

NATURAL OBJECTS AND IDEAL OBJECTS

BY W. TUDOR JONES

IT is certainly true to-day that there is a lamentable want of interest in some, and, indeed, in most of the higher things of life. This fact is, in the main, due to the over-emphasis which is being laid upon natural objects at the expense of ideal objects, which are relegated to the background of consciousness, and are given but a shadowy kind of reality. Of course this is not, in some senses, peculiar to our age: the phenomenon of man clinging closely to natural objects is the story of the human world on the whole in the entire march of its evolutionary life. The result of this close affinity with natural objects has kept the mind constantly on the level of the senses: and, speaking generally of the average human life, there is only a minimum of intelligence required in this mode of activity. The interest in the external world may become so intense—and is, I think, actually so—that whole realms of reality hardly exist for the vast majority of mankind even in civilized countries. These domains of reality which are outside their ken are the most important ones. Certainly this is the conviction of all those who have realized in some degree the reality of the world of *ideal objects*. But if there have been no attempts, or only feeble attempts, to enter the second realm, what that second realm contains does not exist in any effective way in the mind simply because it has been swamped by the over-emphasis which is being laid on the objects which lend themselves to the senses. As I shall try to show, objects in the external world play an all-important part in human life, and human life, in its turn, plays an all-important part among the objects of the physical world.

Thus we pass to the statement that objects in the external world are in no sense to be ignored. It is fundamental for the develop-

ment of the higher life that not a single step backward be taken with regard to any object which lends itself to the senses. A knowledge of such objects constitutes the true and necessary "jumping-off ground" to the higher levels of life. Much of the advancement of the Natural Sciences has come about in this way of keeping the natural object constantly in front of ourselves and allowing concentration of attention to do its work upon it. But it is often forgotten that *mind* is a work in all this. And not only is it forgotten, but the insistence and pertinacity of the sense or senses used are so strong, and make the object so alluring, that there is the very natural tendency of conceding reality to natural objects and to them alone. The consequence of this is that people become content to remain on this empirical level, and some go so far as to state that the search for anything behind and beyond this is hunting after phantoms. I am only hinting at this point of the investigation that in all this there is present something of value and significance.

At the present stage it may be pointed out that one is apt to forget how much that is mental is present and included in our perception of natural objects. To those acquainted with the Theory of Knowledge all this is a truism. But it is not a truism to state that a vast amount of inattention is to be found on the side of describing and explaining what takes place from the side of the mental structure of life in the very act of becoming aware and of knowing any object in the external world. Add to this the nature of what is happening when the object has ceased to be present to the senses and yet is still present to self-consciousness. Let us return for a moment to one of the facts enumerated above, i.e. the forgetfulness of how much that is mental in the perception of the natural object. All idealistic thinkers (and, I suppose, nearly all empirical thinkers) are agreed that the consciousness of the object is mental; that any axioms and postulates which enter into the *meaning* of the object are also mental; and that the totality of the impressions do enter, in some mysterious kind of way, into a realm which lies beneath the sensory level. It is of course true that reference may be continually necessary to the natural object as an actual existence in a world outside consciousness. Still the *meaning* is within consciousness. It certainly takes the ordinary individual a long time to become aware of this fact. And even cultivated men very often are only

partially aware of it. An eminent Professor in Jena once told me that Haeckel had been so long looking at things outside himself that he had come at last to forget entirely that there was anything at all happening inside himself. The temptation to the production of such a type of mind is very natural to those who are constantly engaged with objects and their behaviour in the external world. Thus it may be said that it is not merely the naive mind that needs supplementary ideal objects to enrich the physical ones, but also the man of science is often in need of a constant reminder in the same direction. The result of this constant monopoly of the object is to relegate the remainder of life to a subsidiary place. First things are placed second, and second things placed first. My contention is that the backwardness of mankind concerning the fundamental meanings and values of life is due entirely to this. The natural tendency is to keep perpetually on the level of the *thing* as it presents itself to one or other of the sense. Consequently to-day we witness the failure to grasp the meaning of any object outside its immediate effect upon us.

I have already referred to the fact that such a trait as I have mentioned is present even in men of science. By an increased interest in the physical object the mind is continually forced into considering the empirical aspect as the one of fundamental importance, and thus forgetting more important aspects and attempting to transform mental constructions of various kinds into objects which exist in the world without. That is one of the great illusions which governs much of the natural science of the present day. But if all scientists had remained on such a level mathematics and the more conceptual sciences (e. g. mechanics and physics) would be in a very bad way to-day; it may even be stated that they would never have arisen. This is not the place to show the hypothetical and conceptual character of the Physics of a Newton or of an Einstein. And it is out of the neglect of the meaning and significance of the world of ideal objects that so much criticism has been levelled at some of the most important elements in Einstein's Theories of Relativity.

