its progenitor, ensuring the survival of its species. Another such force is the principle of life that permeates the organic body, the soul, for which the naive mind always finds a concept formed by analogy to sensory realities. This is ultimately the naive person's divine being, which is thought to act in a way that corresponds entirely to perceptible human action – anthropomorphically. Modern physics traces physical sensations back to movements of the smallest particles of matter, and of an extremely fine substance – ether. What we experience as heat, for example, is the movement of particles in a body, generating heat within the space they occupy. Once more, an imperceptible thing

is being understood through analogy with what is perceptible. Here, the sensory analogy of the concept 'body' is the interior of a space enclosed on all sides, in which elastic spheres move in all directions, colliding with each other and bouncing off the walls etc.

Without such assumptions, the naive realist world would crumble into a disconnected aggregate of percepts with no mutual relationships or any kind of unity. But it is clear that naive realism can only arrive at this assumption through an inconsistency. If it wishes to remain true to its founding principle – only what is perceived is real – then where it does not perceive anything, it cannot assume any reality. The imperceptible forces at work in perceptible things are in fact unjustified hypotheses from the standpoint of naive realism. And because this school of thought does not recognise any other realities, it imbues its hypothetical forces with perceptual content. It thus attributes a form of existence (perceptual existence) to an area where sensory perception – the only way to say anything about this form of existence – is lacking.

This inherently contradictory worldview leads to metaphysical realism. Alongside perceptible reality, metaphys-

ical realism constructs another imperceptible reality that it considers analogous to the first. This makes it a dualist worldview.

Where metaphysical realism sees a relation between perceptible things (moving closer together, becoming conscious of an object etc), it posits a reality. The relation it notices can, however, only be expressed through thought, and not perception. The ideal relation is arbitrarily turned into something similar to what is perceived. And so for this school of thought, the real world is composed of transient perceptible objects, which are in a state of constant flux, and enduring but imperceptible forces through which these objects are created.

Metaphysical realism is a contradictory mixture of naive realism and idealism. Its hypothetical, imperceptible forces have the qualities of percepts. Metaphysical realists have decided to accept a realm outside that of the world they have a means of knowing (through perception), a realm in which this means fails, and which can only be discovered through thought. And yet these thinkers cannot decide to acknowledge the form of existence that thinking brings us – the concept (the idea) – as a factor equal to the percept.

If one wants to avoid the contradiction of the imperceptible percept, one must admit that there is only one form of existence provided by thought for the relations between percepts, and that is the concept. If we dispense with the unjustified component of metaphysical realism, then the world is represented by the sum of percepts and their conceptual (ideal) relations. And thus metaphysical realism enters into a worldview that requires the principle of perceptibility for percepts, and the principle of conceivability for the relations between percepts. This worldview cannot admit a third realm alongside the world of percepts and concepts, in which both principles, real and ideal, are valid at once.

When metaphysical realism claims that alongside the ideal relation between the object of perception and its subject there must exist another, *real* relation between the percept's 'thing-in-itself' and the perceptible subject's 'thing-in-itself' (the so-called individual mind), this claim rests on the false assumption of a process of existence analogous to the processes of the sensory world, only imperceptible. When metaphysical realism goes on to say that I have a conscious, ideal relationship with my perceptual world; but with the real world I can only have a dynamic relationship (of forces),

it commits once more the error we have already criticised. A relationship of forces can only be spoken of within the perceptual world (the tangible realm) and not outside it.

Let us call the worldview characterised above, into which metaphysical realism merges when it discards its contradictory elements, *monism* – because it combines one-sided realism with idealism to form a higher unity.

To the naive realist, the real world is a sum of perceptual objects; in metaphysical realism, reality is attributed to imperceptible forces as well as percepts. Monism replaces these forces with ideal connections, formed by thinking. These connections are the *laws of nature*. A law of nature is nothing other than the conceptual expression of the connection between particular percepts.

Monism never needs to ask about other explanatory principles of reality outside percept and concept. It knows there is never any cause to do so, in any realm of reality. It sees a half-reality in the perceptual world, which is immediately available to us; and in the union of this world with that of concepts, it finds full reality. To adherents of monism, the metaphysical realist might say: your knowledge may be

complete in itself, with nothing missing, *for your organisation*, but you do not know how the world is reflected in an intelligence organised in a different way. Monism's answer to this is that, while intelligences other than human intelligence may exist, with percepts that may take a different form to ours (if they perceive at all), this is irrelevant to me for the following reasons: through my perception, this specifically human perception, I am a subject confronted with an object. The connection between things is thereby interrupted. The subject restores this connection by thinking. And so the world as a whole is brought back together. Since it is only due to our subjectivity that this whole appears severed at the point between our percept and our concept, full knowledge is also given in the union of the two parts. For beings with a different perceptual world (with double the number of sense organs, for instance) the connection will appear interrupted in a different place, and its restitution must therefore also take a form specific to this being. The question of there being limits to knowledge only exists for naive and metaphysical realism, both of which see only an ideal representative of the world within the mind. For them, there exists an absolute, self-sufficient world outside the subject, and within the subject is an image of this absolute that is entirely outside it. The completeness of knowledge

depends on the greater or lesser similarity of this image to the absolute object. An entity with a smaller number of senses than humans will perceive less of the world; one with more senses will perceive more. It follows that the former will have a less complete knowledge than the latter.

For monism, the matter is different. The organisation of the perceiving entity determines the point at which the connected world is split apart into subject and object. The object is not absolute, but only relative, in relation to this determining subject. In monism, the divide can only be bridged again in the very specific way unique to the human subject. As soon as the self, split from the world at the moment of perception, fits itself back into the connected world through contemplative thought, all further questions cease, since they were merely a result of the separation.

An entity constituted in some other way would have a different kind of knowledge. Ours is sufficient to answer the questions that are posed through our own being.

Metaphysical realism has to ask what gives us our percepts; what is it that acts upon the subject?

Monism regards percepts as determined by the subject. But at the same time, the subject has the means (thought) to remove the determination it has itself produced.

Metaphysical realism faces another difficulty when it seeks to explain the similarity between different individuals' images of the world. It must ask itself: how is it that the image of the world I build from my subjectively determined percepts and my concepts is so like the one that another human individual builds from their own two subjective factors? How is it possible for me to infer another person's subjective image of the world based on my own? The metaphysical realist infers the similarity of different people's subjective images of the world from the fact that, in practice, humans can agree on things. And from the similarity of images, the metaphysical realist further concludes that individual human minds must also be similar – by which they mean the 'self-in-itself' that underlies the human subject.

This conclusion is thus a collection of effects used to infer the character of their underlying causes. We believe that, given a large enough number of cases, we can have enough of an idea of how one thing relates to another to know how the causes we have found will work in other cases. We call

this inductive reasoning. We will find ourselves needing to modify this reasoning if something unexpected appears in a later observation, because the nature of our conclusion is determined solely by the nature of past observations. This qualified knowledge of causes is, however, entirely adequate for practical life, or so the metaphysical realist claims.

Inductive reasoning is the method upon which modern metaphysical realism is based. There was a time when people thought that something could be developed from concepts that would no longer be a concept. It was believed that, from concepts, we could come to know the real metaphysical entities that metaphysical realism needed. This kind of philosophising is now outmoded. Instead, it is believed that if one has a large enough number of perceptual facts, one can deduce the character of the thing-in-itself that lies at the root of these facts. Just as it was once thought possible to develop the metaphysical realm from concepts, so today it is thought possible to do so with percepts. Since we have concepts before us with complete clarity, it was once thought that the metaphysical realm could be deduced from them with absolute certainty. Percepts do not have the same complete clarity. Each successive percept is a little different from others of the same kind that came before it. In prin-

ciple, then, conclusions drawn from previous percepts are always slightly modified by each subsequent one. Obtained in this way, the character of what is metaphysically real can therefore only be called relatively correct; it is subject to adjustment based on future cases. Von Hartmann's metaphysics depends on this method; the title page of his first major work bears the line: 'Speculative results from inductive scientific methods.'

The character that present-day metaphysical realists give to their things-in-themselves is gained through inductive reasoning. Consideration of the process of attaining knowledge has convinced them that an objectively real, connected world exists alongside that which can be known through percept and concept. And they believe that inductive reasoning based on percepts can be used to discover how this objective reality is constituted.

The Reality of Freedom

The Factors of Life

Let us recapitulate what we have learned in the preceding chapters. The world appears to humans as a multiplicity, a great many individual things. And a person is one of these, a thing among things. We describe this form of the world simply as *given*, and, insofar as we find it rather than develop it through conscious activity, as *percept*. Within the world of percepts, we perceive ourselves. This self-percept would remain one percept among many, did not something arise from the centre of it that proved able to connect percepts in general to one another, and thus to connect the sum of all other percepts with the percept of ourselves. This 'something' is not a mere percept; nor is it simply given, as percepts are. It is produced by activity. It initially appears to be bound to what we perceive as our self. But with its inner significance, it reaches beyond the self. To the individual percepts, it adds ideally determined elements, which

relate one to another and come out of a totality. It gives an ideal determination to our percept of ourselves just as it does to all other percepts, making it the subject or 'self', and contrasting it with objects. This something is *thought*, and the ideally determined elements are concepts and ideas. Thought first appears in the percept of the self, but it is not merely subjective; for only with the help of thought can the self come to regard itself as a subject. Our relationship to our self through thought is what determines our personality in life. Through it, we have a purely ideal existence. It allows us to feel that we are thinking beings. This determination would remain a purely conceptual (logical) one, if nothing else helped to determine the self. We would then be entities whose lives were devoted only to the production of purely ideal relations between percepts, and between these percepts and ourselves. If we call the process of making these cognitive connections 'knowledge', and our own state attained through it 'knowing', then according to the above supposition, we would have to see ourselves as simply knowing entities.

But the supposition is not accurate. We do not relate percepts to ourselves in a merely ideal way, through concepts, but also through feelings, as we have seen. Our lives are thus

not merely conceptual. In fact, the naive realist holds the life of feelings to be more real to the personality than the purely ideal element of knowledge is. And from the naive realist's standpoint, they are entirely correct when they lay the matter out in this way. Feeling is to the subject exactly what the percept is to the object. According to the basic principle of naive realism – everything that can be perceived is real – feeling is the guarantee of reality for one's own personality. Monism, however, must make the same addition to feelings that it regards as necessary for percepts, if they are to stand before us as a complete reality. In monism, a feeling is an incomplete reality, since the form in which it is first given to us does not yet include its second factor: the concept or idea. Everywhere in life, feeling comes *before* knowing, just as perception does. To begin with, we feel that we exist; only in the course of our gradual development do we struggle through to the point at which the concept of self appears to us in our dimly felt existence. But what only emerges *for us* later is bound inextricably to our feelings from the start. This fact leads the naive person to believe that in feeling, they have direct access to existence, while in knowledge it is only given to them indirectly. Cultivating the life of feeling will therefore seem paramount to such a person. They will only believe they have grasped how

the world is put together when they have *felt* it. They try to make feeling, and not knowing, the means of gaining knowledge. Since feeling is something entirely individual, something comparable to the percept, the philosopher of feelings is making a universal principle out of one that has significance only within their own personality. They are trying to permeate the whole world with their own self. What monism strives to comprehend through concepts, the philosopher of feelings tries to achieve with feelings, and sees this relationship to objects as the more immediate.

The school of thought characterised here, the philosophy of feelings, is *mysticism*. The error inherent in this view is that it seeks to *experience* what it should know, and tries to raise something individual – feelings – into a universal principle.

Feeling is a purely individual act; through it we relate the external world to ourselves as subject, insofar as this relation is expressed in purely subjective experience.

There is one more expression of the human personality. In thinking, the self participates in the general life of the world; it relates percepts to itself in a purely ideal (conceptual) fashion, and itself to percepts in the same way. In feeling, it

experiences how objects relate to it as subject. In willing, it experiences the reverse. When we will something, we also have a percept before us, namely that of our self's individual relation to the object. The element of willing that is not a purely ideal factor is simply an object of perception, just as anything in the external world is.

All the same, the naive realist will once again believe that this represents something far more real than what can be gained by thinking. In willing, they see an element in which they are *directly* party to an event, a cause – in contrast to thinking, in which they only comprehend an event through concepts. To such a viewpoint, what the self achieves through its will is a process that is experienced immediately. In willing, adherents of this philosophy believe they have really grasped hold of a corner of world events. While they can only follow other things that happen via perception, in willing, they believe they are experiencing a real event with complete immediacy. The mode of existence in which the will appears within the self becomes a specific principle of reality. They view their own willing as a special case of the world's general events, and world events as a general form of the will. The will becomes a universal principle, just as feeling becomes a knowledge principle in mysticism. This

worldview is the *philosophy of the will* (theism or, more commonly, voluntarism). It turns something that can only be experienced individually into a constituent factor of the world.

Mysticism cannot be called scientific, and nor can voluntarism. For both claim they cannot rely only on concepts to understand the world. Alongside the ideal principle of existence, they demand a real principle. But since perception is the only means of apprehending these so-called real principles, the claims made by mysticism and voluntarism both add up to the view that we have two sources of knowledge: thought and perception, the latter presenting itself as an individual experience in feeling and will. Since what flows from one source (experiences) cannot be taken directly into the other (thought), the two ways of knowing – perception (experience) and thought – exist alongside one another without any higher mediation between them. In these philosophies, there exists a real principle of the world that can be experienced, alongside the ideal principle attainable through knowledge. In other words: both mysticism and the philosophy of the will are naive realism, because they subscribe to the principle that what is immediately perceived (experienced) is real. Unlike the original form of naive real-

ism, however, they are guilty of the inconsistency of making a particular form of perception (feeling or willing) into the sole means of knowing reality – though this is only possible if they subscribe to the more general principle that what is perceived is real. They should therefore really ascribe the same knowledge-producing value to external perception.

The philosophy of the will becomes metaphysical realism when it also sees the will in places outside the subject, where immediate experience of the will is not possible. This philosophy makes a hypothetical assumption that outside the subject, a principle can exist for which subjective experience is the only criterion of reality. As a form of metaphysical realism, the philosophy of the will opens itself up to the criticism advanced in the previous chapter: it has to overcome the contradictory stage of all metaphysical realism, and recognise that the will is only a general process in the world insofar as it is ideally related to the world.

The Idea of Freedom

The concept of a tree is conditioned by the percept of a tree, so that we can know it. When faced with a specific percept, I can only retrieve a very specific concept from the general system of concepts. The connection between concept and percept is mediated and objective, and created by thinking about the percept. This connection is made after the act of perception; but the fact that the two belong together is inherent in the object.

