V.—THE CONCEPTION OF THE UNKNOWN IN ENGLISH PHILOSOPHY.

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ALONG with the emphasis on experience as the starting-point of philosophy and the sole criterion of its conclusions, which is characteristic of the English development, has gone a recurrent reference to a region beyond our ken. The one conception is indeed the counterpart of the other. The principle that only what enters into or is implied in experience is available as a basis for any philosophic doctrine, usually signifies the restriction of knowledge within certain limits; the implication being that whatever lies beyond these limits is unknowable or at least unknown. This self-limitation of knowledge, like the experiential attitude itself, is connected with the practical trend of English thought. A characteristic note of the doctrine that knowledge is confined to certain aspects or portions of reality, has been the contention that the sphere which is accessible to knowledge comprises all that concerns the guidance of action or the conduct of life: what lies beyond is matter of speculation rather than of practical concern.¹ This is the general and practical basis of the doctrine, whatever be the particular theoretic argument advanced in support of it. But the precise theories of a known and an unknown sphere that are upheld by successive thinkers (and, connected therewith, their ideas of the relation between theory and practice) undergo development, just as do their precise conceptions of the nature of knowledge and experience. And these are implicated with each other. The development of the conception of experience is correlative with an advance of view as to what is beyond experience, or what it is that is unknown or unknowable. In the present paper, taking for granted the former,² I wish to outline the latter development and to show its connexion with the other.

¹ Cf. Locke, *Essay conc. Human Understanding*, i., 1, 5 and 6; ii., 23, 12.

² Cf. a previous article in *MIND*, vol. xiii., N.S., No. 51. The present paper was written not long after that.

The conception of experience that mainly dominates the philosophy of Locke and his immediate successors is that of a set of discrete data, in the connexion of which knowledge arises. Although their philosophy, both in its impulse and in its effect, is a progressive effort to get rid of the idea of explaining experience from what exists outside it, the view they take of the fundamental constitution of experience is nevertheless residual from such explanations. When knowledge or experience is taken as originating from the interaction of individual minds and a material world, which are supposed to exist independently of knowledge, the results of the contact on the experient consciousness—whether they are called ‘sensations’ or ‘impressions’ or ‘ideas’—are naturally taken as isolated facts apprehended irrelatively to one another, and as forming both the source and the primary object-matter of knowledge. And when the question of the ultimate origin of ideas is abstracted from or dismissed as irrelevant, without their nature being reconsidered *de novo*, the supposition of them as essentially discrete objects of consciousness is left as a preconception controlling the inquiry from the outset. This is the view of experience that forms the basis of the traditional sensationist or empirical philosophy.

Thus far we have only a recapitulation of the character and kinship of this theory of ideas. But when we proceed to consider the working-out of the hypothesis, there appears as its inevitable counterpart or consequence the conception of something unknown and unknowable as a background and offset of what is known. The philosophy that begins from the antithesis of mental and material existence goes on the supposition that the mental facts which arise from their contact are representative of the material facts which condition the appearance of the mental; and the conscious states or ideas being considered more intimately and directly known than the ulterior objects imaged by or in them, the material existents come to wear a more or less inferential and problematic aspect. This affords the premisses for the sceptical conclusion. If mental facts are the only immediate objects of consciousness, what assurance have we that there are other real objects at all? What warrant is there for assuming any known existence whatever, other than the conscious states themselves?

When Locke initiates¹ the independent investigation of

¹The same drift underlies Hobbes's work, and is not without its parallel in Locke's Continental predecessors. But the ‘new philosophy,’ as Berkeley calls it, attains distinct expression only in the later thinkers, as is evidenced by the markedly epistemological rather than ontological character of the philosophy of Locke and his successors.