Some of the countries of the world are only too prone to live, on the whole, on the empirical level, unconsciously ignoring the impressions which the external objects make upon self-consciousness in its fulness of meaning. Of course it is most fortunate that the mind does much of this abstract work, which has to be constantly

connected with physical objects, without awareness of what is actually included in our knowledge of physical reality. But the question may be legitimately asked, How much more comprehensive and how much richer would the reality be if the awareness of what lies beneath the impression of the physical object were actually present?

It is of fundamental importance to bear in mind that we are deceiving ourselves when we imagine that, in our examination of anything in the external world, there is none more present to self-consciousness than the impressions of the bare object. No object lends itself to any of the senses in its entirety. I have touched on this point in an earlier part of this paper, but it is necessary to repeat it on account of the fact that important consequences follow from such a fact. I am aware, of course, that the fact is a well known psychological one, but that it is something greatly more than this is far too often forgotten. We are certain that some element of what the object *means* is to be found in the concept of the object. The concept of elements of an object cannot possibly be the same as the mere perceptual view of the object. Something is abstracted from the object, and this something becomes another kind of object, i. e. a mental one within consciousness itself. The concept which we possess of any object may be of an elementary kind, and generally is so in the initial stages of every investigation. But as the investigation proceeds in a perceptual way, more and more elements or aspects of the object are passed on into the concept. And, what is often overlooked, other elements or aspects still which are not actually present in perception—and, consequently, absent from the object—are present in the concept and these in their turn work upon the conceptual elements which have issued directly from the perceptual elements. Thus ever richer concepts are formed: these become objects in consciousness, and these cannot possibly have a counterpart in any objects in the world without. Into the formation of such objects in consciousness the perceptual elements have made their contribution, but it is a contribution which has to be compounded into the prior conceptual knowledge and experience that were already present. My main point here is to emphasize the fact that such a contribution of objects in consciousness is apt to be overlooked or, in any case, is apt to be referred back continually to the perceptual level. Certainly such a procedure as this is legitimate

and absolutely necessary in connection with the description and explanation of all objects in the external world. But all this is very different from merely granting an existence to such objects within consciousness only in so far as they are related and referred back continually to the external world. The objects in consciousness, as already pointed out, are something more than a replica of objects perceived. It looks then as if we were in a world of another kind of "dimension" than the external world. Certainly the external world has made its contribution. I am ready to go so far as to say that the objects in consciousness would have had no existence (at least in a physical world like ours) had it not been for the impressions which objects in a physical sense make upon us. But the story only begins there. Something which is not physical but conceptual is called up to observe, to reflect upon, and to transmute all the material that enters through the various avenues of the senses.

When we look into the matter of the nature and workings of the mind we discover such a process of transmutation occurring, and it occurs not only by means of the impressions of objects upon self-consciousness but also by means of a conceptual power in man working upon the material that enters. It is in this sense then that it is stated that *ideal* objects are created by mind. There is no need of repeating that they are not created out of nothing. We may then accept with Husserl's School of Phenomenology the statement that alongside of the *existence* (Dasein) of objects there is their *subsistence* or *their being as they are* (Sosein or Wesensschau). This means that alongside of the perception of natural objects we obtain a still more inward perception of the *Sosein* or *Wesensschau* of objects. In this latter aspect the *relation* of the object to consciousness is not now taken into account. What is taken into account is the conceptual meaning itself of any object as it exists in consciousness. We are certain then that the *ideal object* exists or subsists in self-consciousness, and it is what it is—no more and no less. There is nothing very mysterious about all this. It is all a certitude. But, as I have pointed out at an earlier stage, the trouble begins when no kind of reality is conceded to the *ideal objects*, and when it is believed that such objects have no function whatever to perform save to be referred back to the external world. The main object of this article is to concede a reality to the *ideal objects* of a "dimension" other than that of physical things. The failure to do this—i. e.

the failure to take the *Sosein* or ideality of objects in consciousness—has been the main cause of the lamentably slow progress of humanity in all kinds of directions. The matter we are dealing with here belongs to the realms of the Theory of Knowledge and of Psychology, but it is not confined to such realms. It has consequences of a practical nature—consequences which affect the whole progress of the human race. Let me turn to this point.

In what a fragmentary, elementary stage we should be in to-day had it not been for this passage from *Dasein* to *Sosein*—from physical to ideal objects! Wherever and whenever such a passage has taken place, a further stage of development was reached, because the *truth in itself* and not merely in its relations with physical objects was taken into account. Suppose for a moment that the idealism of a Socrates and a Plato had never entered this world of ours. It would be impossible for us to conceive of the advancement of man in knowledge and in recognition of the most valuable things of life. There is no need of multiplying instances. It is sufficient to state that it is by means of conceptual and ideational experiences that man has been able to shape his life into a domain of civilization, culture, morality, and religion. This could not possibly have happened without man conceiving and feeling in some very deep kind of way that his experiences meant what they stated in his deepest self-consciousness. If he had granted to such experiences no reality other than is to be found in their reference back to levels of perception and to objects existing in a physical world outside his consciousness he would never have achieved what has already been gained.