Will is a different matter. Here, the percept is the content of our existence as an individual, while the concept is the universal element in us. What the concept brings into an ideal relationship with the external world is our own experience, a percept of ourselves – more specifically, a percept of ourselves as active beings, acting upon the external world. In recognising my own will, I am connecting the

concept with a corresponding percept, namely the individual expression of will. In other words, I am integrating my individual ability (willing) into the rest of the world with the help of thought. When an external percept appears on the horizon of our experience, the content of the concept that corresponds with it is given by intuition. Intuition is where all the content in our conceptual system comes from. The percept shows me only which concept I need to apply from the store of my intuitions in any given case. The content of the concept is thus determined by the percept, but not produced by it; it is given intuitively and connected to the percept by thought. In the same way, the conceptual content of an act of will is impossible to derive from the act of will itself. The concept is gained through intuition.

If the conceptual intuition (the ideal content) of my act of will appears prior to its percept, then my individual action is determined by an idea. The reason why I select one particular intuition out of all possible intuitions is not to be found in a perceptual object; rather, it lies in the purely ideal interdependence of the components of my system of ideas. In other words, the thing that determines my will can only be found in the world of ideas, not the world of perceptions. My will is determined by an idea.

The conceptual system, which corresponds to the external world, also depends on this external world. The percept itself is what allows us to determine which intuition corresponds to it; how the intuition then merges with the rest of our system of ideas is in turn dependent on the intuitive content. The percept, then, directly determines its concept, and indirectly also determines its position in the world's conceptual system. The ideal content of an act of will, selected from the conceptual system, and preceding the act itself, is solely determined by the conceptual system.

An act of will dependent upon nothing but this ideal content must be understood as ideal itself, as determined by an idea. Which, naturally, is not to say that all acts of will are only ideally determined. All the factors that influence the human individual have an influence on the will.

For the individual act of will, we must consider both motive and driving force. The motive is the will's conceptual factor; the driving force is its perceptual factor. The conceptual factor, or motive, is the momentary determining factor in the act of will; the driving force is the lasting determining factor of the individual. The motive for willing can only be a pure concept, or a concept with a particular relation

to perception, ie, a mental image. Both general and individual concepts (mental images) become motives for willing something by acting upon the human individual and prompting them to take a particular course of action. The same concept, or the same mental image, will however have a different effect from one individual to another. It will prompt different people to different actions. The act of will is therefore not merely a result of the concept or mental image, but also of each human's individual make-up. Following the example of von Hartmann, we shall call this individual make-up a person's characterological disposition. The way that concept and mental image act upon someone's characterological disposition gives their life a particular moral or ethical stamp.

The characterological disposition is shaped by the more or less permanent content in our subjective life, ie, our mental images and feelings. Whether a mental image currently in my mind rouses me to an act of will depends on its relationship to the rest of my mental images and to my unique set of feelings. But the content of my mental images is, in turn, determined by the number of concepts that have come into contact with percepts over the course of my individual life, and have thus become mental images. And this depends

on my greater or lesser intuitive ability and the extent of my observations, ie, the subjective and objective factors of experience, and the particulars of my inner make-up and my milieu.

My characterological disposition is especially determined by my emotional life. Whether a certain mental image or concept makes me feel pleasure or pain will determine whether I want to make it a motive for action.

These are the elements to consider in an act of will. The immediately present mental image or concept, which becomes a motive, determines the aim or purpose of my will; my characterological disposition prompts me to direct my activity towards this aim. The mental image of going for a walk in the next half an hour determines the aim of my action. But this mental image will only become a motive for the will if it meets with the right characterological disposition, ie, if my life up to this point has given me the mental images of a walk's usefulness and the value of health and, further, if the mental image of a walk arouses a feeling of pleasure in me.

And so we must distinguish: 1) The possible subjective dispositions that are suited to turning certain mental images and concepts into motives; and 2) the possible mental images and concepts capable of influencing my characterological disposition so as to result in an act of will. The one represents the *driving forces* of our morality, and the other its *aims*.

The driving forces of morality can be found by determining which elements make up our individual life.

The first level of individual life is *perception*, more specifically perceiving with the senses. This is the region of our individual life where perception is transformed into will directly, without the intervention of a feeling or concept. We will simply call the driving force that operates at this level a *drive*. Our lower, purely animalistic needs (hunger, crude sexual intercourse etc) are satisfied in this way. This life of drives is characterised by the immediacy with which an individual percept triggers the will. This means of determining the will, which originally only pertains to the lower life of the senses, can however be extended to higher sensory perception. Prompted by the percept of some event in the external world, we can act without further reflec-

tion and without a particular feeling being attached to the percept, as happens in our everyday interaction with other people. The driving force of this action is what we call *tact* or *moral taste*. The more often such an action is immediately triggered by a percept, the more easily the person in question will be guided purely by tact, meaning that *tact* becomes their characterological disposition.

The second level of human life is *feeling*. Particular feelings are attached to the percepts of the external world. These feelings can become driving forces for action. When I see someone who is hungry, my pity can join with the percept to drive me to action. Such feelings include: shame, pride, a sense of honour, humility, regret, sympathy, revenge and gratitude, reverence, loyalty, love, and a sense of duty.[24]

Finally, the third level of life is *thought and creating mental images*. Simple contemplation can turn a mental image or a concept into the motivation to act. Mental images become motives when, through the course of our lives, we continually attach certain aims of will to percepts, which

24 A complete summary of the principles of morality (from the standpoint of metaphysical realism) can be found in Hartmann's *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins,* (*Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness*).

return again and again in more or less modified forms. And this is why, in people who are not completely devoid of experience, particular percepts are always accompanied by the mental images of actions that they have performed in similar circumstances, or have seen being performed by others. In all subsequent decisions, they have these mental images before them as a pattern, and they become elements of their characterological disposition. We can therefore call these driving forces of the will *practical experience*. Practical experience gradually merges into purely tactful action. This happens when some typical pictures of actions become so firmly bound in our minds to mental images of certain situations in life that, in a given situation, we bypass all contemplation of previous experience and skip straight from the percept to the act of will.

The highest level of individual life is conceptual thought without recourse to a particular percept. We determine the content of a concept through pure intuition from the sphere of ideas. At first, such a concept contains no relation to specific percepts. When we begin to will under the influence of a concept that refers to a percept – a mental image, in other words – this percept is what guides us, indirectly via conceptual thought. When we act under the influence of intu-

ition alone, the driving force of our action is *pure thought*. In philosophy, we are accustomed to calling pure thought *reason*, and so we may well be justified in calling the moral driving force on this level *practical reason*. The clearest text on this driver of the will is by Johannes Kreyenbühl.[25] I count his essay on the subject among the most significant findings of contemporary philosophy, more specifically in ethics. Kreyenbühl describes the driving force under discussion here as the *practical a priori*, meaning an impulse to action that flows directly from my intuition.

It is clear that such an impulse cannot be classed as a part of our characterological disposition in the strictest sense. For the driving force here is no longer merely an individual force within me, but the ideal and therefore universal content of my intuition. As soon as I see the justification for taking this content as a reason and starting point for action, I enter into an act of will, no matter whether the concept was already present in me before this, or only entered my consciousness immediately before the action – in other words, no matter whether it was already present in me as a disposition or not.

25 Kreyenbühl, *Philosophische Monatshefte*, vol XVIII, issue 3.

A real act of will only takes place when a momentary impulse to action, in the form of a concept or mental image, acts upon the characterological disposition. Such an impulse then becomes a motive for the will.

The motives of morality are mental images and concepts. Some ethicists also see feelings as a moral motive; for example, that the aim of moral action is the promotion of the greatest possible quantity of pleasure in the acting individual. But pleasure itself cannot be a motive, only the *mental image of pleasure*. The *mental image* of a future feeling can act upon my characterological disposition, but not the feeling itself. For at the moment of action, the feeling is not yet present; it is only brought about by the action.

The *mental image* of our own or another's welfare is, however, rightly regarded as a motive for the will. The principle of creating the greatest sum of pleasure for oneself through one's actions, ie, achieving individual happiness, is called *egotism*. People try to attain this individual happiness either by focusing solely on their own happiness with no regard for others, and striving for it even at the expense of others' happiness (pure egotism), or by working to make others happy, in the hope that other happy individuals will then

indirectly have a positive influence on them – or because it is feared that harming others might put one's own interest at risk (morality of prudence). The particular content of the principles of egotistical morality will depend what mental image someone has of their own or others' happiness. The content of their egotistical efforts will be determined by what they regard as a good thing in life (luxury, hope of happiness, deliverance from various evils etc).

We should view the purely conceptual content of an action as another kind of motive. Unlike the mental image of one's own pleasure, this content is not related only to one's own action, but to the justification of an action according to a system of moral principles. These principles can rule our moral life in the form of abstract concepts, without an individual having to consider where those concepts come from. We then simply find ourselves submitting to the moral concept, which hovers over our action like a commandment, and regarding it as a moral necessity. We leave the establishment of this necessity to whoever demands moral submission from us, ie, the moral authority we recognise (the paterfamilias, the state, social norms, the authority of the church, divine revelation). A special kind of these moral principles are those in which the commandment is given to

us not by an external authority, but our own inner selves (moral autonomy). We hear a voice inside us to which we must submit. This voice expresses itself as our *conscience*.

Moral progress happens when a person no longer simply makes the commandment of an external or internal authority the motive for their action, but strives to understand why some behavioural maxim should act as a motive for them. This progress takes a person from a morality founded on authority to action born out of moral insight. At this level of morality, they will try to find what is needed to live a moral life and allow their actions to be guided by the knowledge of these requirements. They are: 1) the greatest possible good of humanity as a whole, for its own sake; 2) the cultural progress or moral development of humanity towards ever greater perfection; and 3) the realisation of individual moral aims, apprehended by intuition alone.

The *greatest possible good of humanity as a whole* will of course be interpreted in different ways by different people. The above maxim does not relate to a particular mental image of human wellbeing, but to every individual who acknowledges this principle striving to do that which, in their view, does the most good for everyone.

For those who attach a feeling of pleasure to the advantages that culture bestows, *cultural progress* emerges as a special case of the previous moral principle. They will, however, have to accept the downfall and destruction of some things that also contribute to the common good as part of this progress. But some might also see cultural progress as a moral necessity, quite apart from any feelings of pleasure bound up with it. For them, it will be a special moral principle separate from the previous one.

Both the maxim of greatest good and that of cultural progress rest on a mental image, ie, on the relationship we see between the content of moral ideas and particular experiences (percepts). But the highest imaginable moral principle is one that does not contain relationship from the beginning, but springs from the fount of pure intuition and only afterwards seeks a relationship with a percept (with life). What we should will is then determined by a higher authority than in the preceding cases. Someone who abides by the principle of the common good will, in all their actions, first ask what their ideals contribute to this common good. Someone who subscribes to the moral principle of cultural progress will do the same. There is, however, a higher path, which does not proceed in each individual case from the

same moral aim, but attaches a degree of value to all moral maxims, and in any given situation asks whether one moral principle or the other is more important. In a particular set of circumstances, someone might see the furtherance of cultural progress as the right thing to do, in another the furtherance of the common good, and in a third the furtherance of their own wellbeing, and make it the motive of their actions. But when all other motivations only take second place, then conceptual intuition itself is considered first and foremost. All other motives then fall away, and the ideal content of the action alone functions as its motive.

Among the different levels of characterological disposition, we have described that of *pure thought, practical reason* as the highest. Among the motives, we have now classed *conceptual intuition* as the highest. Upon closer inspection, it soon becomes clear that on this level, the moral driving force and the motive coincide, ie, our action is determined neither by a pre-existing characterological disposition, nor an external, normative moral principle. Our action is therefore not formulaic, abiding by the rules of a moral code, and nor do we perform it automatically as the result of some external trigger; it is prompted simply by its ideal content.

Such action requires the capacity for moral intuition. Anyone lacking the ability to create their own particular moral maxims for an individual case will also never exercise a truly individual will.

Kant's moral principle – 'Act in such a way that the principles of your action can be valid for all people' – is the exact opposite of this. His principle is the death of all individual action. I cannot act according to the norms of what *all* people would do, but what I must do in each individual case.

A superficial mind might perhaps object to these arguments by saying: how can an action be both specific to the case and the situation at hand, *and* determined by intuition on a purely ideal level? This objection is based on the conflation of the moral motive and the perceptible content of the action. The latter *can* be a motive, and *is* one in the case of cultural progress, for example, or acting out of egotism etc, but when actions are prompted by pure moral intuition, it is not. The self naturally directs its gaze towards this perceptual content, but is not *determined* by it. This content is only used to form a *cognitive concept*; the self does not take the corresponding *moral concept* from the object. The cognitive concept of a particular situation with which I am faced

is only also a moral concept if I am regarding it from the standpoint of a particular moral principle. If I am standing on the territory of cultural-development morality, my path through the world will reflect this. From every event I perceive and is able to move me springs a moral duty: I must make my modest contribution towards placing this event in the service of cultural development. In addition to the concept, which reveals to me the connection of an event or thing according to the laws of nature, events and things also have a moral label attached, which for me, as a moral being, contains an ethical instruction on how to behave. When I take a higher standpoint, this moral label falls away, and the form my action will take in each case is determined by my idea – the idea generated in me when faced with the specific case.

People have differing levels of intuitive ability. For one person, ideas well up in a great rush; for another they take some effort to acquire. The situations in which people live, and the arenas in which they act, are just as different. How a person acts will thus depend on the way in which their intuition responds to a particular situation. The sum of ideas at work within us – the real content of our intuitions – is unique to each of us, despite the universal nature of the

world of ideas. Insofar as this intuitive content translates into action, it is the individual's moral substance. Those who regard all other moral principles as subordinate are guided by this substance as their moral maxim. We can call this standpoint *ethical individualism*.

What determines an action in each specific case is discovering the corresponding intuition, which is entirely individual. At this level of morality, there can be no talk of universal moral concepts (norms, rules). General norms always presuppose specific facts, from which they can be derived. But it is human action that creates these facts in the first place.