experience and the nature of ideas, while at the same time the prior assumptions are not fully discarded, ideas still retain a representative and things an extraneous character. There is much ambiguity in Locke's account of the originals of knowledge. This is no doubt partly due to the transition he is effecting from the dogmatic to the critical standpoint. But the statements he makes and the conclusions he draws warrant our ascribing them in large measure to insufficient transcendence of the assumptions which his general methodological attitude is fitted to avoid. According to his explicit statements, ideas are representative of extraneous things that are apprehended only through their means; while they are themselves apprehended objects of knowledge. "Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them."¹ "It is evident the mind knows not things immediately, but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them. Our knowledge therefore is real only so far as there is a conformity between our ideas and the reality of things."² Such assertions combine to suggest an antithesis of inner and outer—internal ideas and external things—that is not far removed from the separate-entity theory of pre-critical thought. In conjunction with this, moreover, goes Locke's mode of distinguishing primary and secondary qualities. Ideas, he says, are produced in the mind by the action of things or bodies existing outside it, and the ideas in the mind correspond to qualities or powers in the bodies. Further, some of the ideas resemble the qualities that produce them, others do not. Or to state the matter from the other side, in the one case there are qualities in the bodies which produce ideas like themselves in the mind, and so are patterns or archetypes of the ideas; whereas in the other case the qualities of the bodies are powers of the former qualities (or of the bodies in virtue of these) to produce in the mind ideas unlike themselves. These are the primary and the secondary qualities respectively: the former (figure, motion, etc.) existing as qualities in the bodies whether they are perceived or not. The latter (colour, sound, etc.) only as perceived by the mind and attributable to bodies only as powers of the primary. According to this mode of statement, then, ideas or mental facts are either copies of material qualities or representative of and correspondent to them without being their similitudea.

¹ *Essay*, iv., 1, 1. ² *Ibid.*, iv., 4, 3.

Material facts are either primary, that is, qualities essential to or constitutive of bodies, or secondary, that is, dependent on the different modifications of the primary and incident to there being minds to be affected by them in certain ways.¹ Locke's philosophy wavers between accepting and rejecting this hypothesis. But although his own statements frequently indicate its inadequacy, he never thoroughly succeeds in surmounting it.

So far Locke's account imports that the constituents of matter and mind are qualities or characters and ideas correspondent to each other. But besides the clear and distinct ideas² corresponding each for each to material qualities, we have always, when they are united together in complex ideas, the confused or obscure idea of something in which they inhere or to which they belong. This idea of a something in which qualities subsist is our idea of 'substance'; which is that of a general substrate or support of particular coexistent qualities. But, Locke proceeds, we have no knowledge as to what such a substance is, other than the qualities we ascribe to it. It is "nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities we find existing"—a something, we know not what, besides or beyond the qualities we know.³ Further, we are as ignorant of the nature of a supposed spiritual or mental substance, as the substrate of ideas, as of the corporeal substance or matter. In either case all we know is the characters apprehended as pertaining to them; and although in each case we assume a support of these properties, we know not what it is beyond the properties themselves. Locke is careful to add however, that while, in default of a clear and distinct idea of them, we do not know the ultimate nature of such existents; still, from our not having this knowledge we cannot conclude against the reality of either, and are rather assured of the reality of both.⁴ The significance of this doctrine is twofold. In the first place, it reinforces the antithesis of mental and material substance and the representative theory of knowledge, while yet suggesting their transcendence by insisting that the ideas of secondary qualities at any rate are not copies of external facts; but are original (albeit originated) appearances in the mind, conformable to 'things' only as being the natural and necessary outcome of their contact

¹ *Essay*, ii., 8, 7 ff.

² *Ibid.*, ii., 2, 1. "There is nothing can be plainer to a man than the clear and distinct perception he has of those simple ideas."

³ *Ibid.*, ii., 23, 1-4. ⁴ *Ibid.*, §§ 5 and 16.

with 'minds'.¹ But secondly, the conception that mental and material substance are alike unknown in their ultimate natures implies an opposition to the view of mind and mental facts as certain or categorical in any respect in which matter and material facts are only inferential and hypothetic; which suggests the doctrine that the mental and the material are correlative or correspondent characters exhibiting the nature of one otherwise unknown reality, which is conceived only as conditioning the knowledge these characters convey.

