



Naive Metaphysics
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a theory of subjective and objective worlds

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No personal relationship is so secure that it has not at some time been unexpectedly thrown into question by a word or gesture. The sense of certainty, of which we were perhaps not even conscious, gives way to intimations of something unknown and dangerous; an unexplored region, a depth that has never been plumbed, an order threatened by chaos. Before the threat has time to materialize, the moment passes and certainty returns. And so it is with our relation to the world itself. Unconsciously taken for granted as the backdrop to all our experience and action, the world suddenly becomes visible as a subject towards which one stands in a precarious relation. At such a moment, the very attitude of certainty seems a distortion of reality; the world is and will always remain something absolutely other than I, it is not mine to take for granted. But then, as before, the moment passes and is forgotten.

New Preface (2016)

TWENTY-TWO years have passed since this book first appeared in print. The problems I was grappling with then are still problems for me today. In philosophy, you go through levels of puzzlement. At each level you answer some question only to discover more questions. There is no such thing as complete clarity. There are only lessening degrees of unclarity approaching an ideal point that is never reached.

All I am trying to do is get *less unclear* about the problems that grip me. I fancy that in two decades I have made progress. Writing this book was an important stepping-stone.

What kind of *fact* is it that I am here, now, in a world, when I (seemingly) might not have existed at all? What is it to be a *subject* facing out onto a world which contains other, similar subjects? Why am I here?

Who hasn't asked that question at some time in his or her life? And yet, philosophy appears to be silent on the topic. Whether you look at the history of philosophy, or the different schools of contemporary philosophy, you will find confident reassurances that the question why I exist is not a real question, or that it is a mere symptom of some naive misunderstanding, or, if it has an answer then it is a simple and obvious one; I was born, and so I am here. Next question.

Before you can ask *why* you have to be able to state *what* you are trying to explain. That is all I have set out to do in this book. I will argue that the fact that I am here is not an empirical fact but a metaphysical fact: the fact that there exists *my subjective world*. My subjective world contains all the same objects as the entity we call 'the objective world', or 'the universe' – the same world we are all *in*. And yet it has one extra feature that is not included in the objective world: it is uniquely *mine*.

In stating this as a fact – a metaphysical fact – I may seem to have gone further than it is possible to go using our common language. Am I attempting to say the

unsayable? Anyone who believes that, as a matter of principle, needn't bother reading any further. You have already made up your mind.

On the other hand, if you are not sure, if you would like more clarification of the statement I have just made, then read on...

Part one

*‘What, you wretch, so you want to avoid talking
nonsense?’*

Talk some nonsense, it makes no difference!’

1 Subjective and objective

1. LOGICALLY, the world ought not to exist. – Brute fact is an affront to human reason, which always seeks the sufficient ground for every contingent given. Yet neither can reason be persuaded to accept (pace Spinoza, Leibniz) that it is necessary that our little planet Earth should have come into being. Or that I should be writing this. Or that the Holocaust happened. Fortunately, as finite beings, we are never brought to the point of having to make that impossible choice. The chain from consequences to grounds is (as Kant observed) never-ending. However, a contradiction that will never have to be faced is still a contradiction. Between logical contingency and logical necessity there is no third modality: either our world is or is not the only logically possible world. If it cannot be either, then it cannot be.

Taking our stand, then, in an ultimately illogical universe, we shall not ask why our world exists, or indeed why there is any world. Still, if there is no explaining contingent existence, nor even accounting for its inexplicability, there remains the modest but important task of definition. What is a world? What is it to be the world? or this world? or our world? (Whence the definite description? Whence the indexicals?) What is it, of which we were once prompted, so foolishly, to ask the question, Why? whose existing in the face of all the alternatives – including the awesome possibility of nothing – has led human beings to wonder, to worship, to speculate, even at the certain risk of talking nonsense?

One might call the state of mind which questions the existence of the world naive metaphysics. It is an attitude anyone can fall into or stumble upon, even if one has never heard of a discipline called philosophy – let alone a philosopher called Aristotle. It could be argued that human beings are by nature naive metaphysicians. (Kant thought that the impulse to transcend its proper boundaries was built in to human reason.) We should not

make so strong a claim. Perhaps the impulse indicates merely a serious defect that will one day be eradicated from human consciousness; or, failing that, from the minds of those creatures destined to succeed humankind in the course of evolution. In that case, this book speaks to those who do not wish to be cured (or saved) but who do wish to understand the nature, and consequences, of their affliction.

There is more, however, to naive metaphysics than just a state of mind. Naive metaphysics embodies an implicit theory; a theory which up until now philosophy has, for logically impeccable reasons, either ignored or distorted out of all recognition. In this chapter, we shall identify that theory; the rest of the book is concerned with its defence and application. (In the last chapter, the theory will be extended in response to dilemma put forward in paragraph 1.) For the claim of identification, the author will not cite empirical evidence, but rely upon intuitive generalization from his own case. In saying how things are with oneself, one's aim is always to speak for others. How wide that class of others is meant to be, however, depends upon our view concerning the historical, psychological or even biological roots of the metaphysical attitude.

There is always a risk that, as a trained philosopher, one's intuitions concerning the thoughts or visions of other persons not trained in philosophy may be wide of the mark. However, we intend to make naive metaphysics a partner in the dialectic, to bring it in easy stages to recognize the strange vision to which it is in fact committed. The final, simple test of success or failure is whether the shoe fits; a matter which, ultimately, only the reader can decide. By contrast, the defence of the theory so attributed, rightly or wrongly, is a matter of logical necessity. This might be termed the strictly philosophical component, but the word is only a conventional label. No conclusion of any philosophical interest was ever proved by means of pure logic alone. In

both cases the author is aiming to describe something that he sees, and expects the reader to see also.

2. Consulting one's intuitions, it seems that when naive metaphysics asks the question, Why is there anything? it is asking two questions, not one. The first question is why there is a world; the second question is why there is such a thing as I, or my world. (Throughout this book we shall be reserving the first person singular for the cartesian voice.) Consider the familiar expression of perplexity, Why am I here? One may ask why God chose to make a world, and in particular a world like ours containing someone like me. Yet one may also ask why God chose to make me, and there is a compelling sense that there is something extra in this second question that is not in the first. The question, Why am I here? is not intended as an instance of the schema, Why is....here? If it were not about me then it would not be the kind of question that it is. For it is not as if another person could put the question on my behalf, simply by substituting the third- for the first-person pronoun. In so doing, she would merely be repeating the question why the world contains a person with my particular attributes, a person like me.

As it stands, however, this intuition is shot through with ambiguity. In order to delineate the second question sharply from the first, it seems one would have to consider a number of obscure counterfactual suppositions such as, Could God have chosen to make me Napoleon? or Mother Theresa? Could God have chosen to make a person situated at this place and time, with a history identical to mine, indistinguishable in bodily substance (and soul substance if I have a soul) – who was not me? In asking these questions, we have left naive metaphysics far behind. Nor would it serve any purpose to press the point. Philosophical thinking is a search for consistency, and under pressure from such questioning the inchoate vision that we are seeking with its fundamental inconsistency is just as likely to be destroyed as brought into the open. The picture of the world as one thing, and

of me or my world as something else not included in the world, something extra on top which might or might not have been there leaving the world as such untouched is, as we shall soon discover, sheer paradox. It owes its long survival only to the fact that naive metaphysics is not equipped, or at any rate does not have the energy to examine it.

How then can philosophy hope to describe this curious vision of two worlds without destroying the very thing it seeks to uncover? Logic is hard pressed to speak consistently of what is by its very nature inconsistent. One is reminded of parallels in psychology and physics: the neurosis which disappears in the course of its being brought to light, the particle which moves when we try physically to observe its position. Yet still, neuroses are uncovered, the positions of particles are observed. In each case, the relation between knower and known reveals an internal complexity, a special dynamic which each form of knowledge works through in its own way. The illusion to be got rid of is that this is somehow second best, the thought that ideally what one would like to have before one's mind is the object itself, rather than the mere knowledge of that object. There is an important moral to be learned here. The knowledge we seek as philosophers is whatever waits to be revealed in the course of the dialectic. Whatever emerges, if one succeeds in avoiding the pitfalls, is no more or less that what was there to be known.

3. It seems that no sooner have we encountered the worrying question mark raised against the world as a whole, than there appear one or other of two standpoints from which we can think about our relation to everything that exists, two ways of making the world as such the object of our thought. It is these two standpoints which give rise to two distinct meanings for the question, Why is there anything? Yet neither standpoint is aware of its opposite, nor is there any logical route from one to the

other. For each sees the question, Why is there anything? as having no ambiguity, sees only one question to answer.

Thus it is that on occasion, perhaps during moments of intense perceptual experience, when the self seems to lose itself in a world of sights and sounds, or, by complete contrast, during periods of complete self-absorption, it becomes apparent that the question, Why there is anything? is none other than the question, Why is there anything for me? Why do I exist? The existence of something rather than nothing is simply the existence of a world for me. Take *this* away from the world and there is nothing left. Make *this* and you have made the world. By thinking in such a way, I am adopting the standpoint of my own existence as subject of experience. Whenever I try, in this frame of mind, to imagine or think about anything happening in the world, I find myself representing the events in relation to what is happening to me here and now, or impinging on my senses; even when I picture events on other planets or galaxies, or in the distant past or future.

There are, no doubt, many things which I cannot think about because I lack the requisite concepts, and, moreover, many concepts I shall never have the wit to grasp. Yet my apparent inability, in this mood, to conceive of things happening independently of my I is of a different order. Let my power of thought be extended ever so far, it seems it will always remain tied down to the same egocentric starting point. It follows that the world is in every respect and in total my world; the sun, moon and stars are all mine just as surely as the objects attached to my arms are my hands. Everything that exists, exists for me; and without me there would be nothing. – We shall call this the subjective standpoint.

4. The frame of mind in which one finds oneself thinking about things from the subjective standpoint appears to most of us only as a passing mood; it is not a point of view which we maintain for very long. Indeed, it soon comes into conflict with our most basic beliefs. For

example, if the subjective standpoint were the only point of view from which I thought about my relation to the world, then I could attach no determinate sense to the thought of my own death. The destruction of a body or a brain – or a soul if there are souls – is something that happens within the world. Yet at the moment of my death there is no world for the event to happen in (as the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* observed). Clearly, however, there is no such barrier to my conceiving of the deaths of other persons. Why, then, should I be a special case?