When we seek out the principles that govern and regulate us (the concepts that govern the actions of individuals, nations and epochs), we find ethics – not as a science of moral norms, but as a natural history of morality. Only laws developed in this way relate to human action as the laws of nature relate to a particular phenomenon. But they are by no means identical with the laws on which we base our actions. When I reflect on my actions after the fact (or if someone else reflects on them), they or I can discover which moral maxims should be considered in relation to

them. While I am acting, however, moral maxims are not what moves me; I am moved by my *love* for the objective that I want to realise through my actions. I do not ask any person or moral codex whether I should perform this action; I perform it as soon as the idea has come to me. Only then does it become *my* action. Anyone who acts because they recognise certain moral norms is acting as a result of the principles in their moral codex. The person is merely the executor of the codex, a kind of higher automaton. Throw a stimulus into their consciousness, and the cogs of their moral principles will at once be set in motion, following a set pattern to carry out an action that is Christian, humane, selfless or intended to further cultural development. Only when I follow my love of the objective am I myself the one who is acting. On this level of morality, I do not recognise any master over me, neither an external authority nor the so-called voice of my conscience. I acknowledge no external principle for my action, because I have found the reason for it, the love of acting, within myself. I do not check whether my action is good or evil; I carry it out because I am in love with it. Nor do I wonder how someone else would act in my position; I do what I, a particular individual, want to do. I am guided not by what is usually done, a common morality or maxim, a moral norm, but by my love of the deed itself. I

feel no compulsion from nature, which guides me through my drives, nor from moral commandments; I simply want to carry out what is within me.

To these arguments, the defender of general moral norms will reply that if everyone has the right to express themselves and do as they please, there is no difference between a good deed and a crime; every roguish impulse I feel has the same right to be translated into action as the intention to serve the common good. It is not the mere fact that I have conceived the idea of an action that should influence me as a moral person, but subsequent reflection on whether the action is good or evil. Only if it is good will I carry it out.

My response to this objection is as follows: I am not speaking of children or of people who follow their animal or social instincts. I am speaking of people capable of raising themselves up into the world of ideas. Saying that the deed of a criminal and the embodiment of pure intuition are expressions of individuality in the same sense is only possible in an age when immature people count blind drives as part of human individuality. The animal drive that leads someone to commit crimes is not what makes a person individual; it is part of what is most general about them, and is present

to the same extent in all individuals. What is individual in me is not my organism with its drives and feelings, but the unified world of ideas that lights up within this organism. My drives, instincts and passions say nothing more about me than that I belong to the human species – while the fact that an idea is expressed in a particular way in these drives, passions and feelings is what makes me an individual. My instincts and drives make me human; there are twelve of these humans to the dozen. The particular form of the idea by which I distinguish myself from the rest of that dozen as 'I' is what makes me an individual. Only a being other than myself could tell me apart from others by the variance in my animal nature. My thought, which is to say my active understanding of the ideas expressed in my organism, is how I distinguish myself from others. One cannot therefore say of a criminal's action that it proceeds from an idea. In fact, the characteristic feature of a criminal act is that it proceeds from the non-ideal elements of the human.

An action that has its source in the ideal part of my individual being is free; every other action, no matter whether it is carried out due to a natural compulsion or the necessity of a moral norm, is unfree.

The only free person is one who, at every moment of their life, is in a position to obey only themselves. And a deed is only moral when it can be called free in these terms.

Acting freely does not preclude moral laws – in fact it includes them. The free action simply proves to be placed higher than those dictated by these laws. For why should my action be of less service to the common good if it is performed out of love than if I have taken this action because it is my duty to serve the common good? The concept of duty excludes *freedom,* because it does not recognise what is individual, but demands the individual submit to a general norm. Freedom of action is only conceivable from the standpoint of ethical individualism.

But how can people live together in society if each of us is just striving to exercise our individuality? Here we have another objection taken from moralism. Moralists believe that a community of people is only possible if they are all united by a commonly accepted moral order. Moralists do not understand the unity of the world of ideas. They do not comprehend that the same world of ideas active within me also acts within my fellow human. The difference between us is certainly not due to living in two completely different

intellectual worlds, but because we each receive different intuitions from our shared world of ideas. My fellow human wants to pursue their intuitions, and I want to pursue mine. If we are both really just following an idea, with no external (physical or moral) stimuli, we will inevitably find ourselves striving for the same aims, with the same intentions. A moral misunderstanding or clash is impossible for morally free people. Only the morally unfree, who follow natural drives or the commandment of duty, will come into conflict with others for not following the same instinct and the same commandment. *Live and let live* is the founding maxim of free people. They know no *should*; their stock of ideas will tell them how to *will* in a particular case. If the ability to tolerate others did not lie in human nature, then no external laws could inject it into us. It is only because human individuals *are* of one spirit that they can live alongside one another. The free person lives their life confident that other free people belong to the same spiritual world, and their intentions will coincide. The free person does not demand agreement from their fellow humans, but expects it, because it is in human nature.

There are many people who will say that the concept of the *free* person I am developing here is a chimera, which is

seen nowhere in life. We live among real people, in whom morality is only to be hoped for when they abide by a moral commandment, when they regard their moral mission as a duty and do not freely follow their inclinations and their love. I do not doubt that for a second. Only a blind person could. But then let us dispense with all the hypocrisy about morality. Just say that human nature must be *forced* into its actions, as long as it is not *free*. It does not matter whether this unfreedom is imposed by physical means or through moral laws; whether a person is unfree because they are following their boundless sex drive or because they are shackled by the chains of conventional morality. But one cannot claim that such a person is right to call an action *their own*, when they are driven to perform it by an external force. But from the midst of this coercive order the *free spirits* arise, though they are surrounded by a jumble of morals, legal compulsions, religious practice etc. They are *free* insofar as they follow only themselves; and *unfree* insofar as they subordinate themselves. Which of us can say that they are really free in all their actions? But in each of us there dwells a deeper essence in which the free person speaks.

Our lives are made up of free and unfree actions. But we cannot think the concept of the human through to its log-

ical conclusion without coming upon the *free spirit* as the purest manifestation of human nature. We are truly human only insofar as we are free.

This is an ideal, many people will say. Doubtless it is, but an ideal that is a real element in us, working its way to the surface of our nature. It is not invented or dreamed up; it has life and announces itself clearly even in the most imperfect form of its existence. If humans were simply creatures of nature, then seeking out ideals – ie, ideas that are not yet actual, but that we want to realise – would be an absurdity. For objects of the external world, the idea is determined through perception; we have done our part when we have recognised the connection between idea and percept. With humans, this is not the case. The sum of their existence is not determined without their involvement; the concept of the human (free spirit) is not objectively united with the perceptual image 'human' in advance, to merely be recognised afterwards. A human must themselves actively unite their concept with the percept 'human'. Concept and percept coincide here only insofar as the human subject makes them coincide. And this they can do only when they have found the concept of the free spirit, ie, the concept of themselves. In the objective world, a dividing line is drawn between

percept and concept due to our organisation; knowledge overcomes this boundary. The dividing line is no less present in subjective nature, and humans overcome it in the course of their development, by embodying the concept of themselves in how they live. Thus both the intellectual and moral life of humans point to our double nature: perceiving (immediate experience) and thinking. The intellectual life overcomes this double nature through knowledge; the moral life through the actual realisation of the free spirit. Everything that exists has its innate concept (the law of its being and acting); but in external things this is inseparably bound up with the percept and divided from it only within our mental organism. With humans themselves, concept and percept are *actually* separated in the first instance, and must then be *actually* united by the human mind. One might object that our percept of the human corresponds to a specific concept at every moment of their life, as is the case for every other thing. I can form the concept of a typical, standard human and can also be given this human as a percept; when I also bring to this the concept of the free spirit, I have two concepts for the same object.

This is a one-sided argument. As an object of perception, I am subject to continual change. I was a particular way as a

child, and different as a youth and as a man. Indeed, at every moment my perceptual image of myself is different to the moment before. These changes can happen in such a way that either the same (standard) human is always expressed in them, or they represent the expression of the free spirit. These are the changes to which my actions, as an object of perception, are subject.

The human as perceptual object contains the possibility of reshaping itself, just as the plant seed holds the possibility of becoming the whole plant. The plant will reshape itself according to the objective laws that lie within it; humans remain in their imperfect state when they do not take up the building material within them and reshape themselves with their own strength. Nature makes humans mere natural creatures; society makes them followers of laws; *they* are the only ones who can make *free people* of themselves. At a particular stage of development, Mother Nature releases a person from her chains; society carries this development a stage further; only the person in question can give themselves the final polish.

The standpoint of free morality therefore does not claim that the free spirit is the only form in which a person can

exist. Free spiritedness is only the final developmental stage. This is not to deny that acting according to norms has its justification as a developmental stage. But we cannot regard it as an absolute moral standpoint. The free spirit overcomes norms in the sense that such a person does not see these norms as commandments, but orientates their actions according to their impulses (intuitions).

When Kant calls duty 'Thou sublime and mighty name, that dost embrace nothing charming or insinuating, but requirest submission', who 'holdest forth a law [...] before which all inclinations are dumb, even though they secretly counter-work it',[26] then the free spirit retorts: 'Freedom! Thou friendly, human name, that embraces everything most morally charming, which most flatters my humanity, and makes me no one's servant, since you hold forth no laws, but wait to see what my inclination will proclaim as law, because it resists all laws imposed from without.'

This is the contrast between law-based and free morality.

26 Kant's *Theory of Ethics*, trans Abbott, p180; *Critique of Practical Reason*, chap 3.

The philistine who sees the state as the embodiment of morality will view the free spirit as a danger to the state. They only take this view, however, because their gaze is narrowed to a particular epoch. If they could look beyond it, they would soon find that the free spirit seldom needs to act outside the laws of their state, and never finds their will truly contradicted by these laws. For the state's laws all originate in the intuitions of free spirits, just as all other objective laws of morality do. No law is imposed through family authority that was not first grasped intuitively and laid down by an early ancestor; the conventional laws of morality were also once established by specific people; and the laws of the state are always first formulated in the head of a statesman. These minds laid down laws over other people, and the only person who feels unfree is one who forgets the origin of these laws and turns them into divine commandments, objective moral concepts or the commanding voice of their own conscience. But someone who does not overlook their origin and seeks it in a person will treat these laws as components of the same world of ideas from which they take their own moral intuitions. If they believe their own laws are better, they will seek to replace the existing laws with them; if they find the existing laws justified, they will obey them as if they were their own.

People are not made to found their own moral world order. Anyone who claims they are is taking the same stance on human science that natural science reached when it claimed that bulls have horns so they can gore. Fortunately, natural scientists have jettisoned the concept of objective purposes. Ethics is finding it more difficult to liberate itself from this concept. Horns do not exist *to gore*; goring exists *because of* horns – and in the same way, humans do not exist for morality; morality exists *because* of humans. The free person acts because they have a moral idea, not in order to be moral. Human individuals are the prerequisite for a moral world order.

The human individual is the source of all morality and the focus of all life. The state and society exist only as the necessary consequence of individual life. We can easily see that the state and society in turn react upon individual life, just as we can see that goring, which exists because of horns, has a reactive effect on the further development of the bull's horns, which would atrophy if they were not used. The individual would likewise atrophy if they lived apart from human society. And this is why social order develops, so that it may react positively on the individual.

The Philosophy of Freedom and Monism

The naive person, who believes to be real only what they can see with their eyes and touch with their hands, also demands for their moral life motives that can be perceived with the senses. They require someone or something to transmit these motives to them in a way comprehensible to their senses. They will allow their motives to be dictated to them as commandments by someone they consider to be wiser and more powerful than they are, or who they recognise as an authority over them for some other reason. This is how the moral principles listed above come into being, through the authority of the family, state, society, church, and God. The most narrow-minded person has faith in a single person other than themselves, while those who are a little more advanced will allow some kind of majority (state, society) to dictate their moral behaviour. It is always a perceptible power they build on. Anyone who ultimately

becomes convinced that these authorities are just human beings, every bit as weak as themselves, will seek guidance from a higher power, a divinity whom that person endows with characteristics perceivable by the senses. They will also think of this divinity as conveying the conceptual content of their moral life in a perceptible fashion, be it God appearing in burning thorn-bushes, or walking among men in living, human form and telling them so that their ears can hear what they should and should not do.

In the moral realm, the highest developmental stage of naive realism is that at which the moral commandment (moral idea) is divorced from all external entities and regarded hypothetically as an absolute power within oneself. What a person first heard as the voice of God, they now hear as an independent inner power and call it conscience.

But at this point, the stage of naive consciousness has already been left behind, and we have entered the region where moral laws take on a life of their own as norms. They are no longer attached to anyone; they are metaphysical entities that exist on their own terms. They are analogous to the invisible-visible powers of metaphysical realism. They also always appear as a corollary of metaphysical realism.

Metaphysical realism, you will recall, relates the perceptual world that is given to us and the conceptual sphere accessed by thought to an external entity-in-itself. This school of thought is also bound to seek the origins of morality in this second world. There are various possibilities for this. If the entity-in-itself is thoughtless and operates according to purely mechanical laws, as modern materialism would have it, then it must also produce the human individual out of sheer necessity, along with all the individual's properties. Awareness of our own freedom can then be nothing but an illusion. For, while I consider myself to be the author of my actions, it is the matter of which I am composed and its processes that are at work within me. I believe myself free; but really all of my actions are nothing but the results of the material exchange on which my physical and mental organism is founded. We feel free only because we are unaware of the motives that compel us to act. 'We must emphasise that the feeling of freedom rests on the absence of external compelling motives.' 'Our action is necessitated, just as our thought is.'[27]

27 Ziehen, *Leitfaden der physiologischen Psychologie*, *(Guide to Physiological Psychology)*, 1893, p207f.

Another possibility is that someone will imagine the Absolute as a spiritual being hidden behind the world of appearances. They will then seek the impetus for their actions in a spiritual power. They regard the moral principles to be found in their own reason as an emanation of this being-in-itself, which has its own specific intentions for them. The dualists of this school of thought believe that the moral laws are dictated by the Absolute, and humans merely have to use their reason to discover and carry out the decrees of the absolute being. To the dualists, the moral world order appears as the perceptible reflection of a higher order standing behind it. Earthly morality is a phenomenon of the transcendent world order. And this world order depends not on humans, but on the being-in-itself: God. Humans should do God's will. Von Hartmann, who imagines the being-in-itself as a deity whose own existence is all suffering, believes that this deity created the world so that the world might save it from its own immense suffering. This philosopher therefore sees humanity's moral development as a process that exists for the deity's salvation.