It is more especially with respect to the former point that Berkeley interprets Locke. He denies the validity of the distinction between the ideas of primary and secondary qualities as respectively resembling and not resembling external things. If the secondary qualities as actually apprehended are mental, so also are the primary, since the two sorts are interdependent and inseparable. "Where the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also, to wit, in the mind and nowhere else."² Proof is wholly wanting that any ideas are copies of things or that an idea can be like anything but an idea. And if this is so, the conception of a material substrate of sensible qualities becomes both unnecessary and unintelligible; for the sensible qualities themselves, as they are actually experienced by us, are the only material existents we can ever know, and our experience is quite the same with or without a supposed material substance underlying them.³ Berkeley's philosophy is thus primarily directed against the supposition of independent material things as archetypes of ideas and ideas as ectypes of material things. But the trend of his thought is not at all towards denial or doubt of a knowledge of reality: on the contrary, the key to its whole motive and sequence is contained in the removal of the possibility, which he sees that the supposition in question involves, that all our knowledge is only appearance and never reaches the reality supposed to be known.⁴ Accordingly, in opposition to the doctrine of the representative character of ideas he insists that the ideas or sensible qualities are themselves real. Among his earlier jottings he had written: "Ideas of sense are the real things or archetypes. Ideas of imagination,

¹ Cf. iv., 4, 4.

² *Principles of Human Knowledge*, § 10; cf. 73 and 99; *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (*Works*, ed. Fraser, 1901, vol. i.), pp. 397-405.

³ *Principles*, §§ 16-24; *Dialogues*, pp. 408-411. ⁴ Cf. §§ 86-88.

dreams, etc., are copies, images of these.”¹ And in the *Principles*² he says: “The ideas imprinted on the senses . . . are called *real things*: and those excited in the imagination . . . are more properly termed *ideas* or *images of things*, which they copy and represent”. But the involuntary and unalterable nature of the ideas of sense requires some hypothesis to account for their origin, and to explain the distinction between them and the ideas of imagination. Berkeley finds this in the conception that although our ideas have no archetypes in any material existent, their archetypes exist ‘in some other mind,’ namely, universal mind. The occurrence and order of ideas are independent of the finite individual mind; but in universal or infinite mind are to be found both the originals of ideas and the originating power which Locke erroneously ascribed to matter.³

The point of Berkeley’s philosophy then is—and this is his own statement of its purport⁴—that by exposing the nonentity of an abstract material substrate of perceptible qualities, and substituting for it all-comprehensive mind, it serves to counteract the sceptical tendency apparently involved in Locke’s position. For if the principle or agency to which we refer the substantiality of ‘things’ and the production of ‘ideas’ is spiritual and not material, there seems no difficulty in holding that ideas are truly real, and so uniting (as is Berkeley’s design⁵) the convictions of common-sense and reflexion—that ‘those things we immediately perceive are the real things’ and that ‘the things immediately perceived are ideas, which exist only in the mind’. But while Berkeley’s philosophy tends to break down the opposition between experience and reality, by assimilating ideas and things, it fails to provide an account of the distinction between ideas as existing *within* and *beyond* the individual mind. Moreover it accepts without criticism the distinction between mind and its ideas, and the conception that their relation involves primarily that the ideas are the objects of the mind. Consequently, when Hume proceeds to apply to mental substance the same reasoning as Berkeley had applied to material, we are left with the equation, idea = object or existent, without either things or minds as anywise distinct from the ideas themselves. Hume’s criticism, founding (like the doctrines of Locke and Berkeley) on ‘particular perceptions’ or ideas which are quite ‘distinct’ from one another, maintains the

¹ *Commonplace Book* (*Works*, vol. i.), p. 52. ² § 33.

³ *Principles*, §§ 29 and 90; *Dialogues*, pp. 451-458.

⁴ *E.g.* in the passages just referred to. ⁵ *Cf.* p. 484.

invalidity alike of any material 'existence distinct from the mind and perception' and of mind conceived as 'distinct from the particular perceptions'.¹ On this view, if there exists anything else besides ideas it is at all events unknown and unknowable. Hence Hume's position is the direct sequel of that other interpretation or aspect of Locke's theory, which was indicated a few paragraphs back, that what is really implied in the conception of a 'somewhat' beyond the actual contents of experience is that these contents are conditioned by some otherwise unknown reality. For what alone is definitely expressed in positing, beyond perceptible qualities, an unknown substrate 'wherein they do subsist and from which they do result,' is on the one hand that the known is bounded by the unknown, and on the other that in the unknown lies somehow the cause or the explanation of the known. And when the implications of the assumed irrelative character of ideas are, in Hume's hands, worked out to a logical conclusion, whatever is *without* experience is dismissed as unknowable; the 'ultimate cause' of ideas being 'perfectly inexplicable' and its nature for ever indeterminable by human reason.²