Recognizing that I am just like any other person, and in no way a special case, instantly transports us to the second point of view from which we may grasp our relation to the world as a whole. This second standpoint appears simply that of the world by itself, a world in which I happen to exist but equally well might not have existed. I am merely one amongst the multitude of self-conscious beings who happen to inhabit the world. (In terms of the sheer probability of my having existed, it must be noted, given the state of the world at some arbitrary point in the distant past, it seems that things are, on the contrary, far from equal. Lucky I!)

Now, if I have special characteristics that no-one else has, that is equally true of everyone else. As conscious subjects, we are all the same, for all the uniqueness of each person's physical and mental attributes. Only on the basis of such identity, it seems, could there be such a thing as communication between persons. If the world were only my world, then by seeming to converse with another person, I should in reality be merely altering the state of one of the objects in my world; in effect, I should be talking to myself. For in the world of my subjective standpoint, the sole function of other persons consists in their being there for me, in their playing a part in the story of I. By contrast, from the standpoint of the world itself, what I call the world is simply the one world we are all in, a world which is no more my world than it is my neighbour's. – We shall call this the objective standpoint.

5. The problem with sticking exclusively to the objective standpoint is that it leaves me with no way to express the special, incommunicable meaning that my own existence has for me; the indescribable something I seem to see when I grasp my relation to the world from my subjective standpoint. For once I ascend to the objective standpoint, I have to think of myself as just another person in the world, a subject who exists for other persons to encounter or observe, in just the same way as they exist as subjects for me. The substance, the actuality of all that I experience, all that appears immediately to my consciousness, is translated into a neutral subject matter we can all talk about. The one thing that cannot be talked about, however, is the thing that seems the most important of all: the *this*, which, whether I look into myself or out onto the world, presents itself exclusively to me, but which as soon as I talk about it ceases to be *this* and becomes instead a tickle or a pain, a tree, a house, the sky.

Objectively, what it is to be me is not there being *this*, but simply there being some individual with my unique physical and mental attributes. One of these attributes, let us say, is that I am now perceiving a chair. I, the subject, am seated at my desk in the computer room, having just noticed a broken swivel chair turned over on its side in the corner. In my brain, scattered amongst its intricate workings, there is now taking place the complex information processing, the flickering pattern of physico-chemical reactions, which science tells me constitutes the process of discerning a visible object, such as a chair. Meanwhile, in my consciousness, there occurs a certain experience (therein I differ from my computer) which I describe as my seeing the chair, and which others may attribute to me on the basis of where I am and what I say. Yet the thisness of the chair is nowhere to be found.

6. We have been seeking a way in which each of us can grasp our relation to the world as a whole; and we

have discovered that neither the subjective nor the objective standpoint alone is adequate. Each standpoint misses out something that only the other can supply. Now the first, most natural response to this difficulty is to try to locate the common ground, to work out a compromise between the two standpoints. This might seem easy. If I wish to tell the whole truth about my relation to the world, then why not simply combine together the two standpoints, in the way that a novelist might tell a story, first from the point of view of the main protagonist, and then from the imaginary point of view of an all-seeing observer? Surely, once that is done, there is no further story to tell?

On closer examination, however, this analogy appears fatally flawed. In the novel, the full story is the one which would result if the novelist granted the all-seeing observer access to each character's thoughts and feelings. The objective standpoint from which no-one is picked out for special treatment does indeed give the whole truth. The crucial difference between the novel and the account of my relation to the world is that in my case one of the characters in the story is myself. And we have already seen that the objective standpoint cannot accommodate what appears to me as the special, incommunicable meaning of my existence for myself, the thisness of my experience.

One can anticipate an obvious objection to this argument. In a novel, it is not always made explicit how the all-seeing observer is supposed to have acquired its knowledge of the various characters' thoughts and feelings. One way of acquiring this knowledge, the way we normally use, is simply to talk to the persons concerned and encourage them to confide in us. Indeed, one can imagine it written into the novel that the person telling the story has shared the full confidence of all the protagonists. On the other hand, the novelist is free, without having to offer any further explanation, to place the observer in the position in which we imagine God to be, reading each person's thoughts and feelings directly

by looking into her mind. Now, if in reality there did exist such a deity, who could see not only the objective chair, not only the process in my brain which constituted my seeing the chair, but also my own subjective experience of seeing the chair, then surely nothing would have been left out of account. For then God would see me, not merely with the limited access of an interlocutor, nor even a scientist of the future probing the hidden recesses of my brain, but would directly intuit my conscious experience as I myself experienced it.

In short – so runs the objection – from God’s super-objective standpoint, the view that takes in every side of every existing object, as well as experiencing the world through the eye and senses of every living subject, nothing is left out of the account of my relation to the world. In that case, far from seeking a compromise between the subjective and objective standpoints, we ought instead to reject as superfluous a subjective standpoint which defines itself in opposition to the objective, since it adds nothing to what is given to the standpoint of an all-seeing deity.

This objection is invalid. The reason why it is invalid, however, is highly instructive, for it brings the paradox of the opposition between the subjective and objective standpoints into sharpest possible relief. (It is of course no defence against the objection to insist that the existence of a God first be proved; we are considering a hypothetical deity, to whom we may attribute any cognitive powers that are not logically self-contradictory.) The problem is, to put it succinctly, that God knows too much. Just because he knows everything, there is one thing that God cannot know. While God knows what it is like to be me, just as he knows what it is like to be each one of his creatures, he still does not share in the awareness I have of simply being me. Obviously, he cannot have the sense of being me, since he is not me. The indescribable thisness of my experience, that which marks it as being essentially mine, remains invisible to God; for as far as he is concerned, every person’s

experience is equally 'this'. (In a similar way, we shall argue in a later chapter, for a God who knows all times, past, present and future, there is no such time as now.)

7. We are left, therefore, exactly where we started. The subjective and objective standpoints each present a different account of my relation to the world as a whole. These accounts stand opposed: from the subjective standpoint, I find myself unable to conceive of the possibility of my own death; yet from the objective standpoint, where my death becomes just another event that occurs, I cannot find myself at all. Our natural reaction, when we first encounter this opposition, is to seek a compromise between the two standpoints, a middle ground that somehow encompasses both. Only that cannot be done. Any attempt to compromise with the objective standpoint or incorporate the subjective standpoint into a wider view renders the subjective standpoint invisible. My subjective standpoint stubbornly refuses any kind of absorption into the objective.

In describing the opposition between the subjective and objective standpoints, we have not yet explicitly spelt out the fundamental inconsistency, the paradox implicit in the vision of naive metaphysics; but we are very close to it. Each standpoint has proved defective: by itself it appears incapable of comprehending the whole truth about my relation to the world. It is a fact that I am going to die; but my subjective standpoint cannot see it. Equally, it is a fact that I exist; but the objective standpoint cannot see that. In effect, each cannot see the other, for each denies the very existence of the point of view, the logical space, which the other claims to occupy. From my subjective standpoint, the objective standpoint is inconceivable. From the objective standpoint, there is nothing to which the words 'my unique subjective standpoint' could possibly refer. The contradiction arises because neither will own up to this logical blindness as any kind of defect. Neither standpoint can be eliminated;

each appears absolutely necessary. Yet each proclaims that the other is impossible.

In our everyday lives, we pass back and forth between the subjective and objective standpoints without ever thinking what we are doing. All language and communication presupposes the objective standpoint; the objective account of our relation to the world may never once come up for discussion, but it lies permanently in the background, as the logical condition for the very possibility of language. Similarly, the sense that each of us has of being an existing self-conscious individual presupposes the subjective standpoint as its logical condition; even if we never once explicitly think about it as such. We are not aware of any contradiction between the two standpoints because for practical purposes the endless to and fro works perfectly well. Even when we stand back and allow ourselves to indulge in naive speculation about the existence of the world or of our own selves, there is no sense of any strain or inconsistency.

Sooner or later, however, there comes an unnerving experience which calls this easy-going compromise into question. In trying to comprehend the mystery of love, when subjectivity contemplates, in serenity or despair, the enigmatic countenance of the other; or human suffering, where the distance between self and other seems unsurpassable; or the inevitability of our death, we find intimations of a duality impenetrable and absolute. We begin to realize, however obscurely, that no stable compromise between the subjective and objective standpoints could ever be achieved. Each of us stands alone at the centre of our own unique world; we all share one and the same world. Both propositions are true, and at the very same time both propositions are also false. To comprehend that contradiction is the fundamental task of metaphysics.

2 Egocentrism and nonegocentrism

1. TO say that the discipline of metaphysics takes as its primary point of reference the existence of naive metaphysics at first sounds like a repetition of Plato's remark in *Theaetetus* 155D (echoed by Aristotle in Book I, chapter 2 of the *Metaphysics*) that philosophy begins with wonder. The activity of producing philosophical theories can only arise amongst those who have, for whatever material or spiritual reasons, become sensitive to the force of those questions and perplexities to which theory-making is the appropriate response. It is not enough that the problems are there in some abstract sense, nor even that they have been given a name; one must first feel the real need to solve them. That is all true. As we have seen, however, naive metaphysics, the attitude of wondering about the very existence of the world, does not lead anywhere. It is stuck with a question it does not know what to do with. Metaphysics proper begins only when we question the wonder and reveal the contradiction implicit in its vision of what it takes to make a world.

It turns out – and this could not have been predicted, for it is no part of the notion of a theory as such – that the problems of metaphysics ultimately refer to our actual existence as human beings, to the perennial concerns of human life. For it is here that the unstable equilibrium between the subjective and objective standpoints breaks down. The sense of the wholeness of our life, the unthinking trust with which we gave ourselves to the world and to our projects, which naive metaphysics hardly disturbs, is shattered by the discovery of the contradiction between the subjective and the objective; as when we contemplate the unbridgeable gulf that separates us from others, or from their joy or suffering, or when we face the unimaginable prospect of our own death. For most persons most of the time, the one effective recourse in the face of the contradiction is to forget the doubts and carry on as before. Yet we can no

longer be satisfied with such a course of action. For we have lost our innocence. Having become aware of the problem, one cannot just wipe the slate clean and start again. If the sense of wholeness is ever to be regained, it can only be by an extended process of abstract thought; in other words, by the construction of a metaphysic.

2. In the light of what has just been said, one will hardly expect the philosopher to recite a few spells, wave a magic wand and so make the contradiction between the subjective and objective disappear. In the first chapter, we argued that the contradiction is not apparent but real. However, this was meant in a different sense from that in which one statement is said to contradict another statement. For example, the statement that I am now sitting at my desk in the computer room contradicts the statement that I am now taking a walk in the park. It is conceivable that I could come to hold both beliefs (under the influence of drugs, or through extreme fatigue). No doubt that would pose a serious problem for me, but it would not be a philosophical one. If it is true that I am in the computer room, then it is false that I am in the park; and, conversely, if it is true that I am in the park then it is false that I am in the computer room.