'Only through rational, self-aware individuals building a moral world order is it possible for the world-process to move towards its goal.' 'Real existence is the incarnation

of the deity. The world-process is the passion story of God who has become flesh, and at the same time the path to salvation for He who was crucified in the flesh; but *morality is our cooperation in shortening of path of suffering and redemption*.'[28]

Here, humans do not act because they want to; rather, they should act, because God wants to be saved. Just as the materialist dualist turns people into automatons, whose actions are merely the result of purely mechanical laws, the spiritualist dualist (ie, the one who sees the Absolute, the being-in-itself, as spiritual) turns humans into slaves to the will of that Absolute. Both materialism and spiritualism – metaphysical realism as a whole, in fact – exclude the possibility of freedom.

Both naive and metaphysical realism must, if they are to be consistent, deny freedom for one and the same reason, because they see humans as simply effecting or carrying out principles imposed on them by necessity. Naive realism kills freedom by subordinating humans to the author-

28 Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins, (Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness)*, 1879, section 871.

ity of a perceptible entity, or one conceived by analogy to perceptible beings, or to the abstract voice of conscience. Metaphysical realists, meanwhile, cannot accept the idea of freedom because they believe humans to be mechanically or morally determined by an entity-in-itself.

Monism has to acknowledge that naive realism is partially justified, because it recognises the justification of the perceptual world. Anyone who is incapable of producing moral ideas through intuition must receive them from others. Insofar as a person receives their moral principles from an external source, they are in fact unfree. But monism attributes the same value to ideas as it does to percepts – although the idea can only be produced within the human individual. Insofar as a person follows the impulses that come from this side, they are free. But monism denies all justification to metaphysics, and consequently also the justification of action being prompted by the so-called entity-in-itself. In the monist view, people cannot act freely if they are following a perceptible external compulsion; they can act freely when they obey only themselves. Monism cannot recognise an unconscious compulsion hidden behind percept and concept. When someone claims of a fellow human that their action was *unfree*, they need to point to the thing,

the person or the institution within the perceptible world that caused this person to act; but if the person making this claim invokes a cause of action outside the real world of senses and thought, then monism cannot accept it.

In the monist view, our actions are sometimes free and sometimes unfree. We find ourselves unfree in the world of percepts, and realise the free spirit within ourselves.

The moral commandments that the metaphysician must regard as emanations of a higher power are, to the adherents of monism, *human thought*. For the monist, the moral world order is the imprint of neither a purely mechanical natural order, nor a divine governance, but entirely the free creation of humans. Humans have to carry out their own will in the world, not the will of any god; they realise their own decisions and intentions, not those of another entity. Monists do not see a universal director behind people's actions, bending them to his will; people are simply pursuing their own *human* ends. And every individual pursues their own ends. For the world of ideas is not expressed in a community of people, but only in the human individual. Whatever proves to be a common goal to all people is only the result of individuals' acts of will, and most often the acts

of a few outstanding people whom the others look to as an authority. Each of us is called to be a *free spirit*, just as every rosebud is called to become a rose.

In the realm of true moral action, then, monism is a *philosophy of freedom*. And because it is also a philosophy of reality, it can both reject the metaphysical (unreal) limitations on the free spirit, and recognise the physical and historical (naive-real) restrictions of the naive person. Monism does not see humans as finished products that realise their full potential at every moment of their lives, and so the argument about whether humans are *free as such or not* is futile. Monism sees humans as developing beings, and asks whether, in the course of this development, the stage of the free spirit can be attained.

Monism knows that Nature does not release humans from her embrace as fully formed free spirits, but leads them to a particular stage, from which they continue developing – still as unfree creatures – until reaching the point where they discover their own selves. Monism does not deny morality, but it is clear that someone acting under a physical or moral compulsion cannot be truly moral. It views the path of development through automatic action (following natural

drives and instincts) and obedient action (following moral norms) as necessary prior stages of morality, but also sees the possibility of overcoming both these stages through the free spirit. Monism frees humans from the worldly chains of naive moral maxims and from the transcendent moral maxims of the speculative metaphysician. Monists cannot get rid of these things, just as they cannot get rid of perception, but they reject them because they seek all the principles of knowledge to explain worldly phenomena within the world, and not outside it. Just as monism refuses even to think about principles of knowledge other than those that apply to humans,[29] so it also decisively rejects thoughts of non-human moral maxims. Human morality, like human knowledge, is determined by human nature. And, just as higher beings would probably understand knowledge to mean something quite different to our sense of it, they would most likely also have a different morality. We might even find it impossible to judge their actions from a moral standpoint. In short, monists think it absurd to speak of such things. For the adherents of monism, morality is a specifically human quality, and *freedom* is the human form of being moral.

29 See p134.

The Purpose of the World and of Life (Human Destiny)

Among the manifold movements within human spiritual and intellectual life, let us follow one that can be called the overcoming of the concept of purpose. *Purposefulness* is a particular type of sequence of phenomena. Purposefulness truly exists only when, unlike the relationship between cause and effect where the first event determines a later one, it is the later event that has a determining effect on the first. And this can only be the case for human actions. A person performs an action that they have *previously* imagined, allowing the mental image to determine their action. The later part of this process (the action) affects the earlier (the acting person) with the help of the mental image. This detour through human imagination is entirely necessary for making purposeful connections.

In the process that can be broken down into cause and effect, we must distinguish the percept from the concept. The percept of the cause precedes the percept of the effect; and cause and effect would merely exist alongside one another in our consciousness if we were unable to connect them via their corresponding concepts. The percept of the effect can only ever follow the percept of the cause. If the effect is to have a real influence on the cause, it can only be through the conceptual factor. For the perceptual factor of the effect simply does not exist prior to that of the cause. Anyone who claims that the blossom is the purpose of the root – ie, that the former has an influence on the latter – can only do so based on the factor in the blossom that comes from their own thought. When the root is first formed, the blossom's perceptual factor does not yet exist. But for a purposeful connection, we need more than just the ideal, logical connection of the later to the earlier. The concept (the law) of effect must influence the cause in a real way, through a perceptible process. And we can only observe a concept's perceptible influence on something else in human actions. The concept of purpose is thus only applicable here. The naive consciousness, which regards as real only what is perceptible – as we have noted repeatedly – seeks percepts even where only ideal content is to be found. It

seeks perceptible connections in perceptible events or, if it finds none, *dreams* them into being. The concept of purpose, which is valid in subjective action, is an element suitable for such dreamed-up connections. The naive person knows that they can bring about an event, and concludes from this that nature does the same. In the purely ideal connections of nature, they see not only invisible forces, but also imperceptible real purposes. People make their tools with a purpose in mind; the naive realist would have the Creator build organisms in the same way. This false concept of purpose is disappearing only gradually from the sciences. In philosophy, even today it continues to stir up a great deal of trouble. And so people ask about the purpose of the world, the destiny (and consequently also the purpose) of humankind etc.

Monism rejects the concept of purpose in all areas, with the sole exception of human action. It seeks laws of nature, but not purposes of nature. *Purposes of nature* are arbitrary assumptions just as invisible forces are.[30] But, from the monistic standpoint, we also cannot assume any purposes of life that a person does not decide for themselves. We can call purposeful only what someone has made their purpose,

30 See p128.

for it is only the realisation of an idea that creates purposefulness. In a realistic sense, an idea only has an effect in people. And so life only has the purpose and the destiny that people give it. To the question of what a person's mission in life is, monism can only answer: the one they set themselves. My mission in the world is not preordained; it is the one I choose for myself at any given moment. I do not embark on my path through life with a predetermined route map.

Ideas are only realised by people. It is therefore inadmissible to speak of the embodiment of ideas by history. All such formulations as 'History is the evolution of humans towards freedom', or the realisation of the moral world order etc, are untenable from the monist point of view.

The adherents of the concept of purpose believe that surrendering it would also mean surrendering all order and unity in the world. One hears for example Hamerling saying that:

'As long as there are drives in nature, it is foolishness to deny purpose in the same.

'Just as the formation of a limb of the human body is not determined and conditioned by an idea of the limb floating in the air, but by its connection with the greater whole – the body to which the limb belongs – so the formation of everything in nature, be it plant, animal, or human, is not determined and conditioned by an idea of them floating in the air, but by the formative principle of the greater whole of nature, which develops and shapes itself with purpose.'[31]

And, on p191 of the same volume:

'The theory of purpose claims only that, despite the thousand discomforts and torments of this creaturely life, there is a high and unmistakeable degree of purposefulness and planning in the formations and developments of nature – purpose and planning, however, which are only realised within the laws of nature, and which cannot point towards some land of milk and honey where there is life without death and growth without decay, with all the more or less unpleasant but also unavoidable stages between them.

31 Hamerling, *Atomistik des Willens (Atomism of the Will)*, 1891, vol II, p201.

'Should the opponent of the concept of purpose point to a painstakingly assembled scrapheap of partial or whole, supposed or real instances of unpurposeful things in a world of miracles of purposefulness, such as nature displays in every area, I find that just as amusing...'

What is meant by purposefulness here? Percepts coming together to form a whole. But as all percepts are based on laws (ideas), which we find by thinking, so the planned harmony of the parts of a perceptual whole is nothing more than the ideal (logical) harmony of the parts of an ideal whole contained in this perceptual whole. To say that an animal or a person is not determined by an *idea floating in the air* is a misleading way of putting it, and the view thus condemned loses its absurd character when it is expressed correctly. The animal is determined not by an idea floating in the air, but by an idea innate to it, constituting the law of its nature. It is precisely because the idea is not outside the thing, but acting within it as its essence, that we cannot speak of purposefulness here. The person who denies that the natural being is determined from without (and, in this context, it does not matter whether that external idea is floating in the air, or in the mind of a world-creator) must admit that this being is not determined with purpose and

planning from without, but with causes and laws from within. I construct a machine purposefully when I make connections between its parts that are not in their nature. The construction is purposeful because I have based it upon the idea of how it will work. The machine has thereby become an object of perception with a corresponding idea attached to it. Natural beings are the same in this regard. Someone who calls a thing purposeful because it is formed according to laws may also apply the term to natural beings. But this conformity to laws must not be confused with the laws of subjective human action. For something to have a purpose, it is necessary for the cause to be a concept: the concept of the effect. But in nature we can find no concepts acting as causes; the concept always proves to be nothing more than the ideal connection between cause and effect. Causes are present in nature only in the form of percepts.

Dualism can speak of the purpose of the world and of nature. Wherever we can perceive a nexus of cause and effect according to laws, the dualist may assume that we are seeing a mere imitation of a connection in which the absolute being is realising its purposes. For monism, doing away with the absolute being also does away with the reason to assume purposes in the world and in nature.

The Moral Imagination (Darwinism and Morality)

Free spirits act on their impulses, which are intuitions chosen from the whole of their world of ideas by the act of thinking. For *unfree sprits*, the reason for selecting a particular intuition from their world of ideas and making it the reason for an action lies in the perceptual world given to them, ie, in their previous experiences. Before coming to a conclusion, the unfree spirit recalls what someone did, or deemed to be a good course of action, in a similar case – or what God commanded in such a case etc – and acts accordingly. Free spirits are not ruled by these precedents. They decide for themselves. And in making this decision, they take no account of what others did in this case, or what others said should be done. They are moved by purely ideal (logical) reasons to select a particular concept from the store of all their concepts and translate it into action. But that action will belong to perceptible reality. What this

person does will therefore be identical with a very specific perceptual content. The concept will have to be realised in a specific single event. The concept cannot contain this specific event within it. Its relationship to the event can only be that of a concept to a percept, eg, as the concept of the lion relates to an individual lion. The mediator between concept and percept is the *mental image*.[32] The mental image is given to unfree spirits from the outset. Their motivations are present in their consciousness as mental images from the outset. Whenever they want to carry something out, they will do as they have seen it done before, or as they have been told to in such a case. An authority is therefore most effective when it provides *examples*, ie, transmits very specific individual actions to the consciousness of the unfree spirit. The Christian does not follow the teachings so much as the *example* of the Saviour. Rules are less useful for positive action than for the prohibition of certain actions. Laws only become universal concepts when they prohibit actions, not when they prescribe them. The unfree spirit must be given rules about what to do in a very specific form. Clean the street outside your front door. Pay your taxes at this particular rate to X tax office etc. The laws preventing

32 See p117 onwards.

actions take a conceptual form. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not commit adultery. But these laws, too, only act upon the unfree spirit with reference to a specific mental image, eg, the punishment for breaking them, or pangs of conscience, or eternal damnation etc.

As soon as the impetus for an action is present in universal-conceptual form (eg, Thou shalt do good unto thy fellow man; thou shalt live so that thy welfare is best promoted), then in each individual case the specific mental image of the action (the relation of the concept to some perceptual content) must be found. For the *free spirit*, who is driven neither by examples nor by the fear of punishment, this translation of concept into mental image is always necessary.

A person produces specific mental images out of the sum of their ideas by means of the imagination. In order to realise their ideas and put them into action, the free spirit needs the *moral imagination*. This is the source of action for the free spirit. And for this reason, only people with a moral imagination are morally productive. Those who merely preach morality – ie, people who think up moral rules without being able to condense them into specific mental images –

are morally unproductive. They are like the critics who can explain very competently how an artwork should be put together, but are themselves incapable of creating even the most modest piece of art.

To realise its mental image, the moral imagination must get to work in a particular area of percepts. A person's action does not create any percepts, but it does reshape the percepts that are already present, and gives them a new form. To reshape a particular perceptual object or a sum of objects according to a moral mental image, one must already have understood the percept's logical content (the way it has been working until this point, which one wishes to reform or give a new direction). Further, one must find the mode by which this logic can be transformed into a new logic. This part of moral efficacy rests on the knowledge of the world of phenomena with which one is interacting. It is therefore to be sought in a branch of scientific knowledge. Moral action thus presupposes, alongside the faculty of moral ideas[33] and the moral imagination, the ability to reshape

33 Only a superficial reading could find in the use of the word 'faculty' both here and in other passages a regression to the old psychological doctrine of the faculties of the soul. Taken in connection with what is said on p102, the exact meaning of the word is clear.

the world of percepts without breaking the laws of nature that hold it together. This ability is *moral technique*, and it may be learnt just as science itself may be learnt. Generally speaking, humans are more suited to finding concepts for the already finished world than they are to productively determining future actions that do not yet exist, using their imagination. It is therefore quite possible for people without moral imagination to receive the moral ideas of others and skilfully imprint them on reality. The reverse can also be the case, that people with moral imagination lack technical skill, and other people must then realise their mental images for them.

Insofar as knowledge of the objects in our sphere of action is necessary for moral action, our action rests on this knowledge. What we must know here are the *laws of nature*. And they belong to the natural sciences, not to ethics.