The intuitional or 'common sense' philosophy of Reid and Hamilton, which follows as a reaction against the Lockian development, is, as I stated in my former article, an attempt to establish the validity of knowledge by maintaining its intrinsically objective character in opposition to the subjectivity of the sensationist doctrines. But although Reid is emphatic in his denial that subjective ideas are known with a certainty that does not extend to objective things, and Hamilton equally so in his assertion that consciousness or experience testifies to the reality of existence beyond itself; they uphold the objectivity of knowledge, only at the expense of reinstating the antithesis of individual mind and material world as factors in its production. The principles of relation, which are taken as securing the objectivity of knowledge, are referred to another source than the terms they combine; mental and material existence being conceived as conjoint originators of knowledge. That escape is impossible, on this hypothesis, from the sceptical issue which their philosophy seeks to avoid, becomes apparent when Hamilton proceeds to distinguish between the characters ascribed to these existents and their actual being. Reid's rehabilitation of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities differs

¹ *Treatise of Human Nature*, i., 2, 6; 4, 2 and 5.

² *Treatise*, i., 3, 5 (ed. Green and Grose), p. 385; (ed. Selby-Bigge), p. 84.

from the mode of statement which Locke countenances, primarily in his insistence (following Berkeley) that there is no warrant for holding that any mental fact only represents or copies a material fact. Mental states and material qualities, he says, 'are not of kin to' each other, 'nor resemble' each other 'in any one feature'.¹ But while this position is valid as against the theory of representative perception, it implies either an immediate knowledge of the material world, which is inconsistent with the alleged disparateness of matter and mind; or that the material world is known only as a 'suggestion' of mental states. In point of fact Reid emphasises these alternatives in his *Essays* and *Inquiry* respectively.² But in neither case does he transcend the conception of duplicate existence—sensations and qualities or mental and material facts correspondent to each other,—even while he denies that the relation between them is that of resemblance or simple repetition. Moreover, his doctrine of perception, taken in conjunction with his statement of the difference between primary and secondary qualities—that in the case of the former we know equally well both the quality and our perception of it, whereas we know the latter qualities only as powers in bodies occasioning the perceptions,³—points in the direction of Hamilton's view. For if certain qualities of matter are unknown in themselves and known only as relative to our perception, the question again arises whether any qualities at all are known absolutely and immediately; or wherein consists the warrant of immediate knowledge.

Hamilton maintains that the secondary qualities, so far as they are known, are solely mental or subjective facts; while the known primary qualities or material and objective facts are apprehended directly in so far as they are in immediate contact with the sense organs, and indirectly or inferentially in so far as they are not 'now and here' present.⁴ In other words, his criterion of immediate knowledge is presence in consciousness as a mode of mind or proximity to the organism as a mode of matter. He asserts accordingly both that material existence is in general less directly and certainly known than mental existence and that we have an immediate

¹ *Works* (ed. Hamilton), i., 128.

² *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, p. 123 ff.; *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, p. 258 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, i., 318 ff.

⁴ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, vol. ii., lects. 24 and 27; *Dissertations* (Reid's *Works*, vol. ii.), B and D. Hamilton's conception of intermediate or secundo-primary qualities does not alter his main position. The point at issue is further discussed by Ferrier, *Institutes of Metaphysic*, sect. i., prop. 5; and J. Grote, *Exploratio Philosophica*, i., 101-102, 253-254.

knowledge of the material world. But the two positions are mutually contradictory. To get a consistent statement they require alike to be replaced by the conception that all knowledge, whether of mental or material facts, has both an immediate and a mediate aspect—a conception which Hamilton never reaches. In the end he is driven, by the force of his own logic, to put the two existents quite on a par; but it is only to deny a competent knowledge of either. For he holds that, whether the attributes of mind and of matter—the characters we attribute to these two realities—are known directly or through the intervention of some form of representational consciousness, in neither case have we a warrant for maintaining that the substantial or actual nature of their existence is thereby apprehended. His conclusion is: "Mind and matter, as known and knowable, are only two different series of phenomena or qualities; mind and matter, as unknown and unknowable, are the two substances in which these two different series of phenomena or qualities are supposed to inhere. The existence of an unknown substance is only an inference we are compelled to make from the existence of known phenomena; and the distinction of two substances is only inferred from the seeming incompatibility of the two series of phenomena to coinhere in one."¹