In the absence of any convincing reasons for giving up one or other metaphysical view we cannot, however, ignoring their *prima facie* claims, decree on any arbitrary basis of preference one of the two standpoints to be the true way of conceiving of our relation to the world and abandon the other as false. Admittedly, even in philosophy, it happens that one may simply decide to close one's eyes, or one's heart, to one of the sides in a conflict. One can choose not to listen to the arguments. Yet seeking truth about reality can never be the same as throwing in one's lot for a cause.

Nor indeed is there any hope of avoiding conflict by re-describing the two standpoints, so that each may be seen as valid in a different respect, in the way one might say, metaphorically, that it was both true and false that I

was in the computer room if I had stopped work and was day-dreaming about where I ought to be on a lovely spring morning such as this; or, more literally, that it was both true and false that I was in the computer room if I was standing in the doorway. Nor again, as we saw in the last chapter, can one say that the subjective and objective standpoints each describe a different aspect of one and the same reality, like the different viewpoints of the protagonist and narrator in a novel. Restoring the sense of wholeness to our life, by constructing an account of our relation to the world which does not fragment into two irreconcilable halves, is not simply a matter of finding the right words or inventing an instant glue to cement the subjective and objective standpoints together. Results in metaphysics are not won so easily.

3. Still, before setting out on such a long journey it would seem only prudent to satisfy ourselves that there are no short cuts to be found. Why go to all the effort of trying to save the vision of naive metaphysics if it is in fact beyond redemption? Logic dictates that there are just three short cuts to consider. The first is the egocentric theory, which takes its stand on the exclusive reality of the subjective standpoint: there is only one world, and that world is mine. Clearly, if one could get the objective standpoint out of the way, then the contradiction between the two standpoints would no longer be a problem. The same is true of the second short cut, the nonegocentric theory, which, as its name suggests, takes the opposite position, rejecting my sense of the uniqueness of my existence, the exclusive thisness of my experience as merely a symptom of philosophic illusion. There is nothing in the world or my relation to the world, says the nonegocentrist, that cannot be fully accounted for from the objective standpoint. The third short cut is quicker than either of the other two. This is the anti-metaphysical view which simply refuses to see any real problem at all. According to this view, our mistake lies in thinking that there is anything to hold a metaphysical position about.

For the conflict we seem to perceive between the subjective and objective standpoints, or between egocentrism and nonegocentrism, is only the result of philosophic confusion.

In actual fact, the idea that we have to clear these dissenting claims out of the way before we can get on with the real work would show a complete misunderstanding of the task ahead. For it is not as if we should get to our destination more speedily if we ignored all suspect short cuts and refused to look to the right or the left. Overcoming these other views is part of the problem, part of what is involved in dealing with the contradiction between the subjective and objective standpoints. Both egocentrism and nonegocentrism will crop up again and again as we pursue the problem of the subjective and objective through a range of philosophical issues. As for the anti-metaphysical view, the possibility that we may be deluding ourselves is a challenge which we face constantly. There is no general criterion we can apply that would tell us when we have gone too far and strayed over the borderline between sense and nonsense. The only answer will come from attending closely to the matter in hand, to what we can see of the problem before us, and not losing our way amongst thickets of words. No proof in metaphysics works by magic; nor is there a magical test for deciding when a proof does work.

It should be clear by now that no sharp distinction can be drawn between the positive, constructive work of producing a theory that is able to reconcile the contradiction between the subjective and objective standpoints, and the negative, destructive work of rejecting the mistaken or illusory beliefs of the egocentrist, the nonegocentrist or the anti-metaphysician. For the project of restoring the sense of wholeness to our life necessarily involves fighting against such mistaken philosophical views as preach that we should give up the struggle; either because the theoretical standpoint of a metaphysical construct can never be fully applied to our actual existence but must remain an object of pure

contemplation, like the perfect lines and circles of geometry which are never to be found in the real world; or because those questions which seem to call up a conflict between standpoints, and make us search for an adequate theory, do so only because our thinking is muddled.

4. To make the discussion a little less abstract, we shall be taking a preliminary forage into some of the philosophical issues involved in investigating the subjective and objective standpoints. First, however, we need to deal with a point of elementary logic which seems to go against the assertion that the contradiction between the two standpoints is, in the problematic sense indicated, not apparent but real.

The point is this. According to formal logic, the discipline that investigates the relations of logical implication between statements in general regardless of subject matter, it is a law that contradictions cannot be true. If one of a pair of contradictory statements is true, then the other must be false. In ordinary life, of course, there are many cases which have the surface appearance of contradiction, where each of the apparently contradictory statements is in a sense true. We gave examples above involving vagueness and metaphor. That is not the case here. The subjective and objective standpoints are absolute contradictories: either way of comprehending one's relation to the world totally precludes the other.

A simple-minded response might be to say that our apparent insight into the dual nature of reality is the one unique exception to the logical rule, the one contradiction that escapes the law of non-contradiction. The universality of the law of non-contradiction is, after all, just one more belief, which stands to be corrected in the light of new knowledge, just as intuitionist mathematicians question the law of excluded middle or quantum theorists deny that the connective 'and' always distributes over 'or'. Unfortunately, we cannot escape so

easily. For another, equally correct way of expressing the law of non-contradiction is to say that if a contradiction is put down as strictly true, and not merely in a sense true, then anything is true. If one has been led so far as to attempt the impossible action of simultaneously asserting and denying the very same statement in the very same sense – and not merely asserting it in one sense and denying it in another – then any statement may be validly asserted; for example, ‘I have three heads.’ (Once you allow one impossible thing, then every other impossible thing becomes possible.) Thus, if by saying that the contradiction between the subjective and objective standpoints was real one meant that both standpoints are true and yet still contradict one another, then one would have to admit that one did indeed have three heads; something most persons would be inclined to doubt. Philosophers have believed many nonsensical things; on occasion it can take as elementary a point as this to make the nonsense manifest.

The argument can be blocked by pointing to a crucial difference in logical status between the subjective and objective standpoints. All communication presupposes the objective standpoint, the point of view from which I appear as merely one subject amongst other subjects. The only way words can be used to say anything is, after all, by having the same meanings for different people. It is admittedly sometimes very difficult to know what another person means by a certain word, sometimes we may doubt whether we are really communicating at all; but that doubt or difficulty arises against a background of agreement which we should never think of questioning. The subjective standpoint is something else entirely. For it relates to something given to me alone: the inexpressible *this* which uniquely characterizes my experience as mine. If I try to say anything else about *this* then I find I am using words that another person can be in as good a position to understand as I. For example, if *this* is my experience of looking at the sky, then *this* is blue. If *this* is the sensation of the sun on my face, then

this is warm. Were I, on the other hand, to try to invent words for describing *this* as I and no-one else can grasp it, words with a private meaning that only I could understand, then, by an argument we owe to the later Wittgenstein, I myself would not know what I meant by them. (In chapter 4, an argument not unrelated to Wittgenstein's critique of private rule-following will be used to refute the egocentrist.)

Now, there is no harm in talking of the truth of the subjective standpoint, as we did at the end of chapter 1, provided that one realizes that the word 'true' is being used in an extended sense. For as far as logic is concerned, the notion of truth applies strictly to the objective domain, to propositions that can be expressed in communicable statements. Indicating my inexpressible *this*, on the other hand, or attempting to refer to my unique subjective world is not meaningful in terms of our public language; for what I intend has a significance only for myself. The statement, 'There is *this*,' is thus strictly neither true nor false. Nevertheless, we shall argue, it indicates something real. The contradiction between the subjective and objective standpoints does not, therefore, hold between conflicting truths but rather between conflicting realities. The contradiction is, in short, metaphysical, not logical.

5. To orient ourselves for the task ahead, we shall take a preliminary look at four issues arising from the dialectic of subjective and objective standpoints. The metaphysical contradiction hits us hardest, we have suggested, just when one is brought to realize the absolute separation of our subjectivity from the subjectivity of others. (One says 'our' but one means 'my': the distance I measure between two others can never be compared with the metaphysical divide that appears to separate myself from others.) It is, for example, a distorted awareness of this problem that has led some thinkers to the pessimistic conclusion that the only mind whose reality I can be assured of, or whose contents I can

ever really know anything about is my own. Whatever there may or may not be for others, it seems, is locked away so deep inside that anything I say about it is pure conjecture. The distortion, as we shall discover, lies in failing to appreciate that the separation between self and other amounts to an absolute difference between the two real terms.

From a wider perspective, however, the problem of self and other not only illustrates the equivocal nature of the relation between myself and the world, in the way one runs back and forth between the subjective and objective standpoints without ever finding a resting point; it also provides a compelling metaphor for the attempt to regain the sense of the wholeness of our life. Even though there can be no return to the state of philosophic innocence, we may still hope to overcome the loss of the unthinking trust with which we originally gave ourself to the world of others, despite recognition of a distance which can never be overcome.

6. An issue closely connected with the problem of self and other is freedom of the will. According to a well-known dilemma, it appears that no human action can really be called free when viewed from the objective standpoint. Objectively, the body of a human agent is just a complex system of movements, of chemical and electrical changes which take place according to physical laws. Science tells us that what we call our mental states, such as thoughts, intentions and feelings, all ultimately depend on these movements and changes. This might be taken to mean that, given the total physical state of a person's body at any one time, its states resulting from subsequent variations in its external conditions are in every case fully determined. If that is so, then my sense that in performing an action I could have chosen to do otherwise is sheer illusion. For in choosing that action, I was merely following the laws which govern my bodily movements and changes, from which I have no freedom to depart. If, on the other hand, my bodily movements are not fully

determined by prior conditions, then my sense of my decision's being up to me or to my will at the moment of choosing is illusory for a different reason; whatever freedom I have is only the freedom of randomness or indifference. Those who seek freedom of the will in the rejection of determinism can still only give us less than we feel we have a right to ask for.

Either way, then, if I wish to hold on to my sense of freedom – the feeling that changes in the world genuinely come from myself, from my will or my I – it seems the only remaining alternative is to refuse to view myself and my actions purely objectively. There is, in me, or in my actions, something more than could ever be comprehended from the objective standpoint. That something more is what is inexpressibly given to my subjective standpoint. Yet a parallel argument will not work when I contemplate the actions of others. I may readily admit that they must take the same attitude to their actions as I take to mine; like me, they must refuse to view their actions purely objectively. However, that does not prevent me from viewing their actions from the objective standpoint, or from interpreting their refusal as just another objective event in the world. It would seem to follow that I am alone in the universe in being the only person who is really free: an intolerable result.