The moral imagination and the faculty of moral ideas can only become objects of knowledge *after* they have been produced by the individual. At that point, they no longer regulate life; they have already regulated it. They are to be treated as effective causes like any others (they are purposes

only for the subject). We will approach them as a *natural history of moral ideas*.

There can be no ethics as a science of norms alongside this.

Some people have wanted to retain the normative character of moral laws at least insofar as ethics is held to be like dietetics, which derives universal rules from the organism's requirements for life, and uses them to influence the body in a particular way.[34] This comparison is false, because our moral life cannot be compared with the life of the organism. The organism functions without our intervention; we find its laws already present in the world in finished form, and thus we can seek them and apply what we find. But the moral laws are created by us. We cannot apply them before they have been created. The error arises because the moral laws are not created anew at every moment, but are passed down. Those we inherit from our forebears then appear to be given, like the laws of nature that apply to organisms. But later generations will not be justified in applying them in the same way as dietetic rules. For they relate to the individual and not, like the laws of nature, to the exemplar of a generic

34 Paulsen, *System der Ethik (A System of Ethics)*, 1889, trans Thilly.

type. As an organism, I am one of a generic type, and when I apply the natural laws of the type to my special case, I will be living as nature intended. But as a moral being, I am an individual and have laws that are mine alone.[35]

The view put forward here appears to contradict that tenet of the modern natural sciences known as *the theory of evolution*. But this is only an appearance. *Evolution* is understood here as the real progression of the later from the earlier along paths governed by the laws of nature. In the organic world, evolution means that later (more perfect) organic forms are real descendants of the earlier (less perfect) forms, progressing from them according to the laws of nature. The proponents of the organic theory of evolution posit that on Earth, there was once an epoch when one could have observed the gradual evolution of proto-amniotes into reptiles before one's eyes – if a human could have been present at the time and had a long enough lifespan.

35 When Paulsen, on p22 of *A System of Ethics*, says: 'Different dispositions and life-conditions demand not only a different bodily, but also a different spiritual and moral diet,' he is very close to the right knowledge, but does not make the crucial point. Insofar as I am an individual, I do not need a diet. Dietetics is the art of bringing the particular exemplar into harmony with the universal rules of the general type. But as an individual I am not an exemplar of a general type.

The evolutionists also posit that one could have observed the development of the solar system from the Kant-Laplace primordial nebula, if it were possible to remain at a vantage point in the ether for that immensely long period. But no evolutionist would claim that, if they had never seen a reptile, they could still derive the concept of the reptile with all its characteristics from the concept of the proto-amniote. Nor can the solar system be derived from the concept of the Kant-Laplace primordial nebula, if this concept of the nebula is thought of as only having been formed directly from the percept of the nebula.

In other words: if they are thinking logically, the evolutionist must claim that later evolutionary phases really develop from earlier phases, and that, if we are given the concepts of the imperfect and the perfect, we can see the connection between the two. But the evolutionist will certainly not agree that the concept of the earlier form is all that is needed to develop the concept of the later. For the ethicist, this means that although the connection between later and earlier moral concepts can be seen, it does not follow that even a single new moral idea can be deduced from earlier ones. As a moral being, the individual produces their own content. This content is a given for the ethicist in just the

same way as reptiles are a given for the natural scientist. Reptiles evolved from the proto-amniotes; but the natural scientist cannot derive the concept of reptiles from that of proto-amniotes. Later moral ideas develop from earlier ones; but the ethicist cannot deduce the moral concepts of a later cultural period from those of an earlier period. The confusion arises because as natural scientists we have the facts already before us, and only consider them in retrospect, while with moral action we ourselves first create the facts that we later consider. In the evolution of the moral world order, we accomplish what nature accomplishes on a lower level: we change something perceptible. The ethical norm cannot therefore be *recognised* first, like a law of nature; it must be created. Only when it exists can it become the object of knowledge.

But can we not then measure the new against the old? Is not every person forced to assess what their moral imagination produces against the conventional moral doctrines? If a person wants to be truly morally productive, this proposition is just as absurd as if we were to measure a new natural form against an old one and say: reptiles do not match proto-amniotes, and so they are an unjustified (abnormal) form.

Ethical individualism is not therefore opposed to the theory of evolution, but follows directly from it. It must be possible to follow Ernst Haeckel's genealogy – from protozoa all the way to humans as organic creatures – without any interruption of nature's laws, and without any gaps in the unity of evolution, right up to the individual as a moral entity in a specific sense. But while it is true that the individual's moral ideas can be perceived as having evolved from those of their forebears, it is also true that this individual is not morally fertile if they do not have moral ideas of their own.

The same ethical individualism that I have developed on the basis of the foregoing remarks could also be derived from the theory of evolution. The ultimate conviction would be the same, though the path taken to reach it would be a different one.

For the theory of evolution, the emergence of completely new moral ideas through the moral imagination is just as unsurprising as the emergence of a new animal species from an earlier one. It is just that, as a monistic worldview, this theory in both moral life and the natural world must reject all transcendental (metaphysical) influences. In this, it follows the same principle that drives it when it seeks the

causes of new organic forms in forms that already exist, and not in the intervention of a transcendent deity, who has a creative thought and then produces each new species through some supernatural influence. Just as monism has no use for thoughts of some transcendent creative force to explain life on Earth, it is also impossible for the monist to derive the moral world order from causes that do not lie within the world. Monism cannot admit any ongoing transcendent influence on moral life (divine governance from without), nor any particular instance of this through a revelation (the laying down of the ten commandments) or the appearance of God on Earth (Christ's divinity). To monism, the moral processes are products of nature just like everything else in existence, and their causes must be sought in nature – which is to say, in humans, as the bearers of morality.

Ethical individualism is thus the capstone of the building that Darwin and Haeckel have erected for the natural sciences. It is the theory of evolution transferred onto moral life. A narrow-minded person who regards the concept of what is *natural* as a realm with arbitrary boundaries can easily conclude that there is no space for free individual action within them. The evolutionary theorist who is consistent in

their approach cannot fall prey to such narrow-mindedness. They cannot believe the process of natural evolution ends with apes, and accord to humans a 'transcendent' origin; nor can they find only humans' organic actions to be natural; they must regard the free moral life as an extension of organic life.

All that the evolutionary theorist can do, if they stick to their principles, is claim that moral action evolves from the less perfect kinds of natural processes; the characterisation of the action, ie, determining whether it is *free*, must be left to the *direct observation* of that action. The evolutionary theorist, after all, claims only that humans evolved out of apes. How humans are constituted is something that must be determined through observation. The results of this observation cannot contradict the history of evolution. Only if one were to claim that the results exclude a natural world order would this be incompatible with more recent developments in the natural sciences.[36]

36 We are justified in describing thoughts (ethical ideas) as objects of observation. For although the constructs of thought do not enter the field of observation during the process of thinking, they can become objects of observation afterwards. This is how we have arrived at the characterisation of action.

Ethical individualism has nothing to fear from a natural science that understands itself. Observation tells us that *freedom* is characteristic of the perfect form of human action; relating this realisation conceptually to other kinds of processes gives us the *natural origin* of free action.

Let us look again, from a natural point of view, at the distinction mentioned above[37] between the two sentences: 'Being free means being able to do as you please,' and 'Being at liberty to desire and not to desire is the real proposition involved in the dogma of free will.' Hamerling bases his view of free will on this distinction, in that he holds the first statement to be true and the second to be an absurd tautology. He says: 'I can do as I will. But to say I can will as I will is an empty tautology.' Whether I can *do* (ie, translate into reality) what I will (ie, whether I can realise the idea of future action in my mind), depends on external factors and my own technical skill.[38]

Freedom means being able to determine the mental images that lie at the root of my action (motivations) independently

37 See p17.
38 See p194.

through my moral imagination. Freedom is impossible when something external to me (a mechanical process or God) determines my moral ideas. I am thus only free when I produce these ideas myself, and not when I can act on motivations given to me by another entity. A free being is one who can will what they themselves believe to be right. And if they do something other than what they will, they must be driven to it by motives that do not lie within them. The actions of such a person are not free. And so being at liberty to will what one thinks is right or wrong means being at liberty to be free or unfree. This, of course, is just as absurd as seeing freedom in the ability to do what one is forced to will. But the latter is what Hamerling claims when he says: 'It is entirely true that the will is always determined by motivations, but it is absurd to say that it is unfree for this reason; for no greater freedom can be desired or imagined than the freedom to realise oneself to the full measure of one's own strength and determination.' But no: a greater freedom can be desired, and this alone is true freedom. This is the freedom to decide for myself the reasons for willing something.

In certain circumstances, a person can be persuaded to refrain from carrying out their will. But they can only allow

someone else to prescribe what they should do, ie, to will what someone other than them thinks is right, if they do not feel *free*.

External forces can prevent me from doing what I want. Then they simply condemn me to inaction. Only when they try to subjugate my mind, chase my motivation out of my head and replace them with their own, are they really intent on making me unfree. The church does not therefore merely warn against *action*, but against *impure thoughts*, ie, the motivations for my action. But in the church's view, all motivations given by anything other than the church are 'impure'. A church produces true slaves only when its priests make themselves advisers to people's conscience, ie, when the faithful obtain the motivation for their actions from those priests (in the confessional).

The Value of Life (Pessimism and Optimism)

A counterpart to the question of the purpose of life or its destiny[39] is the question of its value. Here, we encounter two opposing views, along with every conceivable attempt to mediate between the two. One view says that this world is the best of all possible worlds, and that life and action within it is a good of inestimable value. The whole of existence is a web of harmonious and purposeful interaction, and is worthy of admiration. Even what seems malign and evil can be recognised as good from a higher standpoint, for it represents a useful contrast with the good. We are better able to value what is good when it is contrasted with what is not. Even evil is not truly evil; what we experience as evil is merely a lesser degree of good. Evil is an absence of good, and has no meaning in itself.

39 See p184 onwards.

The other view holds that life is filled with torment and misery; everywhere pleasure is outweighed by displeasure, and joy by pain. Existence is a burden, and non-existence would be preferable in all circumstances.

As the principal proponents of the first view – optimism – we have Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz; for the second – pessimism – we have Schopenhauer and von Hartmann.

Leibniz says that this is the best of all possible worlds. A better one is impossible, for God is good and wise. A good God *wants* to create the best of all worlds; a wise God *knows* what this is; He can distinguish it from all other worse worlds. Only a bad or unwise God could create a world worse than the best possible.

Anyone starting from this viewpoint will find it easy to set out the direction that human action must take if it is to contribute to making this world the best. Humans only need to discover God's advice and behave accordingly. If we know what God's intentions are for the world and the human race, we will do the right thing. And adding to the good that is in the world will make us happy. From an optimistic stand-

point, then, life is worth living. It necessarily motivates us to participate and contribute.

Schopenhauer sees the matter differently. He does not believe that our world is steered by an all-wise and all-bountiful being, but by a blind urge or will. And the essential feature of all will is an eternal striving, an endless yearning for a satisfaction that can never be achieved. For if a goal once striven for is reached, a new need will appear, and so on. Contentment can only ever endure for a vanishingly small length of time. Our lives are otherwise composed of unsatisfied urges, ie, dissatisfaction and suffering. If the blind urge should finally be dulled, then our lives would lack all content; our existence would be one of endless boredom. The best we can do is therefore to stifle our desires and needs, to kill the will. Schopenhauer's pessimism leads to inaction; his moral aim is *universal laziness*.

Von Hartmann seeks to establish pessimism in a fundamentally different manner, and to use it for ethics. Participating in a favourite endeavour of our age, von Hartmann tries to ground his worldview in *experience*. He wants to draw conclusions about life from observing it, to discover whether pleasure or displeasure dominates in the world. He arrays

what appears to humanity as happiness and good before the eye of reason, to show that, on closer inspection, all supposed satisfaction proves to be *illusion*. It is an illusion to believe that health, youth, freedom, adequate income, love (sexual enjoyment), pity, friendship and family life, honour and being honourable, fame, power, religious edification, the pursuit of science and art, hope of life after death, and involvement in cultural progress – that all of these are sources of happiness and satisfaction. Under sober consideration, all enjoyment brings far more evil and misery into the world than it does pleasure. *The discomfort of the hangover is always greater than the comfort of getting drunk*. Displeasure dominates in the world by a long way. No person, not even one who is relatively the happiest, would choose to live through the misery of life a second time if you asked them. But since von Hartmann does not deny the existence of the ideal (wisdom) in the world, but rather accords it the same validity as the blind urge (will), he can only attribute the creation of the world to his absolute being if this absolute being creates the pain of the world to serve some wise purpose. The pain of the world is, however, none other than the pain of God Himself, since all of natural life is identical with the life of God. At the same time, the only aim of an all-wise being can be liberation from suffering and, since

all of existence is suffering, liberation from existence. The purpose of creating the world is to transform existence into non-existence, which is much better. The progress of the world is a continual battle against God's pain, which ultimately ends in the annihilation of existence. God created the world so that, through it, He might free Himself from His immense pain. The world is 'to be regarded to a certain extent as an itching eruption on the Absolute', through which His unconscious healing power releases Him from an inner sickness, 'or as a painful poultice which an all-wise being applies to himself to first draw out an inner pain and then rid himself of it'. Humans are part of the world. God suffers within them. He created them to shatter and scatter his immense pain. The pain each one of us suffers is no more than a drop in the immense ocean of God's pain.[40]

As a human, one must fill oneself with the knowledge that pursuing individual satisfaction (egotism) is foolish; one must be guided solely by the task of dedicating oneself to the salvation of God through selfless devotion to the pro-

40 Hartmann, *Phänomenologie des sittlichen Bewusstseins (Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness)*, 1879, p866ff.

gress of the world. Unlike Schopenhauer's pessimism, von Hartmann's leads us to an activity devoted to a lofty aim.

But what of its basis in experience?