The outcome of this phase of doctrine is accordingly as sceptical as that which preceded it. If we accept as the data of knowledge certain definite and indisputable facts, then whether we treat these facts as so many isolated items of knowledge (as the sensationist philosophy does) or regard knowledge as requiring the supplementation of these by another order of indisputable facts (as in the intuitionist doctrine); in either case aught else turns out to be unknowable, or to be knowable only in respect of its existence but not of its nature. Or to vary the statement: Whether we regard matter and mind as being apprehended only in or as discrete characters occurring in consciousness or as existents preconditioning consciousness, on either view an impassable chasm appears between the facts as they are apprehended in knowledge and anything else beyond them. If we refuse, with Hume, to assume the disparity of the mental and the material, we get *one* unknowable reality; if we accept it, as Hamilton does, we get *two*. But in the one case as in the other the source of the theory of unknowability is the conception that ideas themselves lack referential or connective

¹ *Lectures on Metaphysics*, i., 138; cf. *Discussions*, pp. 639-640.

character: they are supposed to be neither continuous with one another nor with the reality they apprehend. We can avoid this result only by recognising that ideas are not irrelative, but thoroughly relative—relative both to one another and to what is beyond though continuous with them.

The resuscitation of the purely empirical standpoint in the doctrines of Brown and Mill is chiefly noteworthy, in the present reference, for the additional evidence it affords of inability to give a satisfactory account of knowledge on the same general presuppositional basis. Brown, like Hume, avoids the preconception of a distinction between mental and material or inner and outer facts. But he leaves us with modes of mind as the only known facts; while matter is inferred as conditioning their occurrence, and although so far known as regards its existence, it is unknown in its nature. Mill upholds Berkeley's hypothesis of the sufficiency of mind and explains matter as erroneously suggested by inseparable association of mental states. But he avers that our conscious states themselves disclose 'a final inexplicability'. Both theories, therefore, renounce the doctrine of representative knowledge—that there are material and mental facts correspondent to each other. Yet neither gets rid of the unknowable. Brown finds it in matter, Mill in mind. And the grounds on which Mill posits an inscrutable reality underlying the phenomena of consciousness are precisely such as disclose the initial error from which the doctrine springs. Having applied the associational view of knowledge in order to explain the conception of an external material world, and found the rationale of this conception in the fact that our experience at any instant not only consists of definite impressions or ideas actually present, but also contains a reference to an indefinite background of associated ideas regarded as supplying the conditions of our actual or present consciousness, Mill proceeds to inquire whether such an explanation is applicable likewise in the case of the other alleged reality beyond the occurrences of consciousness—the internal or mental existent. He concludes in the negative. The conception of mind as well as of matter is, he says, that of a 'something' contrasted with its manifestations or definitely known character. But the phenomena of memory and expectation—of experience of a past or a future in, and as continuous with, the present—forbid us to account for the whole of our consciousness by its actual content together with a reference to an indefinite background of allied content. For these phenomena are

unintelligible except on the hypothesis either that a succession of consciousnesses can be aware of themselves as a succession or that the mind is something quite different from a succession of consciousnesses. Since, Mill concludes, we can comprehend neither of these alternatives we must acknowledge this truth—that what is past or future can yet be apprehended in the present—as an inexplicable fact to which no theory is adequate.¹ Or as he expresses his conclusion in another passage, we are compelled to acknowledge in mind a reality which is known to itself phenomenally as a series of consciousnesses, but is in its real nature unknowable.²