7. The third problem we shall anticipate concerns the nature of time. Just as my incommunicable sense of the uniqueness of my existence might be called my sense of the I-ness of I, so our awareness that the present moment, amongst all possible times, past, present and future is this time and no other, might be called our sense of the nowness of now. We are all immediately aware that this time is uniquely special, even though nothing special may be happening now, simply because it is now. If one wanted an example of something absolutely real, it seems one could do no better than pick the nowness of now.

However, from the point of view of language, that is to say from the objective standpoint, the only reality is

the relative order of events. One of these events is the event of the author writing, a few moments ago, 'this time is uniquely special.' That event can be completely accounted for in relation to other events which occur before and after. It will be the same event tomorrow, and the same the day after that, whether I remember it correctly or not; everything that makes the event the event that it is goes with it into the past. Moreover, it was the same event yesterday, and the day before, waiting for its turn to happen. Yet the actual happening of an event, its reality in being now, is not in the past or the future; it is not part of the description of what that event was or will be. Its reality or nowness is something over and above its place in the objective order of events; a feature which remains completely invisible from the objective standpoint.

Another way of putting that point is to say that the statement, 'now is now' is no more able to communicate a meaningful truth than the statement, 'I am I.' Both are meaningless repetitions. I can see or grasp the reality of now and the reality of I, but I cannot say it. One important difference, however, between 'now is now' and 'I am I' is that the same now is uniquely real for all of us, whereas I am uniquely real only for myself. So one cannot say that now has a purely subjective reality, for if it did each of us would be living in a different now. What, therefore, can now be if it is neither purely objective nor purely subjective?

8. The last problem we shall mention relates to the question, Why is there anything? One of the ways in which naive metaphysics seeks satisfaction is in the religious attitude. There are those for whom the sense of awe at the existence of a world or one's own self renders human efforts to puzzle out the nature of existence futile. Others are happy to combine a religious attitude with an interest in metaphysics. Yet there are also persons who fall into neither category, for whom religion, specifically

theism, assumes the garb of a primitive metaphysical theory.

Now there are two lines of inquiry which follow from our recognition of the reality of the contradiction between the subjective and objective standpoints. The first is this. We described earlier the theory of nonegocentrism, which believes in the exclusive reality of the objective standpoint, and also egocentrism, which holds to the exclusive reality of the subjective standpoint. When either theory considers the problem of the existence of the world, it has just one question to answer: the nonegocentrist asks why there is an objective world, while the egocentrist asks why there is my subjective world. However, if both the objective and subjective standpoints are real, then we have two questions to answer, not one. If God is the creator in the literal sense, an omnipotent power that forged the world out of nothing, then he had to create both the objective world and my subjective world; or, to put the matter another way, having created the world we all know, and in so doing made a human being with all my attributes, he still had the extra job of creating me, the individual for whom there is *this*.

The difficulty is that, as we argued in chapter 1, as far as the God of the 'super-objective' standpoint is concerned my subjective experience is just another of the objective features of the world, albeit one which he knows as well, or perhaps even better than I. Just because God sees every person's experience as a 'this', he will never appreciate what there is for me, namely *this*. There might not have been *this* and he, it seems, would be none the wiser. It follows that, given the reality of both the subjective and objective standpoints, saying that God created the world still leaves open the question who created me. For there appears to be nothing a deity can add to any of the human beings he has created to make that person I, rather than someone merely like me in every objective respect. If the deity cannot even appreciate the difference between making that person

and making I, then the most one can say is that the existence of my subjective standpoint must have come about, in some manner yet to be fathomed, as an accidental by-product of the creation of an objective world. That is the same as saying that I am no part of God's design. God is not my creator. The only solution would seem to be to postulate a god of my subjective standpoint; but that commits me to believing in two gods, not one, neither of whom could have created the other.

9. For the second line of inquiry, we begin by noting a surprising parallel between the fact that the world exists or is actual, and the two inexpressible realities which we called the I-ness of I and the nowness of now. What remains invisible from the objective standpoint is that, amongst all I's there is the unique I, that amongst all nows there is the unique now. Similarly, one may question what it means to say that amongst all possible worlds, there is one unique actual world. What does the actuality of the actual world consist in? The only answer forthcoming – and it is really no answer at all – is that there being a unique world which is actual, amongst all the possible worlds which might have been actual, is the one fact which defines the objective standpoint, just as the fact that a certain person is I defines the subjective standpoint. However, that raises the question whether there might be a third standpoint, which has the same contradictory relation to the objective standpoint as the objective standpoint has to the subjective.

Let us call this third standpoint the ultimate standpoint. From the ultimate standpoint, one might suppose, all worlds are not only equally possible but also equally real. None carries any special mark to distinguish it as being actual as opposed to being merely possible: every world is a possible actual world. If we now ask what it means to say that God created the world, we have first to decide whether God's standpoint is the ultimate standpoint from which all possible worlds appear on the same level, or only the objective standpoint. If we picture

God as choosing to create this world out of a pre-existing catalogue of possible worlds, then we are picturing him as occupying the ultimate standpoint. There is nowhere else for God to be, prior to that fateful choice being made. Now there arises the same question about what could be added to any of the merely possible worlds to make it the actual world, as arose when we asked what could be added to any of the persons in the objective world to make that person I. The God of the ultimate standpoint might prefer one particular world to any of the others, might even take a special interest in what goes on there, in the way one returns time and again to one's favourite novel; but that favoured world is no more actual than is the story in the novel.

The only alternative, then, is to say that God's standpoint is not the ultimate standpoint but only the objective standpoint. It follows that God could not have chosen to create this world out of a catalogue of all possible worlds; that is to say, the fact that this world was to be the actual world, that all other worlds were to be consigned to the realm of the merely possible was settled in advance by God's occupation of the objective standpoint of our actual world. If a physical event of creation did take place (say, the appearance of matter or energy where previously there was nothing) that too was settled in advance. If, on this view of the deity, we use the proper name 'God' for the one ultimately responsible for everything that happens in our world, or indeed for there being a world at all, then we must at the same time acknowledge that the selection of our deity out of all the possible deities there might have been – the god who, according to his essential nature decreed that the physical world as we find it should have come into being – is no less inexplicable than the selection of this world to be the actual, objective world.

Either way, then, As a metaphysical theory or hypothesis designed to account for existence or the fact of there being our world, the notion of a selection or choice made by a deity explains nothing. The question this

throws into sharp relief is whether logically there could be anything that fulfilled the role of a theory of existence; and, if not, what we are to make of that.

10. By now, the reader should have some idea of just what is at stake in pursuing the dialectic of the subjective and objective standpoints. Nothing has been resolved, nor could it be, other than in its proper place. However, it should at least be clear how within its own arena metaphysics brooks no competitors; nor is there any aspect of our thought about the nature of existence or our relation to the world as such which lies outside that domain. Other approaches must stake their claims. What they cannot claim is to be dealing with the same problems, or aiming for the same objective – only, as it were, by a different route. If that route is not pure thinking, then the objective cannot be the same. (That is perhaps not so much a reflection of any pre-eminent status accorded to activity of metaphysical inquiry, as of the sublimity of its ultimate goal.)

If, therefore, these last few questions have left the reader reeling, one need make no apology. By one means or another we intend to stir naive metaphysics from its slumbers. Nor is there any way of entering into the spirit of metaphysical inquiry other than by allowing oneself to be overwhelmed by the sheer impossibility of its questions, and by the reckless audacity with which it throws itself into the task of answering them. Before we rush headlong, however, a degree of moderating caution might be advisable. Like Prometheus, we are setting out to steal fire from the gods, and the same warnings apply to us as we with the benefit of hindsight might have given that Greek hero. First, we had better take pains to establish our right to the treasure we mean to plunder. Proving that claim will occupy the remainder of Part One.

3 Refining egocentrism

1. HAVING done with preliminaries it is time to make a start. – That statement has an air of paradox about it. Our journey is well underway. We have entered the territory of subjective and objective standpoints, and are learning more about our strange new world with every step. What more are we required to do? If philosophy were simply a matter of describing a vision – take it or leave it – the answer would be, nothing. Yet, clearly, something more is required. In a work of philosophy one argues, one aims to persuade. That remains true even though, as we remarked near the beginning of chapter 1, logical argument presupposes the capacity to share a vision. Nor is the goal of persuasion a matter of mere convention. Between what one would like to believe and what is true lies a path that cannot be traversed by a mere effort of will, nor even good will. Vision may guide our steps; but logic supplies the motive power for getting there.

That is the problem. The question of starting point has appeared, to many who might otherwise be sympathetic to our project, the one insuperable obstacle to constructing a metaphysic. Suppose that after an initial survey of the terrain, we locate what looks like a good place to begin. Who is to say that in making that initial move we are not already falling into error? It is no use reassuring ourselves with the thought that if every step had to be justified, including the first, one would never get anywhere. Perhaps there is nowhere to go. So says the sceptic: The need to make a choice at the very start negates any results achieved, for each alternative choice leads to a different theory. Whatever you end up with is simply the outcome of your initial move, and carries with it no less a taint of contingency even if it does not carry any more.

Our response is to proceed dialectically. The remarkable thing about this method is that it allows one to do metaphysics apparently without making any assumptions at all, simply by examining other theories and revealing their inconsistencies, thereby refuting them. That is, of course, an over-simplification. What we

carry with us, as we follow the argument on the rebound, first from one view and then another, is not nothing but rather a sense of judgement – of what is logical or illogical, what coheres or does not cohere – that cannot be further articulated. It is a knowing or grasping that we cannot stand back from and make into a theory or an axiom because it is none other than our own selves, the way we see things.

Given that the number of incoherent theories is potentially infinite, however, we still need some principle for sorting the raw material to work on before we can even attempt to get going. A process of elimination, attacking every possible theory and seeing if that led anywhere, could never be completed, for it would take an infinite length of time. Yet now, it seems, we have not been wasting our time with mere preliminaries after all. For what better raw material could one choose than the very attitude of naive metaphysical speculation? It is time to put the pressure on.

2. Forced to confront the contradiction between the subjective and objective standpoints, the naive metaphysician, not surprisingly, sees only a straightforward choice between two theories, the egocentric and the nonegocentric. Some persons will opt for one theory, some for the other. However the numbers work out (and a statistical survey surely has no place in a work of philosophy), it is, or ought to be, a matter of complete indifference which theory we attack first. Since egocentrism has more of the look of a metaphysical theory, however, if for no other reason, it would be better for heuristic purposes to start with that.