To strive for satisfaction means that our life's activity reaches out beyond our life's content. A creature is hungry, and so it strives for satiety, when its organic functions demand new content in the form of food. Striving for honour means that a person only regards what they do and what they eschew as valuable when others approve of their activities. People are motivated to strive for knowledge when they feel that something is missing from the world they can see, hear etc – something they have not understood. The fulfilment of this striving creates a feeling of pleasure in the striving individual, and failure to fulfil it creates displeasure. It is important to note here that pleasure or displeasure depends only on the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of my striving. The striving itself can in no way be seen as displeasure. And so, if at the moment I attain what I have striven for, a new striving is born, I may not say that pleasure has given birth to displeasure for me – because pleasure always creates the desire to experience it again, or the desire for some new pleasure. It is only when

the desire comes up against the impossibility of fulfilment that I can speak of displeasure. Even when a pleasure once experienced sparks the longing for a greater or more refined experience of pleasure, I can only speak of this first pleasure causing displeasure at the moment when the means to experience the greater or more refined pleasure are denied me. Only when displeasure follows as a natural consequence of enjoyment, as when a woman's sexual pleasure is followed by the pains of birth and the toil of childcare, can I find the origin of pain in enjoyment. If striving itself produced displeasure, then giving up this effort would necessarily bring us pleasure. But the opposite is the case. The lack of striving in our lives causes boredom, and this is bound up with displeasure. But since striving by its nature can go on for a long time before an aim is achieved, and in the interim we must content ourselves with the hope of fulfilment, we have to acknowledge that displeasure has nothing whatever to do with striving as such, but depends solely on its unfulfilment. Schopenhauer is wrong in all cases to regard desire or striving (the will) in itself as the source of pain.

In truth, the opposite is actually the case. Striving (desiring) in itself makes people happy. Who has not felt the pleasure brought by the hope of a distant but keenly desired aim?

This happiness is the companion to the work whose fruits we will only enjoy in the future. It is a pleasure quite independent of whether the aim is achieved. And if it is, then the pleasure of striving is joined by the pleasure of fulfilment, as something new. But to anyone who tries to claim that the displeasure of an aim unfulfilled is then joined by the displeasure of disappointed hope, ultimately making this aggregate displeasure greater than the pleasure of possible fulfilment – to them, we can retort that the opposite may be the case. Looking back at the enjoyment felt in the time of desiring what was not then fulfilled just as often lessens the displeasure of unfulfilment. If at the moment of dashed hopes we cry out: 'I did my best,' this is proof of this claim. The blessed feeling of having tried your very best is ignored by those who claim that, when a desire is unfulfilled, then not only is the pleasure of fulfilment absent; the enjoyment of the desiring itself is destroyed.

The fulfilment of a desire brings pleasure, and its non-fulfilment displeasure. We must not conclude from this that pleasure is the satisfaction of a desire and displeasure is a failure to satisfy it. A person can feel both pleasure and displeasure without these being the consequences of a desire. Illness is a displeasure that is preceded by no desire. Anyone

who tries to claim that illness is the unsatisfied desire for health is mistakenly classing the natural and unconscious wish not to become ill as a positive desire. If someone receives an inheritance from a wealthy relative whose existence they were not previously aware of, this fact will fill them with pleasure without any preceding desire.

Anyone, then, wishing to investigate whether there is a surplus on the side of pleasure or displeasure must take into account the pleasure of desiring, and of the fulfilment of desire, and the pleasure that comes to us without any striving. On the other side of the ledger, we have the displeasure of boredom, and of striving without fulfilment, and finally the displeasure that comes to us without any desiring. In the last category there is also the displeasure caused by work that is forced upon us rather than chosen.

Now the question arises of the means by which we should tot up *the balance of both sides*. Von Hartmann is of the opinion that reason is the right tool for this calculation. He says: 'Pain and pleasure are only so far as they are felt.'[41] From

41 Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten (Philosophy of the Unconscious)*, 1869, vol II, p6.

this it follows that there is no yardstick for pleasure other than the subjective one of feeling. I must *feel* whether the sum of my feelings of displeasure, set against my feelings of pleasure, produce a surplus of joy or pain. Despite this, von Hartmann claims: '...although undoubtedly the life-value of every being can only be considered according to its own subjective standard [...] yet it is by no means asserted that every being draws the correct algebraic sum from all the affections of its life, or, in other words, that its collective judgement on its own life is a correct one in respect of its subjective experience.'[42] But here, once again, the *rational evaluation* of feelings is made the judge of value.

And because von Hartmann is of this opinion, he believes that in order to reach a correct valuation of life, he must dispense with the factors that falsify our judgement of the balance of pleasure and displeasure. He tries to achieve this in two ways. *Firstly*, he proves that our desiring (drive, will) has a disruptive effect on our sober judgement of the value of feelings. While we ought to tell ourselves, for example, that sexual pleasure is a source of evil, the fact that humans

42 Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten (Philosophy of the Unconscious)*, 1869, vol II, p7.

have a powerful sex drive lures us into pretending we feel a pleasure that is not present to that degree. We want enjoyment, and so we do not admit to ourselves that we are suffering in the midst of that enjoyment. *Secondly,* von Hartmann subjects the feelings to a critical examination, and seeks to prove that the objects to which feelings attach themselves prove to be illusions when considered with reason, and that *they are destroyed at the moment when our constantly growing intelligence sees through the illusion.*

Von Hartmann therefore thinks of the matter in the following way: if an ambitious man wants to work out whether, up until the moment he begins his consideration, his life has been dominated by pleasure or displeasure, he must first rid himself of two sources of error. Since he is ambitious, this feature of his character will act as a magnifying glass to his pleasure at gaining recognition for his achievements; it will have the inverse effect on insults he has felt at being disregarded. When he suffered an instance of disregard, he felt the insult, because he is ambitious – but in retrospect, it appears in a milder light, while the pleasures of recognition, to which he is so susceptible, leave a much deeper impression. Now, the ambitious man is very fortunate to experience life in this way. The illusion lessens his feeling

of displeasure at the moment of self-observation. All the same, his conclusion is false. The suffering over which his nature now draws a veil was something he really had to endure at its full strength, but he enters it into the ledger of his life incorrectly. To reach a correct conclusion, the ambitious man must lay aside his ambition while he considers the matter. He must view his life to date without any distorting glasses before his mind's eye. Otherwise he is like the merchant who, when making up his books, adds his own eagerness to make a sale to the income column.

But von Hartmann goes further. He says that the ambitious man must also be clear in his mind that the recognition he pursues is worthless. He must come to the insight himself, or be brought to it by others, that a rational person cannot set any store in recognition from other people, since, 'In all cases that are not vital questions of development or finally settled by science, one may be confident, a priori, that the majority are wrong and the minority right. [...] To such a judgement that man surrenders his life-happiness who makes ambition his guiding star.'[43] If the ambitious man tells

43 Hartmann, *Philosophie des Unbewussten (Philosophy of the Unconscious)*, 1869, vol II, p54.

himself all of this, then he must begin to think of everything his ambition has achieved as an illusion, including the feelings that came with the fulfilment of his ambition. For this reason, von Hartmann says that we must strike out of our life's ledger all those feelings of pleasure that are revealed to be illusory. What remains is the sum total of our pleasures in life, and these pleasures are so small when set against the sum of displeasures that life is not enjoyable, and non-existence is preferable to existence.

But while it is immediately apparent that interference from the drive of ambition gives a false picture and produces an inaccurate result in balancing the books of life, we must contest what von Hartmann says about the illusory nature of the objects of pleasure. Striking from the ledger all feelings of pleasure attached to real or supposed illusions would produce an entirely false total. For the ambitious man really did take pleasure in widespread recognition, no matter whether later he himself or someone else realises that it is an illusion. This realisation does not reduce the joy felt at the time one bit. Striking all such 'illusory' feelings from the pleasure column of life does nothing to correct our judgement of these feelings; it merely removes from life feelings that were really present.

And why should these feelings be struck out? Because they are attached to objects that are revealed to be illusions. But this makes the value of life dependent not on the quantity of pleasure, but the quality, and this in turn depends on the value of the things that have caused that pleasure. But if I want to determine the value of life based upon the quantity of pleasure or displeasure it brings me, I cannot insert a precondition for this through which I determine the relative value of pleasure. If I say that I want to compare the quantity of pleasure with the quantity of displeasure and see which is greater, then I must add up all pleasures and displeasures in their true quantities, without taking into account whether any is based on an illusion. Anyone who ascribes a lesser value for life to a pleasure based on illusion than a pleasure that can be justified by reason is making the value of life dependent on factors other than pleasure.

Whoever assesses pleasure to be worth less when it is attached to a vain object, as von Hartmann does, is like a merchant who enters into his books only a quarter of the significant income from a toy factory, because it only produces objects for children's amusement.

If we mean simply to weigh up quantities of pleasure and displeasure against one another, then the illusory character of the objects of certain feelings of pleasure may be left aside entirely.

The path recommended by von Hartmann – rational consideration of these quantities that life produces – has therefore led us to the knowledge of what we must count as pleasure and displeasure, what we should enter in one side of the ledger or the other. But how is the calculation to be made? Is reason in fact the right tool for working out the final balance?

The merchant has made an error in his sums if the profit he *calculates* does not match the provable value of the business he has done, or expects to do. The philosopher, too, will certainly have made an error of judgement if they cannot prove in their actual feelings the surplus of pleasure or displeasure they have worked out.

For the time being, I will not criticise the pessimists who base their calculations on rational consideration of the world; but anyone trying to decide whether to continue the

business of life or not will want proof of where the calculated surplus of displeasure lies.

Here, we touch upon the point where reason is *not* in a position to determine the surplus of pleasure or displeasure on its own; it must instead point out where this surplus lies in life as a percept. For humans cannot access reality through the concept alone; they need the interaction of concept and percept enabled by thought (and feelings are percepts).[44] The merchant will only give up his business if the losses calculated by his bookkeeper are confirmed by the facts. If the facts seem to differ, he will have the bookkeeper redo the calculations. A person in the middle of life will take exactly the same course of action. If the philosopher wants to prove to them that displeasure is far greater than pleasure, but the person does not feel that, they will say: 'You have erred in your cogitations, think the matter over again.' But if at a particular point in time a business really has made such losses that no credit will now suffice to satisfy its creditors, it will enter bankruptcy, if the merchant fails to keep the books so that he has clarity over his affairs. In the same way, if at any time a person's quantity of displeasure becomes so

44 See p93 onwards.

great that no hope of future pleasure (credit) can help them overcome the pain, their life's business will go bankrupt.

The number of suicides is, however, relatively low in comparison to the many people who bravely go on living. Very few people close down the business of their life due to the displeasure present in it. What may we conclude from this? Either that it is incorrect to say that the quantity of displeasure is greater than that of pleasure, or that we do not make the continuation of life dependent on the amount of pleasure or displeasure we feel.

In quite a curious way, von Hartmann's pessimism reaches the conclusion that life is worthless because pain dominates within it – and yet he also believes it necessary to see life through. This necessity lies in the fact that the world's purpose as set out above[45] can be achieved only through unceasing, devoted work by humans. But as long as humans continue to pursue their egotistical pleasures, they are unsuited to such selfless work. Only when experience and reason have convinced them that the pleasures in life they strive for out of egotism cannot be attained, do they devote

45 See p209.

themselves to their real task. And so the pessimistic frame of mind is to be the source of selflessness. An education based on pessimism would stamp out egotism by showing how pointless it is.

According to this view, then, striving for pleasure is rooted in human nature. It is only when fulfilment is seen to be impossible that this striving is diverted towards the higher tasks of humanity.

Looking at the moral worldview that hopes the acceptance of pessimism will lead to a devotion to un-egotistical aims in life, we cannot say that it overcomes egotism in the true sense of the word. It would mean that moral ideals are only strong enough to take possession of the will once a person has realised that self-interested striving for pleasure cannot lead to any satisfaction. The person whose self-interest desires the grapes of pleasure finds them sour because they cannot be reached; that person then turns away from them and steers a selfless course through life. In the pessimist's view, the moral ideals are not strong enough to overcome egotism; they build their kingdom on the land cleared for them by the recognition that self-interest is pointless.

If people strive for pleasure in accordance with their natural disposition, but find it impossible to attain, then destruction of existence and salvation through non-existence is the only rational goal. And if one takes the view that God is the real bearer of the world's pain, humans must make it their duty to bring about God's salvation. An individual's suicide does not further the achievement of this aim; it impedes it. Rationally, God can only have created humanity in order for it to bring about His salvation. Otherwise, creation would have no purpose. Each of us must carry out our particular task in the service of this general salvation. If someone should withdraw their labour through suicide, then the work intended for them must fall to someone else. This second person must suffer the torment of existence in place of the first. And since God, as the real bearer of pain, is within each of us, killing oneself does not lessen the pain of God in the slightest; rather, it gives God the extra difficulty of creating a replacement.

All this presupposes that pleasure is the yardstick for life's value. But life is expressed in a number of drives (needs). If the value of life was dependent on whether it brought more pleasure or displeasure, then a drive that brought a person a surplus of the latter would have no value. Let us

look for a moment at drives and pleasure, to see whether the former can be measured by the latter. Not wishing to arouse the suspicion that life begins only at the level of the 'intellectual aristocracy', we shall begin with a 'purely animal' need: hunger.

Hunger arises when our organs can no longer function without a fresh supply of fuel. The first thing the hungry person strives for is satiety. As soon as food is supplied in a quantity that stills their hunger, everything that the food-drive strives for is achieved. The enjoyment attached to feeling sated consists first in alleviating the pain that hunger causes. But another need arises with the basic food-drive. A person does not eat merely to restore order to the disturbed function of their organs, or to overcome the pain of hunger; they seek to do this with the accompaniment of pleasant sensations of taste. If a person is hungry and an enjoyable meal is half an hour away, they will avoid sating their hunger with inferior food that can be had sooner, and thus spoiling the pleasure of the better meal. We need hunger if we are to take full enjoyment in a meal. Thus hunger also becomes a cause of pleasure. If all the hunger in the world could now be sated, we would have the full measure of enjoyment achieved thanks to the existence of our need for food. To

this, we would then have to add the special enjoyment that gourmets gain by cultivating their palates to a higher level than ordinary people do.

This quantity of enjoyment would have the greatest conceivable value if no need connected with this type of pleasure went unsatisfied, and if, in order to enjoy it, we did not have to accept a certain degree of displeasure.