Turning to the need of affirming the reality of ideal objects, in all their meaning, value, and comprehensiveness, and of working them out in life, we may ask the question, what objection can there be for professed teachers of science, philosophy, and religion to accept the doctrine of the ideality of all knowledge and experience? An atmosphere could thus be created within a generation which could be breathed by vast numbers of people concerning the meaning, value, and significance of the things of the spirit. Radical changes are at present needful in the personal applications of all forms of knowledge. In Natural Science, it is generally felt that there is no need to deal with the purely epistemological and metaphysical elements. It is probably true that so many men of science are pure

novices in the Theory of Knowledge. The result is that their methods and conclusions are nearly always of an almost empirical nature. In Philosophy it is often the same. Metaphysics and its allied sister, Logic, do not obtain the place they deserve in the writings of many professional teachers. The result is that Truth and Principles are very largely discarded for scraps of knowledge which have a biological and physiological connection. Of course this kind of work is necessary, but the time has more than arrived when it should be supplemented by something more substantial and more closely allied to the deepest needs of human life. Matters do not seem very much better, but in some sense worse, when we consider the methods of teachers of religion. Here the training has dealt with material of a very doubtful nature. An acceptance of the great creeds of Christendom may leave the religious teacher absolutely blind to the vast mass of knowledge that has already accumulated on the fields of science and philosophy. It is only here and there that we discover anything more than a naive kind of acquaintance with all this. Is it then a wonder that an increasing section of the community in all the civilized countries of the world—and this section often the more intelligent one—has drifted from organised religion and has lost its anchorage of the great and permanent values of life? Many teachers of religion are conscious of this fact, and confess that they do not know where to turn for a solution. The solution seems to me to lie in granting a reality to the contents of experience and of conceiving of these as constituting an order of existence other than the order of the physical world. It is a tremendous help for man to realise that he is in possession of a nature that is not only capable of interpreting the world without, but that it also includes a real kind of mental and spiritual existence or subsistence which will carry him onward and upward to ever higher realms of thought and feeling and action.

The justification for taking into consideration *ideal objects* in their ever increasing depth and comprehensiveness is, I hope, thus seen to be the main problem to-day. It is an actual mode of penetration nearer to the heart of reality. It must not be taken as any form of delusion. As I have tried to show, it is the meaning which *ideal objects* grant us that interprets the world and passes beyond it. The warrant for proceeding in this manner may be found in the

nature of man himself whenever that nature comes to an awakening. In the awakening nature of man there is always to be found a *need of completion* (Ergänzungbedürfnis) as Frege and Husserl show. Although by these two men the "need of completion" is taken in a logical sense, still I believe that it applies also to man's whole nature. The mind has needs and demands beyond physical existence. By obliging the dictates of these needs and demands the mind fills the gaps left by perception. To such an awakening nature, to live on the level of perception is impossible. This does not mean that we expect to discover anything which is idealistic in the unfilled gaps of science. But it does mean that mind is so made as to complete more and more, without end, the meaning and experience of reality.

The pathway of *ideal objects* is not confined to a Theory of Knowledge or to branches of the Natural Sciences. The ever greater completion of the meaning of reality has other "needs of completion" within the realms of Psychology, Logic, Ethics, Metaphysics, and Religion. Thus we discover various levels which the "need of completion" has to pass through. As the various steps of this hierarchy of the sciences are scaled the *ideal objects* within self-consciousness become more and more comprehensive and significant. Also, the content becomes more and more unseen and spiritual, and there is no final goal discernible in front of the individual or of the race in the transmutation of reality. Why, then, concede reality to the elementary stages of the ascent and deny it to the more advanced ones? I am bound to say that I cannot understand why. It is the advanced stages which have made the world what it is on its physical side and on every other side. The final goal, as already stated, is not in sight; and, further, is not to be conceived in any perceptual, pictorial sense. But we proceed by taking each object as it is on its own level and meaning, and passing on and on to its further meaning and significance. If such a mode of viewing things can be presented in as simple and intelligible way as possible to mankind I believe that a universal response will be found among many men and women of ability and good-will. And thus we win them to a form of religion which will be constant in its nature, and which will view physical existence as preliminary to the formation of the reality of the "second dimension" found within self-consciousness, and ever deepening there as an experience of the things of the spirit. At the

same time the "forward view"—the "need of completion"—will constantly pass from natural objects to ideal ones, and when the passage backward to natural objects is taken, as it will have constantly to be taken, it will cast its halo and glory even on the natural objects themselves. It is something of this nature that seems to me to be the legitimate outcome of all branches of science, history, philosophy, and religion.