Let us suppose, then, that one is drawn towards the egocentric view. I tell myself, 'I exist.' Perhaps for the first time in my life, I am aware that those words mean something. What am I to make of my existence? How am I placed in relation to the world? It seems that the objective standpoint, in its insistence that my being here means just one more human individual added to the world, will not allow such questions to be raised, or, rather, I would get just as good an answer if I asked what I am to make of my neighbour John Smith's existence, or how John Smith is placed in relation to the world. That is

surely a hard thing to accept. The world can take or leave John Smith; I cannot entertain the thought that it can just as easily take or leave me. Thus, following what appears the line of least resistance, the naive metaphysician chooses to repudiate the world of the objective standpoint. – Whatever I have to lose, it cannot be as bad as losing my own dear self.

What is it to believe in the egocentric theory? As an egocentrist, one is fully aware that each individual is capable of thinking of herself both from the subjective standpoint, as the axis around which the world of one's knowledge and experience revolves, and equally from the objective standpoint, as just one individual amongst a multitude who share a common world. Regarded as anything more than a useful picture, however, the objective standpoint distorts into philosophic illusion. I am lulled by my experience of living a normal social life into thinking that other persons stand in the same relation to the world as I do, and in my everyday dealings with others I collude happily with this deceptive appearance; but in reality I know that each person I meet is only a character in the story of my world.

3. Now to ordinary persons not corrupted by philosophy, this theory sounds outrageous, and also deeply offensive. To those unfortunates who show by their behaviour that they believe that the world does belong to them we give the name psychopath, and lock them up in asylums for the criminally insane. What precisely is the difference between a philosophical egocentrism and that psychopathic state? Evidently, there must be one, for by hypothesis the philosophical egocentrist continues to live as we all do, showing just as much care and consideration for others as any normal person. This is in itself a remarkable fact which requires some explanation.

The easy answer would be to say that a metaphysical conviction such as egocentrism is not a genuine case of belief. Then what is it? It is not a pretended belief, something one avers but does not truly believe, for that is only another name for a lie; what we mean by 'telling the truth' is just saying what one believes. Nor is the egocentrist's theory something one merely pretends or imagines to oneself; for then anyone who imagined what

it would be like to be an egocentrist would automatically become one. It is certainly not merely an inexplicable preference for a non-standard use of words. The egocentrist who says, 'Only my feelings are real feelings,' but continues to show due consideration for the feelings of others, does not intend merely to use the term 'real feelings' to mean the same as 'my feelings'; that would reduce the content of egocentrism to a mere tautology.

This last point was indeed noted by Wittgenstein in a remark in the *Philosophical Investigations* (I/402-3). Finding that he was unable to explain the meanings of the contesting metaphysical claims in terms of the concept of belief, Wittgenstein concluded that the dispute between 'Idealists, Solipsists and Realists' could not have any substance to it, appearances to the contrary, and so dismissed it as nothing more than the result of grammatical confusion. This summary judgement indicates, in the judgement of the present author, the extent of Wittgenstein's continuing implacable hostility both to the idea and the practice of metaphysics – towards the very notion that one should possess the means to describe a metaphysical vision, as opposed to merely giving verbal expression to one's illusions – all this despite the profound metaphysical implications of both his early and late work.

Yet if Wittgenstein's judgement is too swift, what would be the alternative response? The question one ought to ask is, Why should the lack of practical consequences automatically entail that the egocentrist's vision lacks content? Surely, that begs the question by insisting on viewing the egocentrist from the objective standpoint – in looking for signs of the vision in the egocentrist's behaviour – and so assuming from the start that egocentrism is invalid. The correct conclusion to draw is rather that we have been looking in the wrong place. We have to enter, if we can, the egocentrist's mind and see just what it is that the egocentrist sees. (Later on in the book, when we investigate the logical basis of morality, we shall discover a different sense in which the refutation of egocentrism – the proof of the reality of the objective standpoint – does indeed carry 'practical consequences'.)

4. We shall begin by recalling a paradigm experience which, following the example of Descartes, many philosophers have called upon, an experience that first casts doubt upon the status of a world independent of my I. In itself, the experience does not indicate any particular metaphysical theory, but at most delimits a range of alternatives. We are interested, however, in one particular way of taking that original experience; as it were, a vision of the vision. We shall then follow the dialectic of the successive refinements of the vision as philosophy struggles, with greater or lesser success, to find words adequate to express what it seems to see.

The experience might take some such form as this. I am gazing intently at some object; let us say, a shiny red apple, illuminated by the golden glow of a table lamp. The colour fills my eyes, they are engorged with it. Then something strange happens. From one moment to the next, it seems as if the redness and the yellowness are no longer in the apple or in the lamp but in me. Only it is not just the colour. As I continue to look, the very objects themselves seem to dissolve away without a trace; nothing remains of what was supposedly out there. The apple and the table lamp now appear to me as nothing other than images floating in my own mind. As I look round, the same happens to every object I cast my eyes upon.

What caused this extraordinary event to occur? My whole world has completely changed; and yet, in a strange way, everything remains the same as before. Nothing flickered or went fuzzy, no visible sign testifies to the dramatic transformation I have just witnessed. In vain, I reach out to touch the objects around me to reassure myself that they are really out there and not in me; the smooth, hard skin of the apple, the heat of the table lamp and the soft fabric of the lampshade now reveal themselves as mere experiences, just events happening in my mind.

Now one might quickly dismiss this unsettling vision as a momentary mental lapse. Indeed, after a short while the image of an apple becomes an apple again, the image of a lamp is once more a lamp. Everything returns to the state it was in before – or does it? The egocentrist would persuade us otherwise. Think of it this way, says the

egocentrist. Say to yourself, I have made a discovery of the greatest importance. I have succeeded in one brief glimpse in catching reality off guard. I have seen beneath the deceptive appearance of a world independent of my I. In reality, all that exists is nothing but the constant flux of sensations, thoughts and ideas that make up the contents of my conscious mind.

5. It would not be much of an achievement to refute what amounts to a first, simple-minded attempt at a metaphysical theory. Such crude subjectivism would be disowned by the more thoughtful egocentrist. The proper basis for a critique – indeed the only way that will yield a result we can use in constructing our own theory – is to allow the original vision of a world in my mind to develop through self-criticism into one that is as far as possible self-consistent and immune from attack. (By the end of the end of chapter 4, we shall see how, ironically, the egocentrist succeeds only too well.)

We begin by noticing that the vision of a dissolving world appears similar to the state of mind which Descartes reached, in the ‘First Meditation’, by his famous method of systematic doubt: How do I know that there is a world beyond my perceptions, that I am not merely being deceived by an evil demon into thinking so? The egocentrist, however, is far more ruthless in following up the implications of the cartesian method. For it seems that Descartes, despite his avowed aim of questioning everything he formerly believed, makes an unjustified assumption. He never goes so far as to doubt whether it is logically possible for objects to exist beyond his perceptions, that he knows what that proposition means. His only question is whether in fact there are any such objects.

Our simple-minded egocentrist simply does not understand the question. What notion can I have of external objects corresponding with my perceptions? Like everything else I know, it is just an idea in my mind. When one looks at a picture one has some idea of what it might mean to say that the picture either corresponds or does not correspond with what it depicts, or indeed that the object which it is intended to depict really exists; for there is such a thing as comparing the two, the picture

with its object. Where logically there can be no comparing the notion of correspondence is empty. (In fairness to Descartes, one should remember that the method of systematic doubt was never meant to extend to doubting the existence of something, I know not what, beyond my perceptions. Whether that something is an external world or only an evil demon, the contents of my mind will always have another side or aspect from the one they present to me. We shall see later that this notion of a plurality of sides in effect defines the objective standpoint.)

6. Let us now try to describe these mental objects. Previously, I believed in the existence of such things as apples and table lamps, trees and houses. Now all that remains for perception are mental images of these and other things. In trying to assert this claim, however, I am embarrassed to discover that I am quite unable to describe my experience other than in terms of the apples and table lamps, trees and houses in which I supposedly no longer believe! One might imagine that one could make a start by talking of variously shaped patches of red and yellow, green and grey, and so on. Yet it soon becomes apparent that such a limited range of concepts proves hopelessly inadequate to describe subjective experience in all its depth and richness .

The embarrassment is soon overcome, however. I can admit that my mind is neither swift enough nor sufficiently acute to devise and employ a sensation language couched purely in terms of such properties as colours and shapes; that I have no choice but to continue using the language which I once used to express my beliefs about an external world. That just means that where I once talked of apples and table lamps I now talk of appearances of apples and table lamps. The images in my mind still have attributes of their own which exist to be described by a hypothetical sensation language, even though they never will be actually so described; just as for the common sense view of the world the grains of sand on the beach do not depend for their existence on anyone's being able to count them all or describe them individually.

We may call the subjectivist view that asserts flatly that the only objects that exist are objects in my own mind simple egocentrism. Having rejected an entire world of independent objects, the simple egocentrist never once questions what could be meant by the notion of a mind, or what kind of thing is referred to by the pronoun 'I'. One thinks of oneself as a kind of ghostly container, with thoughts and feelings floating about inside, into which pours an incessant stream of feelings and sensations. As Hume observed in the first book (Pt IV §6) of his *Treatise on Human Nature*, however, wherever one looks one never sees the I, the container, but only the mental objects it contains. What then could be meant by saying that a given set of mental objects belong in the same container, in the same mind? The only thing I am aware of when I look inside my mind are connections between the various images I find there; for example, between a sensation of red and the memory of having had a similar sensation in the past. Anything added to that is a baseless supposition.

This discovery shatters simple egocentrism. It is as if the implicit dynamic behind the egocentrist's paradigm experience, the mind's power to dissolve every object it touches into mental images, now turns on those mental objects themselves; and with their dissolution mind itself then disappears. Yet, seemingly, all is not lost. The more sophisticated, Humean egocentrist concludes that what we commonly refer to as 'mind' is in reality nothing but the product of a continual process of composition and decay, as mental images connect up or break their connection. Similarly, what I mean by the term 'I' is just the indeterminate bundle of mental objects which connect up either directly or indirectly with a given present sensation or feeling nominated as 'mine'. (The historical Hume, it should be noted, never gives up his belief in the objective standpoint from which the detached philosophical observer views the workings of 'human nature': all praise to his inconsistency.)