Now one need not be prepared to maintain either that Mill's theory of matter is adequate or that it could under any circumstances be made adequate to the phenomena of mind. On the contrary, the outcome which the theory has indicates its inadequacy. But what concerns us here is that it is the assumption of the essential disconnexion of conscious states, or the absence from them of all inherent referential character, that leads Mill to assert the inexplicability of the actual phenomena of consciousness, and conjointly, the existence of an unknowable reality underlying them. In other words, the preponderance given to the discreteness over the continuity of mental states, which had ruled the Lockian development, is here once more carried to a consistent issue. The Berkeleyian strain in Mill's thought causes the stress to fall on *mind* as the unknowable existent which is taken to be implied in experience. But in his case as in Hume's it is the implications of the continuity of experience, reacting on the presupposition of its discontinuity, that give the general result which is the self-refutation of their philosophy. And as we have found in Hamilton's theory, the counterview which reasserts the continuity of consciousness, but seeks its relations in a source that transcends its terms, fails in the end to avoid the same general conclusion.

But further, Hamilton's philosophy presents an additional phase of doctrine that makes evident the final concurrence in outcome of his mode of thought and that which he opposes. This further phase follows from the other so soon as the 'incompatibility' of mental and material existence is taken as not excluding their union in a common and more ultimate source or ground. However disparate mind and matter are, they are relative to each other, and this fact signifies the con-

¹ *Examinations of Hamilton's Philosophy*, pp. 247-248.

² *Ibid.*, p. 263.

nexion as well as the distinction of the two. Hamilton maintains accordingly that not only are the qualities of mind and matter respectively relative to a substance which transcends these qualities, but they are known only in correlation to each other. All qualities, both of mind and of matter, are thus known only as relative to or conditioned by one another. In general, each fact known is known only as limited or conditioned by other facts known together with it. Hence knowledge is only of the conditioned: the unconditioned is unknown and unknowable. But what is conditioned implies the unconditioned as its complement or ground;—implies its *existence* (according to Hamilton), although it is *known* only as the negative of the relative and conditioned. We can know existence only as conditioned, but we cannot avoid at the same time positing unconditioned existence, albeit unknowable or known only negatively as complementary to the conditioned.¹ The essential purport of such a doctrine as this is that whatever is known, is known only as relative to something else; each item of knowledge being in the end relative to all other items, and all of them alike relative to the unknown. But as Hamilton holds it the doctrine is both inconsistent in itself and at variance with the other principles of his philosophy. For, in the first place, a merely negative conception is a psychological impossibility: it must have some positive features, however contrary they are to the conception to which it is opposed. To be conceived as existing at all, therefore, anything must be positively and not simply negatively conceived; to be known as existing it must be positively, however meagrely, known.² But again, and apart from this, the principle that knowledge is only of 'the relative as variously related' is contradictory both of an abstract opposition between relations and terms, and the supposition of determinate existents as prior conditions of knowledge. For it is implied in the relativity of knowledge that known existence

¹ *Dissertations*, pp. 935, 965; *Discussions*, pp. 12-14.

² I cannot here discuss the reintroduction (by Hamilton, especially *Discussions*, p. 15; and Mansel, *Limits of Religious Thought*, lects. iv., v.) in the form of belief of what is excluded from the sphere of knowledge. It bears, of course, on the practical aspect of the question and raises the problem of the relation between theory and practice. This much at least may be said, that no theory is satisfactory which simply leaves these two contrasted with each other, and that from the theoretical point of view the distinction between belief and knowledge can only refer to the less and the more definitely known. Cf. below. A recent statement in line with Hamilton's and Mansel's doctrine is that of S. H. Hodgson, *Metaphysic of Experience*, iv., 204 ff.

is phenomenal to consciousness and therefore cannot account for its origin.

With respect to the former of these points Hamilton's position gets corrected in Spencer's philosophy. "The unconditioned," Spencer says, "must be represented as positive and not negative." Every proof of the relativity of knowledge postulates the existence of something beyond the relative; and as all existence is, as such, positive, all consciousness is a positive consciousness of existence. What is conceived or known as existing beyond knowledge cannot, therefore, be thought of as *only* negative of the knowable: if it eludes distinct consciousness, it is at the very least something more and other than the limited or conditioned; something, therefore, of which we have 'a positive though vague consciousness'. In other words, the very character of knowledge which involves that all that is definitely known is relative and conditioned, involves likewise the indefinite consciousness of that which transcends definite knowledge. For the definite is such only by virtue of arising out of the indefinite, which persists throughout the variations of definite thought: all definition implies something which is defined—something which, while still undefined, is real. Spencer concludes accordingly: "Our consciousness of the unconditioned being literally the unconditioned consciousness, or raw material of thought to which in thinking we give definite forms, it follows that an ever-present sense of real existence is the very basis of our intelligence. As we can in successive mental acts get rid of all particular conditions and replace them by others, but cannot get rid of that undifferentiated substance of consciousness which is conditioned anew in every thought; there ever remains with us a sense of that which exists persistently and independently of conditions."¹