Modern science takes the view that nature creates more life than it can sustain, ie, it also produces more hunger than it is in a position to satisfy. The surplus of life created is doomed to perish in pain while fighting for its existence. At any given moment in world history, the needs of living things are greater than the means available to satisfy them, and the enjoyment in life is diminished by this fact. But the enjoyment in life that actually exists is not reduced in the slightest. Where a desire is satisfied, the corresponding quantity of enjoyment is present, even if there are in the desiring being itself, or in its fellow beings, a large number of unsatisfied drives alongside it. But what is diminished by this circumstance is the *value* of enjoyment in life. If only some of a living creature's needs are satisfied, it experiences enjoyment commensurate with this. And that enjoyment

has a lesser value the smaller it is in proportion to the total demand of life in the area of these desires. One might represent this value as a fraction, with the numerator being the enjoyment actually experienced, and the denominator the sum total of all needs. The fraction has a value of one when numerator and denominator are the same, ie, when all needs are satisfied. It is greater than one when a living creature experiences more pleasure than it desires; and it is less than one when the quantity of enjoyment is lower than the sum of desires. But while the numerator has even the slightest value, the fraction can never become *zero*. If a person made up the ledger of their life before they died, and imagined the amount of enjoyment related to a specific drive (eg, hunger) distributed across their whole life along with all the demands made by that drive, then the pleasure experienced might have only a very low value, but it could never be valueless. For the same quantity of enjoyment, when someone's needs increase, the value of the pleasure decreases. The same applies to the sum of all life in nature. The greater the number of living things in relation to the number that can fully satisfy their drives, the less the average pleasure-value of life as a whole. The promissory notes for enjoyment that our drives write out are worth less if one cannot hope to cash them in for the full amount. If I have

enough to eat for three days, and then have to go hungry for another three, it does not lessen the enjoyment I feel on the three days of eating. But I must then think of it as distributed over six days, whereby its *value* for my food-drive is reduced by half. The same is true in relation to the magnitude of pleasure in relation to the *degree* of my need. If I am hungry enough for two slices of bread and butter, and can only get one, the enjoyment derived from that one has only half the value it would if I were sated after eating it. This is how the value of pleasure is assessed in life. It is measured against the needs of life. Our desires are the *yardstick;* pleasure is what they measure. The enjoyment of satiety only gains value when hunger is present, and it gains a particular level of value through its relationship to the magnitude of the hunger.

Our life's unfulfilled demands cast their shadow even over those desires that are satisfied, and diminish the *value* of enjoyable hours. But one can also speak of the *present* value of a feeling of pleasure. This value is lower the smaller the pleasure is in proportion to the duration and strength of our desire.

A quantity of pleasure has full value for us when it matches our desire precisely in terms of duration and degree. A quantity of pleasure smaller than our desire lowers its value; a quantity greater creates an unlooked-for surplus, which is only felt as pleasure as long as we are able to increase our desire during our enjoyment of it. If our increasing demand cannot keep pace with the increasing pleasure, that pleasure turns into displeasure. The object that would otherwise satisfy us assails us when we do not want it, and we suffer as a result. This is proof that pleasure only has value for us when we can measure it against desire. An excess of a pleasant feeling turns into pain. We can observe this especially in people whose demand for a certain kind of pleasure is very low. People whose food-drive is dulled quickly become disgusted by food. This too shows us that desire is the yardstick for the value of pleasure.

Now the pessimist may say that the unsatisfied drive for food brings into the world not only displeasure at going without enjoyment, but positive pain, torment and misery. Here, the pessimist can invoke the untold misery of people plagued by worries about getting enough food, and the quantity of displeasure that such people suffer indirectly from the shortage of food. And if this philosopher wants

to extend their claim to the natural world outside humans, they can point to the torment suffered by animals who starve to death at certain times of year for lack of available food. The pessimist would say that these evils far outweigh the quantity of enjoyment created by the food-drive.

There is no doubt, of course, that one can compare *pleasure* with *displeasure* and determine a surplus of one or the other, as we do with financial *profit* and *loss*. But if pessimism believes that finding a surplus in the displeasure column means it can conclude that life is worthless, it is in error, as this calculation never takes place in real life.

In any given case, our desire is directed towards a particular object. The pleasure-value of satisfying that desire will increase, as we have seen, the greater the quantity of pleasure is in relation to the magnitude of our desire.[46] But the magnitude of our desire also determines how much displeasure we are willing to accept in order to achieve pleasure. We do not compare the quantity of displeasure with that of pleasure, but with the magnitude of our

46 Here we will ignore the case in which the immoderate increase of pleasure tips this pleasure over into displeasure.

desires. A person who takes great delight in eating will find it easier to get through a period of hunger for the sake of enjoyment in better times than would a person who takes no joy in satisfying the food-drive. The woman who wants a child does not compare the pleasure of having that child in her keeping with the quantity of displeasure caused by pregnancy, childbirth, childcare etc, but with her desire to have a child in her keeping. We never strive for a particular quantity of pleasure in abstract terms, but for particular satisfaction in a very specific way. If we are striving for a specific object or a specific sensation, we cannot be satisfied by gaining another object or sensation that affords us the same amount of pleasure. When someone is striving for satiety, one cannot substitute that pleasure for one of the same magnitude, but caused by going for a walk. Only if our desire was quite generally for a particular quantity of pleasure would it be dulled if this pleasure could not be attained without experiencing an even larger quantity of displeasure. But since we strive for a particular kind of satisfaction, we can enjoy the pleasure of fulfilment even if we have to accept displeasure that outweighs it along the way. The drives of each living thing move in a specific direction, towards a definite goal, and so we cannot set down the amount of displeasure encountered along that path as

an equal factor in our calculations. If the desire is strong enough to persist to some extent even after overcoming the displeasure – however great that displeasure is in itself – then the pleasure of satisfying the desire can still be enjoyed to the full. The desire does not relate the displeasure to the hoped-for pleasure directly, but indirectly, by comparing its own (relative) magnitude to that of the displeasure. The question is not whether the hoped-for pleasure or the displeasure is greater, but whether the desire for the goal or the resistance of displeasure along the way is greater. If this resistance is greater than the desire, then the latter will yield to the inevitable and weaken, and we will stop striving. We demand that satisfaction be achieved in a particular way, and so the pleasure that it brings gains a significance that allows us, once satisfaction has been achieved, to bring displeasure into the equation only to the extent that it lessened our desire. If I am passionate about beautiful views, my calculation is never to compare the amount of pleasure the view from the mountaintop will bring with the displeasure of climbing up and back down. But I do consider whether, having overcome the difficulties, my desire for the view will still be sufficiently strong. Only by including the magnitude of the desire can the pleasure/displeasure equation yield a result. What we must ask is therefore not whether there is

a surplus of pleasure or displeasure, but whether the will to pleasure is strong enough to overcome the displeasure.

A proof for this claim can be found in the fact that we accord a higher value to pleasure when it has to be bought at a price of great displeasure than when it falls into our laps like a gift from God. If suffering and torment have lessened our desire, but we still reach the goal, then the pleasure *in proportion* to the remaining quantity of desire is all the *greater*. This relationship, as I have shown,[47] represents the *value* of pleasure. Another proof is that living creatures (including humans) pursue their drives as long as they are able to bear the pain and torment that they face in the process. And the fight for survival is just the consequence of this fact. Living things strive to develop, and only give up the fight if their desires are stifled by the force of accumulating difficulties. Every creature goes on seeking sustenance until the lack of food destroys its life. Humans, too, only lay hands upon themselves when they believe (rightly or wrongly) that the aims in life, which they feel are worth striving for, are unattainable. But as long as they believe it possible to achieve

47 See p226.

what they think is worth achieving, they will battle through against all misery and pain.

Philosophy might teach people the opinion that willing something only has meaning when the pleasure is greater than the displeasure, but it is human nature to keep wanting the objects we desire if we can bear the displeasure necessary to reach that goal, however great. But such a philosophy would be in error, because it makes human will dependent on a circumstance (a surplus of pleasure against displeasure) that is originally foreign to humans. The original measure of will is desire, and this asserts itself for as long as it can. If, when buying a particular quantity of apples, I am forced to take twice as many bad ones as good – because the seller wants to clear out his stock – I will not hesitate for a moment to take the bad apples if the value of the smaller quantity of good ones is so high to me that in addition to their purchase price, I am prepared to bear the cost of taking away the bad ones. This example sheds light on the relationship between the quantities of pleasure and displeasure occasioned by a drive. I do not determine the value of the good apples by subtracting their number from that of the bad, but by whether they retain a value despite the presence of the latter.

Just as I disregard the bad apples while I am enjoying the good ones, I give myself over to the satisfaction of a desire after shaking off the necessary tribulations.

Even if pessimism was correct in its claim that there is more displeasure than pleasure in the world, this would have no influence on the will; living creatures would still strive for what pleasure remains. True, the empirical proof that pain outweighs joy would be effective in showing the futility of the philosophical movement that sees the value of life in a surplus of pleasure (eudaemonism), but not for showing the will itself as irrational; the will is not set on a surplus of pleasure, but on what pleasure remains after the displeasure is subtracted. This still seems to be an aim worth striving for.

People have attempted to refute pessimism by claiming that it is impossible to calculate a surplus of pleasure or displeasure in the world. To perform such a calculation, a quantitative comparison of the things to be set against one another would have to be possible. Now, every displeasure and every pleasure has a particular magnitude (strength and duration). We can also compare different types of pleasure with one another, at least approximately. We know whether

we get more enjoyment from a good cigar or a good joke. So there can be no objection to the comparability of various types of pleasure and displeasure by magnitude. And the researcher who takes on the task of determining the surplus of pleasure or displeasure in the world is beginning from entirely sound suppositions. One may claim that the pessimists' results are erroneous, but one may not deny the possibility of a scientific estimation of the quantities of pleasure and displeasure, and thus the calculation of the pleasure balance. But it is incorrect to claim that this result is of any consequence for human will. The cases in which we really base the value of our activity on whether there is a surplus of pleasure or displeasure are those in which we are indifferent to the objects towards which our action is directed. If, after work, I feel like amusing myself by playing a game or indulging in some easy pastime, and am indifferent to exactly what I do to this end, I ask myself what brings me the greatest surplus of pleasure. And I will certainly abandon the activity if the scales begin to tip towards displeasure. If I am choosing a toy for a child, I consider what will bring them the most joy. In all other cases, we do not make decisions based exclusively on the balance of pleasure.

When the pessimist ethicists therefore take the view that by proving there is more displeasure than pleasure in the world, they are preparing the ground for selfless devotion to cultural work, they fail to consider that human will, by its nature, is not influenced by this knowledge. Human striving is orientated towards the degree of satisfaction that might be attained after overcoming all difficulties. The hope of this satisfaction is the reason for human activity. The work of each individual, and cultural progress as a whole, springs from this hope. Pessimistic ethics believes it must present the pursuit of happiness as impossible, so that people will then devote themselves to their real moral tasks. But these moral tasks are nothing other than the concrete natural and intellectual drives, and we will strive to satisfy them despite the displeasure they incur. The pursuit of happiness, which the pessimists seek to eradicate, is therefore nowhere to be found. But the tasks that humans have to carry out, they do carry out, because they *want* to with all their might. Pessimistic ethics claims that a person can only devote themselves to what they recognise as their life's work when they have given up striving for pleasure. But no ethics can conceive of any life's work other than the realisation of satisfactions demanded by human desiring, and the fulfilment of moral ideals. No ethics can take away

the pleasure a person feels at the fulfilment of their desires. When the pessimist tells people not to strive for pleasure, because they can never attain it, we may retort that it is the human way, and the idea that humans strive merely for happiness is something invented by a philosophy that walks the paths of error. People strive to satisfy what their innermost self desires, and the fulfilment of those desires gives them pleasure. What pessimist ethics demands – not to strive for pleasure, but to achieve what you recognise as your life's work – is a description of what humans already naturally *want* to do. People do not need philosophy to persuade them to change their ways; they do not need to throw off their natural instincts in order to be moral. It is moral to strive for an aim, as long as the displeasure that comes with the striving does not kill off the desire. And this is the essence of all real will. Ethics does not rest on eradicating all striving for pleasure, so that anaemic moral ideas can establish their kingdom where they are unopposed by a powerful longing for enjoyment in life; ethics rests on the *strong will* that achieves its aim, even when the path that leads there is a thorny one.

Moral ideals spring from the human moral imagination. Their realisation depends on people desiring them strongly

enough to overcome pain and difficulties. They are the intuitions of *people*, the driving forces that animate their minds; they *will* these ideas because realising them is their greatest pleasure. People do not need ethics to first forbid them from striving for pleasure, and then tell them what they *should* strive for instead. They will strive for moral ideals if their moral imagination is active enough to give them intuitions that lend their will the strength to put them into action.

Anyone who strives for high ideals does so because they are the content of their will, and realising them will bring a pleasure that makes the pleasure lesser people derive from the fulfilment of their everyday drives seem trivial. Idealists *revel* in the transformation of their ideas into reality.

Anyone wanting to eradicate the pleasure a person takes in the satisfaction of their desires will first have to make that person their slave, who will act not because they want to, but because they are told to. For the achievement of what we want gives us pleasure. What we call the *good* in life is not what a person *must* do, but what they *want* to do when they fully express their human nature. Anyone who does not recognise this must first drive out of a person what they

want to do, and then prescribe *from without* what they must make the content of their will.

We attribute value to the fulfilment of a desire because the desire comes from our inner selves. What is achieved has value because it is wanted. If one denies that the aim of human will as such has any value, then one must seek valuable aims in things that humans do not will.

The ethics built on pessimism come from disregarding the moral imagination. Only someone who does not think the individual human mind capable of providing for itself the content of its striving can believe a longing for pleasure to be all that constitutes the will. A person with no imagination creates no moral ideas. The ideas must be given to them. But physical nature ensures that this person strives to satisfy their lower desires. The desires stemming from the mind, however, are important for developing the *whole* person. Only if one believes that people do not have these desires can one claim that they should be received from without. Any ethics that demand humans suppress their will in order to carry out tasks they do not wish to carry out is not envisaging a whole person, but one who lacks the capacity for desires of the mind. For the harmoniously

developed human, however, the 'ideas of the good' are *within* the circle of their will, not *external* to it. Moral action consists in the full development of human nature, not in effacing a person's will. Anyone who believes that moral ideals can only be attained when a person suppresses their will does not know that people want these ideals just as they want to satisfy their 'animalistic' drives.

There can be no denying that the opinions characterised here are easy to misunderstand. Immature boys with no moral imagination like to regard their half-nature as full humanity, and reject all moral ideas they have not originated so that they can 'live to the full' without restriction. It is self-evident that what is true for whole people is not valid for half-developed human nature. Anyone who still needs to be educated before they reach the point at which their moral nature breaks through the eggshell of the lower passions cannot be expected to act in the same way as a mature person. Though, in saying this, it is not my intention to lay out what the undeveloped person must be taught, but what lies in the nature of the mature person.