7. The difficulty with Humean egocentrism is that as soon as one tries to explain the supposed connection between different mental objects, one is caught in a tight circle. Take the simplest possible case. Suppose that I am

now experiencing a sensation of red and also a buzzing sound. Here is red and there is a buzz: but what is the connection between here and there? The buzz is not red, nor does the red buzz. Nor is there, according to this view, any I to act as a link between the one and the other. All one can say is that there is now red and also a buzz; what connects them is simply their happening in the form of one compound event.

What if the red had occurred before the buzz? There is first red, then there is a buzz, accompanied by the memory of red. The buzz and the memory of red are connected because they occur at the same time, forming a single event; but we still need to connect the memory of red with the actual red that it remembers. It is of course true that a sensation of red can occur together with the memory of a previous sensation of red, but that does not help in any way to connect this particular memory of red with the red that it remembers. The only thing that could connect them is the fact that they occur at different times in one and the same subject, namely myself. However, talk of the subject of experience, of the I, is the one thing the Humean egocentrist cannot allow, since the I is supposed to be defined in terms of connections between its experiences. As a result, the only thing that can be a subject or a mind is something with no identity over time: a momentary coming together of sensations and images.

This bleak conclusion reduces the egocentrist claim that the only objects that exist are objects in my mind almost to absurdity; almost, but not quite. I can continue denying that an independent world exists provided that I also deny that I exist. Still, that is not the same as making the absurd claim that nothing exists. There remains *this*: a momentary constellation of somethings which are neither in the world nor in any mind, which occupy no spatial position and possess no temporal duration.

There is worse to come, however. We still have to ask what it means to say that these momentary somethings have attributes, that they are thus-and-so and can, in principle if not in practice, be described as they really are. Consider again the example of the red and the buzz. What is red? What is a buzz? All terms and concepts, however simple, mean something only in relation to a

wider context. One red thing may be compared with another red thing; one buzz with another buzz. On the other hand, a red thing is not blue, a buzz is not a whistle. Yet the red and the buzz of our momentary somethings do not stand in relation to anything else. One is led to argue that the bare experience of red could exist even if the concept 'red' had no meaning, even if there was not even the logical possibility of relating together different red things. Imagine our experienced world in all its original detail, the egocentrist might say. Somewhere in this totality there is a particular red and a particular buzz. Now start taking things away. At no point does the red cease to be red, the buzz cease to be a buzz, even when the red and the buzz are the only two things that remain. – Only now we must ask whether this simple-minded thought experiment tells us anything about real logical possibility, or only about the way our imaginations work; and to that the Humean egocentrist has no reply. (Imagine an artist removing patches of colour one by one from a canvas until there is just one single patch of colour left. Except that the artist herself, her brushes and palette, easel and canvas are themselves part of the painting.)

8. One might call the position to which the Humean egocentrist is driven a 'reductio ad silentium'. If the only reality is this present experience, with no connection with before or after, if all that exists is a momentary constellation of somethings whose attributes cannot be described, then absolutely nothing can be said about anything. Yet remaining silent is no easy thing to do; for the philosopher if not for the mystic. So one continues to talk, inconsistently, about fictions and suchlike – calling it Humean irony.

To reconstruct the metaphysic of egocentrism so that it may, with at least the appearance of consistency, accommodate our notions of a self which persists through time and a world of external objects which the self perceives, requires more powerful tools and materials than Hume allows. For that purpose, we need to borrow insights from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; specifically, from the two 'Transcendental Deductions' and the second edition 'Refutation of Idealism'. (Once again, one should

note that the historical Kant is firmly committed to the reality of the objective standpoint; his egocentric epistemology, we would argue, as little entitles him to that belief as it does Hume.)

Kant starts from the basic assumption, which he regards as axiomatic, that I do in fact succeed in describing my experience. I make judgements about how things are, based on how they seem. Not only is there something, a *this*, given immediately in experience (Kant calls it 'Anschauung' or intuition); there must also be concepts available for describing it. Now applying a concept involves an act of recognition: for example, this red is the same colour as a previous red. To do that, one has to connect together sensations of red which occur at different times; they must present themselves to one and the same I. There is no question, however, of reinstating the simple egocentrist's ghostly container of ideas. It is not a fact, contingent or necessary, that where there is intuition and concepts there is an I; rather, it is analytic. The two taken together (as they necessarily must be) make up the entire substance of I; take them away and nothing remains. The I is thus not any kind of object but rather the common element, the 'I think' which is necessarily capable of accompanying every act of thinking, every application of a concept to an object.

Having recovered the I, Kant sets his sights on recovering the notion of a world of objects outside the mind. One might be excused for thinking that such a project, were it to be successful, would mean the rejection of egocentrism. On the contrary, as we shall now see, it merely serves to refine the egocentric theory by ridding it of its distorting, subjectivist element.

Consider again the momentary red and the momentary buzz. It might seem that all one needs to turn this example into one which allows for the application of concepts, and thus for a persisting I, is to make the red and the buzz continue through time. What is wrong with that suggestion? Kant would reply that the subject which utters the words, 'red, red again, red again...', or 'buzz, buzz again, buzz again...' is not actually thinking, is not making judgements on the basis of its experience. It merely detects red and reacts with the word 'red', detects a buzz and says, 'buzz'.

For the sake of argument, however, let us suppose that this primitive subject is continually making very simple judgements, which in some sense do not require thought. Briefly, let us imagine, the red turns to blue, then back again. At the same time, the buzz is replaced by a whistle. One asks: was that blue? was that a whistle? But the question is pointless, for nothing the subject will ever experience could count either way. The only thing it can go on is what it remembers, or seems to remember reporting at the time. The blue whistle might recur several times; then on one occasion, say, blue is accompanied by a buzz. The subject would have no right to say, 'That couldn't have been a blue buzz, because blue always whistles!' Or, rather, it can say that if it likes; it can say anything it likes. Merely to go through the motions of enumerating instances of noisy colours or coloured sounds can never amount to an induction, for each new instance has no sooner appeared than it joins the set of seemingly remembered instances that the induction was meant to verify. – The water flows out of the bucket as quickly as it is poured in.

There is thus not even the logical possibility of our primitive subject ever being wrong about anything, just because everything it says reduces to what seems to be the case at the time. Whatever it says goes, and there is no room for even a shadow of a doubt. Yet making a judgement that could not possibly be wrong is like shooting an arrow at a target, when the target is already attached to the arrow. Just as a target attached to your arrow is one you can neither miss nor hit, so a concept that cannot possibly be misapplied cannot be used to say anything false or true; which is the same as saying that it is not a concept at all. In the imagined experience of the continued red buzz, there are no concepts, no 'I think' – and therefore no I.

9. If experience, by definition is something had by a persisting I, then a continuing red buzz is not a possible experience. How far, then, could experience deviate from what we have and still be experience? Kant's answer to this question is very simple. However much variety or order one introduces, the end result will not be a possible experience unless it bears the kind of structure that permits its non-arbitrary interpretation as the perception

of a world of objects from a point of view within that world. Sensations, such as the red or the buzz, not only occupy times but are seen as occupying places to which one can in principle return. Thus, on the basis of its experience, the subject makes judgements about the qualities of objects situated at different places, at the same time as it makes judgements about its own spatial position in relation to those objects. By contrast with the fake judgements about the red buzz or the blue whistle, these essentially interpretative judgements commit the subject to believing that things are thus-and-so at places at which it is not now located.

It is this very commitment – to the truth of propositions that can neither be reduced to reports of immediate sense experience nor to any generalizations made up of such reports – that makes the perceptual reports genuine judgements, and thus allows us to regard the I as a genuine subject of experience. Now, it seems, we have everything we wanted: if there is such a thing as experience, then there must be such a thing as an I that uses concepts in judging the character of that experience; if there is such a thing as an I that makes judgements then there must necessarily be a world of external objects – an ‘objective world’ – which the I perceives. (Note that a two-dimensional quasi-spatial world of relatively stable secondary properties would be sufficient to account for the possibility of false judgement. It is indeed possible to introduce richer conceptions of objectivity, such as the requirement that there be a distinction between primary and secondary qualities: Cf. Evans ‘Things Without the Mind’. This represents, in effect, an additional feature grafted on to the original Kantian model, and by no means requires the rejection of egocentrism.)

There is much that Kant says about the way a world is constructed and the subjective requirements for being a subject that is able to do the work of construction – all grist to the egocentrist’s mill – which we do not need to mention here. All that is relevant, from the point of view of the refinement of egocentrism, is that the I should possess the concept of space, or something closely analogous to space, in which the I, and the objects of its perception are located; and that what is immediately there for the I should in its intrinsic structure conform to

the requirement that the concept of a spatial world have application.

Without doubt the notions used in Kant's account of objective judgement, even in our stripped-down version of it, are doing real work. There are genuine problems to solve about the details of the account, which anyone will discover who attempts to construct different imaginary worlds and tries to work out, case by case, whether and how the requirements of objective judgement are met. At the same time, one may be forgiven for thinking that all this amounts to no more than a conjurer's sleight of hand. For the argument seems to accomplish something quite impossible. How can anyone, starting from the almost totally negative position where all that exists is an indescribable, momentary *this*, where there is no space as such, no world of external objects, no time, no I recover both the I and the world on the basis of the single axiom that there is something to say about something? If any theory is the equivalent of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps, that is it. Now whenever such an extraordinary move occurs in philosophy, it is advisable to examine one's new, elevated position very carefully to make sure that it is not merely the same old surroundings seen upside down. In the next chapter, we shall raise doubts about Kant's argument which lead, not to a further refinement of egocentrism, but rather to its total rejection.

4 Silencing the egocentrist

1. PURSUING our negative strategy for establishing the theory of subjective and objective worlds, we had arrived at the end of the last chapter at a final, Kantian formulation of the first of the two theories to be attacked. According to the egocentrist, my relation to the world is to be comprehended purely from the subjective standpoint. The world is nothing but the world of my possible experience: the ultimate stuff of which the world is made is simply *this*, the indescribable subjective input or intuition upon which I base all my so-called objective judgements.