But if this is so, Spencer's characteristic doctrine that the 'actuality lying behind appearances' is unknowable, cannot be upheld. Not only have we, as he maintains, an indefinite consciousness of reality as the ground and warrant of whatever is definitely known; but reality is precisely that which our knowledge progressively defines. Spencer regards the conception that we have an indefinite consciousness of reality besides the definite consciousness which constitutes knowledge or appearances, as the only safeguard against a sceptical issue. But his own view only converts the sceptical into an agnostic attitude. For our 'indefinite consciousness

¹ *First Principles*, § 26.

of the unconditioned' does not, in his view, preclude reality from being 'for ever unknowable'. But this is self-contradictory. 'Unconditioned existence' is indeed unknowable. But this does not mean that we have to posit once for all an unknowable existent 'beyond conditioned existence' and then confine ourselves to the appearances which are inconsistently said to 'manifest' this reality. It means that existence so far forth as unconditioned—that is, not characterised by being brought into relation with already known existence—is assuredly unknown, but not therefore incapable of becoming known. The distinct articulation of this principle belongs, however, to a mode of philosophy to which Spencer's statements are inadequate. For the proof that existence is intrinsically knowable lies in the truth that 'existence' is *for* knowledge just what is actually or potentially known. Unless any existent is either known or continuous with the known it cannot be anything for knowledge at all, that is, cannot exist even in thought and hence cannot be thought as unknowable. The defect, then, of the Spencerian doctrine lies not in the relativity of knowledge but in not making the relativity thorough enough. Hamilton and Spencer propound relativism in opposition to absolutism. But their doctrine is itself absolutism in the sense of maintaining existence irrelative to knowledge. That anything exists but cannot be known, even if we add that it must be thought, involves that existence is not as such relative to knowledge—that knowledge and existence are not essentially relative to each other.

The argument against the conception of unknowable existence is, in the English development of philosophy, first formulated by Ferrier; and a basis laid for the overthrow of the doctrine of nescience. The true remedy against undue declarations of ignorance is, Ferrier says, to institute an independent inquiry into what the nature of knowledge (and by implication, of ignorance) really is. When we do so, we find that unknowable existence is a nonentity which is only a phantom of the true reality we know. Whatever are the deficiencies of Ferrier's philosophy,¹ his position here is in essentials impregnable. What his principle involves is that knowledge cannot be *only* phenomenal and relative, since we cannot know anything as *phenomenal* without implying what is not phenomenal, and this means that there is a non-phenomenal significance *in knowledge*.² And further, we

¹ Some of these were indicated in my former paper.

² *Institutes of Metaphysic*, § 1, prop. 14, 18, 20.

cannot posit, either as determinately known or as inherently unknowable, any existent irrelative to knowledge; for we can only know what existence is by asking what it is for knowledge, and it is the differentiation of features in knowledge that is our sole basis for distinctions in reality.¹ Real existence, then, cannot be unknowable; on the contrary it is precisely what is knowable. For knowledge the only unknowable is the unintelligible or contradictory; and to suppose that real existence is unintelligible or contradictory is to belie the nature of knowledge. Further, ignorance being simply want or deficiency of knowledge, there can be no ignorance of what it is not possible to know. "There can be an ignorance only of that of which there can be a knowledge." In other words, the sphere of knowledge and that of ignorance are coincident; the knowable is also the only 'ignorable'. Reality, therefore, or any character of reality, may be either known or unknown—what we know or what we are ignorant of,—but it cannot be incompatible with the nature of knowledge; and the circumstance that knowledge cannot extend to what is incompatible with its nature—that is, the self-contradictory—is not a defect of knowledge but its strength, that which makes it knowledge and therefore knowledge of reality.²