This mature person gives themselves their own value. They do not want pleasure handed to them by the grace of nature

or by the world's creator; nor do they fulfil a duty that they recognise as such only after they have given up striving for pleasure. They act as they will – ie, they are guided by their ethical intuitions – and see true pleasure in achieving what they have willed. They assess the value of life by measuring what is striven for against what is attained. The ethics that replace 'I want' with 'I should', and inclination with duty, logically assesses a person's value by measuring what duty demands against what they fulfil. It judges a person by a yardstick outside of their own being. The view developed here throws a person back on themselves. It recognises as the true value of life only what the individual regards as such by the measure of their own will. It pays as little heed to any value of life not recognised by the individual as it does to a purpose of life that does not spring from the same. It sees the individual as their own master and their own judge.

The Individual and the Generic

At first glance, the view that a human being is a free individual, complete in themselves, appears to go against the facts that each human is a constituent part of a natural whole (race, tribe, nation, family, male and female sex), and that they operate within a whole (state, church etc). We each have the general characteristics of the community we belong to, and we give our actions a content determined by the position we take up within a majority.

Given this state of affairs, is individuality still possible? Can one see a human being as a self-contained whole when they grow out of one greater whole and integrate themselves into another?

The whole determines the characteristics and functions of each of its members. A tribe is a whole, and all the people

in it have the traits inherent in the nature of the tribe. The make-up of the individual and how they behave depends on the character of the tribe. This means that the individual's physiognomy and actions have a generic quality. When we ask the reason why a person is like this or that, we will be pointed beyond the individual to the genus. This explains why something about that person is as we have observed it to be.

But humans liberate themselves from these generic characteristics. They develop traits and functions of their own, the reason for which we can seek only within that individual. What is generic about them serves them only as a medium through which to express their individuality. They use the characteristics given to them by nature as material to be moulded into a shape that suits them in particular. If we seek the reason for this self-expression in the laws of the genus, our search will be in vain. We are dealing with an individual who can only be explained with reference to themselves. If a person has reached the point of liberation from the generic, and we still try to explain everything about them in relation to the character of the genus, then we have no sense for what is individual.

It is impossible to understand a person completely if one bases one's judgement on a generic concept. Our tendency to judge in this way is most stubborn when it comes to sex. Men almost always see in women, and women in men, too much of the general character of the opposite sex and too little of the individual. In practical life, this does less harm to men than to women. A woman's social position is generally such an unworthy one because it is determined not by the individual peculiarities of a particular woman, but by the general ideas that people have of women's natural functions and needs. A man's occupation in life reflects his individual abilities and inclinations, but a woman's is determined solely by the fact that she is a woman. Women are supposed to be slaves to the generic, the generally feminine. As long as men debate whether women are 'by nature' capable of this job or that, then the 'woman question' cannot get beyond its most elementary stage. Women themselves should be the judge of what is in a woman's nature to want. Anyone who fears that the fabric of our society will be torn apart by treating women as individuals rather than generic people must be told that a social fabric within which half of humanity has an inhumane existence is in dire need of improvement.

Anyone judging people according to their generic character stops just shy of the boundary at which they begin to be beings whose activity is based on free self-determination. What lies inside this boundary can of course be the subject of scientific consideration. The characteristics of race, tribe, nation, and sex are studied by specific branches of science. Only people who live solely as exemplars of a genus could be fully described by such scientific consideration. But none of these sciences can see through to the particular content of the individual. Where the realm of freedom (thinking and acting) begins, the individual ceases to be determined by the laws of the genus. The conceptual content that a person must connect with the percept by thinking in order to gain a full picture of reality[48] cannot be fixed once and for all and passed down to humanity ready-made. The individual must gain their concepts through their own intuition. No generic concept can tell us how we must think as individuals. The individual themselves, and they alone, can do this. Nor can general human characteristics determine an individual's specific aims. If we want to understand an individual, we need to drill down into their essence, and not stop at their typical characteristics. In this sense, every single person is

48 See p93 onwards.

a unique problem. And all science that deals with abstract thought and generic concepts is only the preparation for the knowledge that we gain when a human individual communicates to us their way of seeing the world, and the knowledge we gain from the content of their will. Where we sense that we are dealing with a person who is free of typical ways of thinking and generic willing, we must cease taking any concepts from our own minds to aid us if we want to understand this person's essence. Knowledge consists in connecting the concept with the percept by thinking. For all other objects, the observer must gain these concepts from their own intuition; when seeking to understand a free individual, the task is simply to take into our minds the concepts by which that person understands themselves in pure form (with no admixture). People who immediately mix their own concepts into a judgement about someone else can never understand an individual. Just as the free individual liberates themselves from the traits of the genus, knowledge must liberate itself from the way in which the generic is understood.

A person can be considered a free spirit within a human community only to the extent that they have liberated themselves from the generic, as described here. No one

is completely generic; nor is anyone completely individual. But each of us gradually detaches a larger or smaller sphere of our being from the generics of animal life, and from the commandments of human authority that rule us so despotically.

The part of a person that they cannot liberate becomes a member within the natural and mental organism of the whole. They live in this respect as others have shown or instructed them. Only the actions that spring from their intuition can have ethical value. They add these to the store of moral concepts already available to them. All of humanity's moral actions come originally from these ethical intuitions. One might say that humanity's moral life is the sum total of products from the moral imagination of free human individuals. This is the creed of monism. It cannot look at the history of moral life and see humanity being educated by a transcendent God, only the gradual development of all the concepts and ideas that spring from the moral imagination.

Final Questions: The Consequences of Monism

The unified explanation of nature, or monism, takes all the principles it needs for the explanation of the world from human experience. It also seeks the sources of action within the observed world, namely in our human nature, which can be accessed by self-knowledge, and in particular the moral imagination. It rejects the notion of seeking the ultimate reasons for the world that perception and thought can comprehend *outside* that world itself.

For monism, the unity that thoughtful observation brings to the manifold variety of percepts is exactly what the human need for knowledge demands, and it satisfies this need entirely. Anyone who seeks another unity behind this one is only proving that they do not recognise this fact: what is found by thinking and what the drive for knowledge demands are one and the same.

The single human individual is not in fact separated from the world. They are part of it, and the continuity between ourselves and the whole of the cosmos is broken not by reality, but only by our perception of it. At first, we see this part of the whole as a self-sufficient entity, because we do not see the straps and ropes by which the fundamental forces of the cosmos turn our wheel of life. Anyone who remains at this point of view will see the part of the whole as an entity with a genuinely independent existence, a monad who receives information about the rest of the world from some external source.

Monism has shown that we can only believe in independence until the point at which what we perceive is woven into the net of the conceptual world by thought. Once this happens, all partial existence in the world, all specific existence, is revealed to be a mere *illusion caused by perception*. Only the universe as a whole can be said to have a complete, self-contained existence. Thinking destroys the perceptual illusion and integrates our individual existence into the life of the cosmos. The unity of the conceptual world, which contains objective percepts, also encompasses the content of our subjective personality. Thinking gives us the true character of reality, as a self-contained unity, while the

manifold nature of percepts is only an illusion, a product of how we are organised.[49]

At all time, the aim of human thought is knowledge of real unity, as opposed to the illusion of multiplicity. Science attempts to see a unity in seemingly unconnected percepts by discovering the systematic connections between them. But because it was believed that the connection provided by human thought had only subjective significance, the true reason for the unity was sought in an object beyond our world of experience (God, the will, an absolute spirit etc). And, based upon this opinion, people tried to gain a second kind of knowledge beyond the connections within human experience, and discover a connection between experience and entities that could not be experienced (metaphysics).

The reason we can use systematic thinking to understand how the world is connected was thought to be that a creator had constructed the world according to logical rules, and the reason for our action was likewise thought to be the will of this creator. There was no recognition that thought spans both subjective and objective realms, and that total reality

49 See p176 onwards.

is transmitted when percept and concept are combined. We are only dealing with what is purely subjective when we consider the laws that pervade and determine percepts in the abstract, as concepts. But the content of the concept – which is added to the percept with the help of thought – is not subjective. This content is taken from reality, not from the subject. It is the part of reality that perception alone cannot give us. It is experience, but not experience gained through perception. Anyone who cannot imagine that the concept is something real is thinking only of its abstract form, which appears in the mind. But this separation is a result of how we are organised, just as it is for perception. The tree we perceive has no self-contained, separate existence. It is a cog in the great machine of nature, and can only exist in real connection with nature. An abstract concept in itself has no reality, just as a percept in itself does not. The percept is the part of reality that is given objectively; the concept is given subjectively (through intuition).[50]

Our mental organisation splits reality into these two factors. One factor appears to perception, the other to intuition. It is only uniting the two, and finding the percept's

50 See p102 onwards.

logical place within the universe, that gives us full reality. If we contemplate the mere percept on its own, we do not have reality, but a disconnected chaos. If we contemplate the logic of percepts alone, we are dealing merely in abstract concepts. It is not the abstract concept that contains reality, but thoughtful observation, which contemplates neither the concept nor the percept in isolation, but the connection between the two.

Even the most orthodox idealist will not deny that we live in the real world (that our real existence is rooted there). They will only dispute the claim that we can know this lived reality through ideas. Counter to this view, monism shows that thought is neither subjective nor objective, but a principle that spans both sides of reality. When we think as we observe, we are carrying out a process that itself belongs in the ranks of real events. Thinking within experience allows us to overcome the one-sidedness of mere perception. We cannot work out the essence of reality through abstract, conceptual hypotheses (purely conceptual contemplation), but by finding the ideas for our percepts, we *live* in the real world.

Monism sees reality in concept and percept, and does not look beyond experience for something that cannot be experienced (something outside this world). It does not spin metaphysics out of pure concepts, because it sees in concepts only one half of reality, which is hidden to perception, and only has meaning in connection with percepts. It does, however, produce in people the conviction that they are living in the real world and have no need to seek a higher reality outside it. Monism stops people from seeking the absolute reality anywhere but in experience, because they recognise the content of experience itself as what is real. And it is satisfied with this reality because it knows that thought suggests no other. What dualism seeks behind the observed world, monism finds within it.

Monism shows that our knowledge grasps reality in its true form, not as a subjective image. For monism, the conceptual content of the world is the same for all human individuals.[51] According to monistic principles, one human individual considers another to be the same as them because the same world-content is expressed in both. In the unified conceptual world, there are not as many concepts of 'lion' as there

51 See p95 onwards.

are individuals who think of a lion; there is only one. And the concept that person A adds to the percept of a lion is the same concept that person B adds, merely apprehended by a different subject.[52]

Thought leads all perceiving subjects to the same ideal unity of all multiplicity. A single world of ideas is expressed in a multiplicity of individuals. If a person understands themselves merely through self-perception, they see themselves as this specific person; but as soon as the world of ideas lights up in them, encompassing all that is specific, absolute reality will live within them. Dualism sees the element that permeates all people and lives in them all as a divine creator. Monism finds this shared divine life in reality itself. The ideas of another human subject are the same as mine, and I see them as different only when I perceive, and not when I begin to think. Each person's thought encompasses only a part of the whole world of ideas, and so the actual content of their thought is part of what makes individuals different from one another. But all this content falls within a self-contained whole that comprises the thought-content

52 See p96.

of all people. The thinking person thereby also grasps the shared Absolute that permeates all people.

A life in the real world, filled with the content of thought, is at the same time a life in God. The world is God. The concept of the transcendent rests on a misunderstanding by those who believe that the earthly realm does not contain the foundation of its own existence. They do not understand that thinking can give them the explanation they demand for the percept. No speculation has therefore ever yielded any content that is not borrowed from the reality given to us. The personified God is only a person transferred into a higher realm; Schopenhauer's will is only human will-power made absolute; von Hartmann's Unconscious, composed of will and idea, is only a composite of two things abstracted from experience. Exactly the same can be said of all transcendent principles.

In truth, the human mind never gets beyond the reality in which we live, and nor does it need to: everything it requires to explain this world resides within the world. If philosophers ultimately declare themselves to be satisfied with deriving the world from principles borrowed from experience and transferred into a transcendent realm, then this

satisfaction must also be possible if the same content is left in the earthly realm, from which it originates in any case. The notion of going beyond the world is illusory, and the principles transferred out of the world to another realm do not explain the world any better than the ones that lie within it. But thought that really understands itself does not demand any such excursion, since there is no content of thought that does not find an earthly percept with which it can form something real. The objects of imagination are also just contents that are only justified when they become mental images that relate to some perceptual content. This perceptual content allows them to fit into reality. A concept with content that is believed to lie outside the given world is an abstraction that corresponds to no reality. Thought can only give us the *concepts* of reality; to discover reality itself, we also need perception. For thought that really understands itself, an absolute being for which we *invent* a content is an impossible theory.

Monism does not deny the ideal – in fact, it sees a perceptual content that lacks an ideal counterpart as an incomplete reality – but in the whole realm of thought it finds nothing that does not belong to this world. Monism regards a science that confines itself to describing percepts without

penetrating through to their ideal counterparts as only half a science. But it also regards as half-measures all abstract concepts that have no perceptual counterparts, and therefore no place in the nexus of concepts that encompasses the observable world. It therefore refuses to recognise any ideas that point to objects beyond our experience, and which are intended to form the content of metaphysics. It sees all such ideas that humans have created as abstractions from experience, whose originators have merely overlooked their borrowed status.

Nor, according to monistic principles, can the aims of our actions be given to us by some transcendent force. Insofar as they are the products of thought, they must stem from human intuition. A person does not turn the purposes of an objective (transcendent) absolute being into their own individual purposes; they follow their own aims, given to them by their moral imagination. The idea realised in an action is taken from the unified world of ideas and becomes the basis of a person's will. Their action therefore does not express commandments injected into our world by a transcendent realm, but human intuition, which is part of our world. Monism does not see any force outside ourselves steering the world, giving aims and directing our actions. Humans

find no transcendent origin of existence whose guidance they might discover, in order to derive from this guidance the things they should aim for. We are reliant on ourselves. We ourselves must provide the content of our actions. If we look outside the world in which we live for the causes that guide our will, we will search in vain. If we want to go beyond satisfying the drives that nature gives us, we must look in our own moral imagination – or choose the comfort of being guided by the moral imagination of others.

In other words: we must either abandon all action, or act according to motivations produced by our world of ideas, or those of others. And, if we advance beyond satisfying our sensory drives and carrying out the orders of other humans, we will be determined by nothing but our own selves. We must act upon an impulse we have given ourselves, which is determined by nothing else. True, this impulse is determined in the unified world of ideas, but a person must still select it and turn it into reality. Monism can find the reason that people transform an idea into reality only within a person themselves. If an idea is to become an action, a person must *will* it before it can happen. And the reason for this willing lies solely within the human being. We are the ultimate determiners of our actions. We are *free*.