Now at first sight, this seems to do away with an external world entirely, since all that exists is reduced to the contents of my own mind. However, the Kantian egocentrist has found an ingenious way to retain the idea of a world outside my mind. The simple egocentrist, who believes that the external world has been done away with, fails to see that my having a notion of myself as a subject of experience presupposes that intuition be so structured as to appear as my perception of a world of objects in space. The subjective input cannot be described except in terms of concepts of an external world. We saw that the Humean egocentrist, by contrast, in rejecting both external objects and the self which has experiences, is forced in the end to reject also the very possibility of judgement. Missing the Kantian point, the Humean wrongly assumes that a self or mind could only be a ghostly container of ideas. Kant's argument, then, may be summarized in three statements. First, the only thing that can be a subject of experience, a self or mind, is a being that makes judgements, that describes its experience by means of concepts. Secondly, concepts can only be used to describe something if there is a real difference between getting it right and getting it wrong, between knowledge and error. But thirdly, there is room for error only if the things which the subject perceives appear in space, and not just as a one-dimensional series spread out in time.

Whatever hopes Kant may have held for his 'refutation of dogmatic idealism' (he thought he was

attacking Berkeley in the spirit of Descartes: he was wrong on both counts), what his argument actually proves is simply that calling intuition 'mine' logically implies that it has the character of my perception of an external world. In practice, this means that the egocentrist can continue talking about things in the world as we all do, knowing all the while that such talk ultimately relates back to the indescribable subjective stuff, the *this*. Now, it is no objection to the argument that it proves less than one might have expected from its name. We are only considering the argument as employed by the Kantian egocentrist; not some other argument which might be used to prove a stronger conclusion. However, it will be useful to start by considering three elementary objections, corresponding to the three stages of the argument that we have just outlined.

First, why couldn't there be a subject which simply had experiences without thinking or making judgements about them? Why can't a series of experiences just happen, each with a determinate character of its own, even though the subject they happen to is not in a position to make judgements about that character? If they can, why can't that subject be I? Secondly, why must it be possible for concepts to be incorrectly applied? To be red-or-not-red, for example, is surely a concept, yet the law of excluded middle ensures that it may be used to describe anything you like, and the result will never be false. Less trivially, perhaps, the statement, 'Something exists' applies the concept of existence in such a way that that judgement could never be false. Thirdly, why can't a series of stable objects existing in time but not in space serve as the reality external to mind in relation to which concepts may be correctly or incorrectly applied? Why, for example, couldn't a non-spatially located mind whose experiences consisted of an orderly succession of different colours mistakenly describe one of its red experiences as 'blue'? We shall consider these objections in turn.

2. In order to meet the first objection, why there couldn't be a conscious subject which had experiences without making judgements about them, we do not need to go into the question of whether or not it would be right to describe any primitive organism we came across that

sought nutrients or avoided harmful agents as having some form of attenuated experience; or whether, at the other end of the scale, a dog might possess a simple range of concepts, and so qualify as having a mind, even though it never did anything which we call thinking. It would be difficult to deny that non-human subjects do have conscious experience and, given that admission, that such experience whether it be rich or poor must as a matter of logic have its own determinate character. However, when Kant talks of the self or subject of experience he means any being which is capable of having beliefs about the past or future, and which possesses a sense of its identity over time, as we do; a being which is able to raise the question whether its apparent memory of a certain event is correct. (A dog 'checking' where its bone is buried could not be said to be questioning its memory.)

What the simple egocentrist must believe is that a subject with a sense of its identity over time could have a purely temporal experience, an experience which did not appear as the perception of objects in space. Kant's argument refutes that belief. The simple egocentrist fails to realize that the temporally located subject could not have the identity claimed for it, but would disintegrate into individual, momentary experiences, with no connection between before and after. The I think which binds the subjective happenings together into a series of connected experiences is bound up with the use of concepts to describe those experiences as perceptions of one and the same reality; only then can the experiences be said to occur in one and the same mind. The argument is that the only reality which will adequately serve the purpose is a world of objects in space.

Yet, given all this, would it not still be possible for a more sophisticated egocentrist to declare that the reality which, lacking the power to make judgements, I can only call *this* – my subjective experience as it is in itself, in its own determinate character – is what I shall henceforth regard as my self, even though I can never know myself as an I, nor even connect one experience with another? We may reply on Kant's behalf: say that if you like; nothing follows from it. The one thing you cannot say is that the experience you call 'this' or 'self' has its own determinate identity as a series of connected

events. In the absence of an I that makes judgements, no glue is strong enough to force the atoms of experience to stick together.

3. The second objection takes the form of two counterexamples. In the last chapter, we said that applying concepts that could not be wrongly applied was like shooting at a target which was already attached to one's arrow. There is neither missing nor hitting, neither wrong nor right. Now, the concept 'red-or-not-red' is made out of the concepts 'red', 'or' and 'not', and so qualifies as a perfectly genuine concept. And surely one would be right if one said, of a glass of wine, that it is red-or-not-red, even if one would be saying something rather odd. Yet we should be making a statement which could not be false.

This counterexample can be dealt with by distinguishing between concepts that are descriptive, concepts that can actually be used to say something, to convey information however trivial, and those that are non-descriptive. We are deliberately not saying anything about the colour of the wine when we say that it is red-or-not-red; for we do not intend to rule out that it might be blue or green; nor do we mean to imply that one can always be sure of saying when a particular shade of pink counts as 'red'. We do not mean to rule anything out as far as the colour of the wine is concerned, which is why the concept 'red-or-not-red' cannot be wrongly applied to it, and so does not describe it in any way. The necessity of concepts Kant is arguing for, by contrast, is the necessity of descriptive concepts; for the identity of the I in the I think depends upon there being a descriptive content for the I to actually think, a judgement which the subject commits itself to. The discovery that one can put together artificial, non-descriptive concepts does not weaken the argument in any way.

The second counterexample, however, appears on the face of it another matter entirely. What could be of greater significance than the judgement that something exists? Yet, barring the most heroic scepticism, there is no way that such a judgement could be false. Our response is in one respect parallel and in another respect opposite to the one we gave to the previous

counterexample. We have seen that there is no thinking, no I, unless the subject thinks thoughts which commit it to something's being the case, something that might turn out not to be the case. In the present example, in thinking that something exists the subject does not undertake any commitment, not because there is no content to commit itself to – we have no sympathy for any view that attempts to block the naive metaphysician's request for an explanation of contingent existence by the simple expedient of denying content to the explanandum – but because as far as the subject is concerned, the content is simply that there is such a thing as content; and to that the subject is equally committed, just as much with every judgement it takes back or deems false as with every judgement it asserts.

4. The third objection asks: what is logically impossible about the idea of a reality, say, an orderly succession of colours, spread out in time but not in space? By reference to such a non-spatial world, one might be said to mistakenly remember a previous red sensation as having been blue, or, alternatively, mistakenly believe that the next sensation is going to be blue, and then find that it is red.

In order to deal with this objection, we must first get rid of the notion that we might stand in the privileged position of being able to observe the temporally located mind which makes judgements about red and blue and other colours, and compare those judgements with the multicoloured reality that its judgements are about. We are asking whether we could conceive of what it would be to have such an experience, and so must adopt the subjective viewpoint of the temporally located mind. Now the peculiar thing about this non-spatial world is that every sensation we experience is one which we have, strictly speaking, never seen before and will never see again. Just because the sensations are identified only by their location in a temporal series, there is no coming back to a sensation previously experienced, as opposed to merely having another one like it, in the way that one might return to an object located in space in order to confirm that one's memory of it is correct. For no amount of similarity between two sensations occurring at

different times, or between the patterns in which the two sensations occur, could, logically, ever make them into the same object.

What this means is not, however, that one would have to remain forever in doubt whether one's memory was correct. In the non-spatial world, there is strictly no use for memory. The function of retaining a picture of how things were at different places where we are not now located, so important to us in our spatial world, is indistinguishable in the non-spatial world from a function of merely inventing a picture of how things are at other temporal locations. But supposing one were to grant that in the non-spatial world the past is by definition always just as it seems to have been whenever one thinks about it, could I not still be caught by surprise by a sensation of red which, on the basis of patterns I seemed to have experienced before, I expected to be blue? Let us pretend for the sake of argument that this does happen. My expectation can turn out to have been disappointed only if I remember correctly that it was an expectation of blue and not of red. Yet we have already seen that there is no such thing as memory in the non-spatial world, no difference between remembering correctly or incorrectly. Kant's conclusion therefore stands. A non-spatial world is not something that could be described by means of concepts; there could not be a subject who had experience of a world in time but not in space.

5. The Kantian egocentrist does indeed seem to have the best of both worlds. One retains the metaphysical vision that all that really exists is the indescribable *this* of my subjective awareness, while at the same time apparently justifying the common sense belief in a world outside my mind. Now the time has come, however, to ask whether egocentrism is in fact true; and, if it is not, how one might refute it. As is well known, Dr. Johnson's reported response to Bishop Berkeley's immaterialism was to kick a stone and declare, 'I refute it thus.' In chapter 15, we shall discover that there is more than a grain of truth in this knock-down argument. (According to our definition, Berkeley's immaterialism is a form of nonegocentrism.) The reader will find that our anti-egocentric argument is also essentially a one-liner. So it

would be a good idea to first try out what would seem to be the nearest literal equivalent of Dr. Johnson's kick.

If someone tells me that she is an egocentrist, that the world is nothing but the world of her possible experience, then surely I know without any further discussion that whatever it is that she believes cannot be true. I am certainly not just a character in the story of another person's world. Let me be reduced to nothing in the eyes of others; I still have an absolute reality for myself which cannot be reduced to the possible perceptions that make up the world for some other mind. However, the egocentrist disposes of this argument with ease. 'It's no good your proving the falsity of my egocentrism to yourself; you have got to prove it to me. As far as I'm concerned, you are just a concept that I use to describe my experience, and all your fine words are just sounds in my ears. Why don't you ask yourself how you know that I'm not just a character in the story of your world? Why aren't you an egocentrist? If you could come up with an argument that convinced the egocentrist in you, then maybe I would be prepared to apply the argument to my own case!'

Of course, in saying this, the egocentrist is fully convinced that no such argument could ever be given. – And however certain I may be most of the time that egocentrism is false, are there not also times when I have felt all alone in my world, when everything seemed to be just my own private dream, or nightmare? If this is a possibility I can entertain in my darkest moments, might the possibility not turn out, after all, to be the way things really are?

6. The first question I might put to the egocentrist in me is whether there is any special characteristic that distinguishes between my experience of perceiving an external world, and my experience of having a dream. According to Kant's argument, I exist as a subject of experience only insofar as my experience appears as perception of an external world. Yet so do my dreams, while I'm having them. What grounds do I have for dismissing some apparent perceptions as mere dreams, while taking others to be genuine? A term one might use here is 'coherence'. The experiences of my waking life

cohere, literally, 'stick together', because they back one another up. My home, the town where I live, indeed the whole world appear to me as a relatively constant framework within which all changes take place according to the principle of cause and effect. Every perception is answerable to the knowledge that I have built up from past perceptions. Everything that doesn't fit in is called a hallucination, or else a dream.