This conclusion has been enforced and amplified by more recent thinkers. There is substantial agreement among recent writers that the alleged eclipse of knowledge by the shadow of unknowable reality is fallacious and self-inconsistent. Present-day controversy concerns the specific nature and the relative extent of our knowledge rather than its general validity. The centre of interest has shifted from the question how far our knowledge is real to the question how much we really know.³ Is not our actual knowledge of reality infinitesimal when compared with the reality that is unknown or at best apprehended only in uncertain outline or by vague surmise? Or to put it otherwise: Is not the definite or certified knowledge we have yet attained only taken as valuable at all because it is supplemented by vague guesses which have a practical significance but lack theoretic confirmation? And must we not find in such inchoate apprehension the *suggestion* towards more adequate knowledge, and in this in turn the *amendment* of our conjectural

¹ *Institutes of Metaphysic*, introd., §§ 54-60.

² *Ibid.*, § 2, prop. 1-3; § 8, prop. 1-5.

³ This aspect of the matter was distinctly expressed by Hamilton (*Discussions*, pp. 629-630). Cf. Prof. Pringle-Pattison's *Scottish Philosophy*, p. 206 ff.

beliefs? There are the questions underlying present discussions. But in order to get a clear issue we require to keep the past development of philosophy before us; for our present topics are simply the forms into which the historic problems have been thrown for us by the discussions of our predecessors.

To summarise and conclude the foregoing outline: The conception that experience consists fundamentally of definite items of consciousness that are apprehended irrelatively to one another, and that knowledge arises by way of extrinsic connexion of these data, or fails to be knowledge if they cannot get connected, leads to the conclusion that we have no guarantee of the ultimate validity of our knowledge. And the counter-conception, that the desiderated relations are supplied by principles of another order than the data themselves, has a similar result. The source of both theories is the supposition that mind and matter exist, as they are known, independently of the knowledge of them, and that in these known existents are to be found the preconditions and the explanation of experience. But the outcome of this view is, that since we know matter and mind only in so far as they are characterised in knowledge, what they may be apart from knowledge we do not and cannot know; and as they are already posited as existents prior to knowledge, they seem to be unknowable in their real nature and known only in respect of certain characters which enter into knowledge. When it is recognised that the two existents are known only relatively to each other and must have a common ground of relation, there still seems to be unknowable existence although it transcends the nature alike of matter and of mind. The only means of escape from this conclusion is the recognition that mind and matter or subjective and objective existence¹ are, as they are known, realities only *within* experience. The presupposition both of the sensationist and intuitionist philosophy is that subject and object exist outside experience and condition it, or if they do not so exist, knowledge is restricted to certain conditional appearances and cannot reach the conditioning reality itself. In the one case experience is taken as the product of known subjective and objective factors; in the other as having an unknown source beyond known existence. But in either case ultimate reality, or reality as it truly is, seems unknowable. In Spencer's doctrine, which may be taken as com-

¹ One may take these antitheses as in the main coincident, without discussing their relation or their precise significance.

binning sensationist and intuitionist strains, known existence both subjective and objective is taken as belonging to appearance and not reality, while the distinction between them is accepted without inquiry into its source in experience. It is only when we are through with the start from experience that the subjective and the objective are seen to be, as known existents, features within our experience and yet a valid characterisation of reality. For while subject and object are indeed known only relatively to each other, they express in their varying and advancing correlation precisely the degree in which reality is known.

What alone is meant, then, by anything's existing apart from or independently of the knowledge of it, is that what we know always implies more to be known or that what we know is not fully known. But the very terms of its assertion signify that it is knowable. All our experience implies a beyond—an unknown correlative to the known; but in order to be anything for experience at all the beyond must be continuous with experience. And this involves that much that is not definitely characterised may be known indefinitely in anticipation of more definite knowledge;—that the unknown reality is not wholly unknown, and that it is what as knowledge advances becomes progressively known; for knowledge becomes definite only by defining what is indefinite though none the less real. In fine, knowledge and existence, though not coincident, are of a piece with each other. However far, then, unknown reality may transcend our specifically human experience, this experience is itself intimately linked with the reality beyond, and has its whole significance in being a progressive apprehension of and participation in *real* existence.