Yet is it really necessary that all my waking experiences should stick together as experiences of just one spatial world? Anthony Quinton, in his paper 'Spaces and Times', suggests the following possibility. Every time I go to sleep I 'dream' of waking up in a world which appears in every respect as coherent as this world; and when I go to sleep in that world I once more wake up in this world. The suggestion is not intended to criticize egocentrism, but to show how one might acquire grounds for believing in the existence of another world, spatially unrelated to this one. The problem is that there is no reason why the number should be limited to two. I could find myself regularly visiting three, four or any number of different worlds. What then are the limits to this kind of experience? If every few minutes I fell asleep and seemed to wake up in a world I had never seen before, then my experience would no longer be coherent; there would cease to be any real difference between my perceiving a succession of worlds and my having an endless series of dreams. However, there is no point at which one could draw a dividing line which separated one from the other, which was not completely arbitrary.

The situation we have just described is ripe for the application of an argument which, in ancient times, was known as the paradox of 'the heap'. A few grains of sand scattered on the floor is definitely not a heap. Adding one grain of sand could never convert something that was not yet a heap into a heap. Therefore, by repeating the process, no amount of sand could ever be a heap! The fallacy in this argument lies in the attempt to apply strict logic to a vague term; there simply is no definition of a 'heap', even though we get on perfectly well with the term for practical purposes. Where this form of argument is valid is against any attempt to base an absolute philosophical distinction on a merely relative difference.

The egocentrist cannot say that there is an absolute distinction between perceiving a world and having a dream, while at the same time also allowing that someone might experience more than one spatial world, in the way we have described above. There is no number or frequency of worlds at which one could draw the line between a series of worlds and a series of dreams. (We shall consider how one ought to respond to Quinton's thought experiment from the point of view of our two-world theory in chapter 9.)

Kant avoids having to face this difficulty by refusing to allow the hypothesis that one might ever experience more than one spatial world, on the grounds of its *prima facie* incompatibility with the necessary unity of experience. Perhaps the most sympathetic gloss one could put on Kant's strict view is that, while I am in this world, I can say what I like about the other world or worlds and never be wrong; just as, when reporting a dream, whatever one says goes. According to the refutation of simple egocentrism, if one's memory of something can never be wrong, then there is nothing real to be remembered, correctly or incorrectly. Arguably, not even apparent coherence with the memory reports of other persons who claim to have had similar experiences (Quinton's suggestion) could make any essential difference: what makes my memory of an experience correct is not any number of persons assuring me that it is so, but rather the experience actually having happened at the time I seem to remember it.

The Kantian objection can still be met, however, by allowing events in each world to have the potential to connect in a lawlike way with events in each of the other spatially non-related worlds. If, for example, someone invented a trans-world television camera, then one's apparent memory of events in other worlds would be backed up by listening to the television news reports in whichever world one happened to be in. All the worlds would then be linked together through a single, non-spatial network. The Kantian egocentrist, in the face of Quinton's thought experiment, would therefore seem to have great difficulty in drawing the line at only one spatial world; and if there can be more than one then there is no absolute limit to the number of worlds. Now at

some point, the number and frequency of worlds would make it simply impossible to keep up with the trans-world news reports; but this point is not located at any precise place. In that case, according to the paradox of the heap, there is once again no absolute distinction between reality and a dream.

7. With the discovery that reality cannot be defined absolutely, we are already on the slippery slope that will lead to the eventual downfall of egocentrism. But perhaps all is not yet lost. If reality is only a relatively coherent dream, then there is still some distinction to be made between being awake and dreaming, only one that is not absolute. Similarly, no-one would deny that there was a distinction between a heap of sand and a few grains scattered on the floor, although the number of grains required for a heap cannot be defined precisely. Thus, if the egocentrist admits that coherence cannot be defined precisely, there could still be a difference between a coherent experience and an incoherent experience, between perceiving a world and having a dream or hallucination, even though no sharp line could be drawn between one and the other; a difference which might justify the application of the concept of objective experience.

One ought to remain deeply sceptical about any such admission, however. We saw that Kant's refutation of simple egocentrism turns on the question whether the conditions are satisfied for the existence of a subject or self which applies concepts in order to describe its experience. In a dream world there is no subject in this sense, even if, reporting the dream later, there seemed to be; without judgement, the I think which necessarily accompanies every application of concepts, there is no I. Yet surely the distinction between there being a subject and there not being a subject is absolute, not relative. In which case, contrary to the egocentrist's admission, the distinction between perceiving a world and having a dream must also be absolute and not relative. The argument from the heap therefore applies with full force.

The dream-like quality of the egocentrist's world is revealed even more clearly when one asks, What, ultimately, are the things that the I perceives? What is

the I that perceives them? The common sense reply that one perceives such things as trees and houses and people, and that the I that perceives them is just one's own self, a subject located in the world, misses the point of this metaphysical question. The unity of the I in the I think which accompanies all judgements has shown itself to be the unity of a function, a mere capacity for thought, of which no further account can be given. Similarly, there is no explanation of the existence of the immediate, subjective given, the indescribable *this* to which concepts are applied. The power of judgement and the immediate given must both be treated as ultimates, the end point of all explanation.

It is here that the egocentrist parts company with Kant himself, who sought to introduce an unknowable, 'noumenal' subject, the subject as it is in itself, the entity in which the power of judgement is ultimately grounded, together with unknowable noumena or things-in-themselves which come into relation with noumenal subjects to produce the appearance we know as our perceived world. There cannot be appearance, Kant said, without 'something that appears', something of which it is the appearance; and this surely is a powerful argument. For all the difficulties with the notion of unknowable things-in-themselves, it is in one respect far more in accord with the common sense view, that what makes a dream a mere dream is just that its images do not correspond with any actual things outside the world of one's subjective experience, or, rather, that what they do correspond with is only a state of the subject of which the subject has no direct knowledge, a state of that medium or substance in which one's conscious processes are realized.

The strict egocentrist, by contrast, will have none of this. From my subjective standpoint, the notion of any relation between the world as it appears to me, and the world as it really is outside my possible perceptions is meaningless. The whole of reality is just appearance, a world of phenomena, which I cannot question further. To go so far as to ask what the appearance is an appearance of is to abandon my subjective standpoint in favour of the objective standpoint, to relinquish egocentrism in favour of nonegocentrism.

8. The world of the Kantian egocentrist is not a world most of us would care to inhabit; it is a mere spectacle, a succession of images on a cinema screen, robbed of all substance. However, it is not our business to question this vision on aesthetic grounds. The only relevant question is whether egocentrism is a logically self-consistent theory. Its apparent vulnerability to the paradox of the heap implies that it is not. Still, that argument is not finally conclusive. In the absence of an alternative theory, one might argue, a relative distinction between a world and a dream is better than no world at all.

Our main argument, however, is directed towards an even more fundamental assumption. One feature which plays a pivotal role in egocentrism is the principle that there exists a real distinction between true and false judgement, one that does not reduce to whatever is taken to be true or false at any given time. That is how the Kantian is able to refute simple egocentrism, by showing that a world in time but not in space is not something about which one could ever judge falsely. Whatever the simple egocentrist's subject seems to believe at any one time is necessarily the truth; one cannot ever talk of its remembering events in its past correctly or incorrectly. By contrast, the memories belonging to a subject who perceives a world in space are answerable to the future course of its experience; in a spatial world, one can return to places one has visited before. Thus, every judgement becomes an interpretation; nothing is taken simply at face value, but is judged in the light of past experience, and waits to be corroborated by future experience. This is indeed a valid point against simple egocentrism.

The question is whether this argument is consistent with the two metaphysical ultimates which form the basis of Kantian egocentrism: the power of judgement expressed in the I think, and the immediate, subjective given, the *this* which together produce the story of my experience of an objective, spatial world.

Now, on its own, the *this* does not dictate what kind of interpretation I should place upon it. That requires the application of concepts, the use of my power of judgement. But suppose it occurred to me to ask myself

whether I trusted my power of judgement? To the question whether my experience is perception of a world, or only a dream or hallucination, we have seen that the egocentrist answers that dreams and hallucinations lack the coherence necessary for genuine perception. Coherence is a matter of interpretation, something I have to form a judgement about. However, the one thing I cannot form a judgement about is whether I am not merely making up my interpretations as I go along, so that any false belief can just as easily be deemed true, or any true belief false. This is one possibility I am not allowed even to consider.

Yet surely there is an exact parallel here with what the Kantian egocentrist says about simple egocentrism. The simple egocentrist has to view the subject's memory of events in a non-spatial world as infallible, as incapable of ever being incorrect, since there is no such thing as going back into the past to compare a previous experience with one's memory of it. In an exactly similar way, one might argue, the egocentrist who rejects simple egocentrism possesses no conception of the reality in virtue of which my power of judgement is either reliable or faulty. For that, one requires the objective standpoint, the existence of points of view outside my own system of representation from which that system may be considered as something that either succeeds or fails in putting me in reliable touch with reality, the possibility of subjects whose ways of interpreting our common experience are independent of my judgement. Egocentrism says that there is no such reality; everything there is belongs to the world of my possible experience, the world as seen through my system of representation, as constructed out of my judgements. So my judgement is the sole judge of itself; its authority to evaluate its own judging must be regarded as absolute. In that case, we must say the same thing that the egocentrist said about simple egocentrism: a judgement that cannot, logically, be wrong is one that cannot be right either. There is, therefore, no world for judgements to be about, and no subject to make them. The egocentrist is, for the second and final time, reduced to silence.

So we are back, after a long detour it seems, with the inexpressible vision of the *this*, the unique, self-

subsistent reality about which nothing can be said. The attempt to justify talk of a world outside the mind, or indeed of the mind or subject which perceives that world, has come to nothing. Even so, one will go on talking anyway; that is simply to repeat Hume's ironic observation that the demands of the real world soon make one forget one's metaphysic. For our purposes, however, that is not good enough. As we argued in the last chapter, egocentrism is not refuted by the mere fact that its supporters fail to live up to their philosophy. In attacking egocentrism, we cannot rest content until we have destroyed the vision of the one true reality of the *this*. For, so long as that vision remains intact, the whole world stands in abeyance, ourselves included. Our life, or rather my life, everything I seem to do and everything I seem to believe, has no reality or meaning other than what I myself dream into it.

– *END OF PREVIEW* –

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