MIND

A QUARTERLY REVIEW

OF

PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.

I.—ON ACTIVE ATTENTION.

BY F. H. BRADLEY.

My object in this paper is naturally not to attempt a complete treatment of its topic. I was led to write it because, in endeavouring to make clear the essence of volition, I found myself embarrassed constantly by the claims of attention. And rightly or wrongly I resolved to remove beforehand this recurring obstacle. I am therefore going to try, so far as I can, first to fix the meaning of active attention in accordance with the ordinary usage of language, and next to deal with a certain number of questions concerning it. That the usage of language to some extent varies I readily admit, but this variation is on the whole, I think, consistent with one central meaning. And in psychology to employ words in a sense opposed to their everyday signification is surely most ill-advised. It is difficult to suppose that the established use has no reason behind it. It is hard to imagine that the reader and the writer could ever wholly free their minds from the influence of association even if that were irrational. And in short, if we cannot employ terms in something like their ordinary sense, it is better to make new ones than to abuse and pervert the old. In the case of attention the abuse has even been carried to such a point that attention has been used to include and cover what every one does and must call a state of inattention. Such an attempt must naturally be short-lived, and we need not trouble ourselves to discuss it. It will repay us better to ask what is the ordinary meaning of our term and what

that meaning implies. In this article I shall take attention always (unless the reader is warned) in the sense of *active attending*.¹ And I do not mean by this merely a state in which in some sense we may be said both to be active and to attend. I mean by it a state in which the attention itself is involved in and follows from an agency on our part.

I will at once proceed to consider the facts in the light of ordinary language. If I am sitting at ease with my mind not dwelling, as we say, on any subject, but wandering aimlessly as I regard some well-known scene, I am what every one would call inattentive generally. If we keep to ordinary language I am not attending here to anything at all. I am occupied by no one object, and even that mode of sensation and feeling which may be said to predominate, is both diffused and feeble. Let us suppose now that a sudden and acute pain shoots through me, or that without warning a gun is fired close by, my state at once is altered. These things at once occupy me—there is no doubt of that—but am I to be said at once therefore to attend to them? If we use attention strictly for *active* attention we are unable to say this unconditionally. My state becomes attention if I go about consciously to get rid of my pain, or again if I begin to wonder what it is; and the same thing holds, of course with a difference, in the case of my hearing the shot. And I naturally and probably under the conditions do so go on to attend. But suppose that at once, recognising the sound as the report of a gun, I throw myself flat on the ground, have we, with merely so much as that, got active attention? I should deny this, and I should deny it again even if my act has proceeded from the idea of escaping danger and has thus been a real volition.² For attention in the first place, if we follow the usage of language, must have an object, and in the second place it must involve some dwelling on and maintenance of that object, and so by consequence some delay. If an animal hearing a sound pricks

¹ In this and in some other points I am departing to some extent (it seems not worth while to ask in detail how much) from an article in *MIND*, No. 43, 1886. I must beg the reader also not to forget that throughout the present article I am assuming that volition consists in the self-realisation of an idea. There is obviously no space in which to discuss this question here. I may refer the reader provisionally to *MIND*, No. 49, and again to *MIND*, N.S., No. 40. But I propose to deal with the question in future articles.

² For the justification of this see the references given above. The arbitrary limitation of volition to acts of choice is in my view quite indefensible.

its ears and springs at once, and, as we say, by one action, we should not call that attending. But if it pricks its ears and then pauses, we at least perhaps have got attention. There must in brief be an object and its maintenance, and hence we must proceed to inquire about the meaning of these terms.

The mere having of an object or objects is by itself not attention. If I am sitting listlessly, as described above, it cannot be said that I perceive no object. For I certainly have objects before me though I attend to none of them. There may even be some prominent object in my visual field, or there may be some predominant object of hearing, such as the sound of a machine, and yet I need attend actively to neither. And I may be assailed by ideas which are certainly objects, and which maintain themselves as we say even actively, and yet I need not attend to them. I may succeed in not attending to them if and so far as, whenever they recur, I do nothing to maintain them but turn instinctively to something different. Thus to treat attention as the state generally where I have an object would be at least to come into collision with language. I do not attend by the mere perception or thought of an object. I begin to attend when in a further sense I go on to make this my object.

To attend in the proper sense I must by my action support and maintain an object in myself, but we have attention only so far as I maintain it theoretically or at least perceptively. Attention alters something, that is clear, and it is so far practical, but in the sense of altering the existence of the object it is not practical at all. If I turn a handle and so keep up a sound, that by itself is not attention and it need not even in any way imply it. If I turn the screw of a microscope, my act is not in itself attending, and it need not involve attention to the object, though in most cases in fact it does so. If again I move my eyes or my hands and so gain knowledge about an object, that action in the first place need not involve attention. And in any case, so far as I alter the actual thing, that alteration will fall outside of the attention itself. So far as in general my act can be said to create the existence of the object, we have so far not got attention at all. My act is attention only so far as it supports and maintains the ideal presence of the object in my perception. Thus attention is practical but it is not practical except as altering myself, and as so causing the object, unaltered by me, to maintain and to develop itself before me and in me.

In more familiar language we may say that my end in

attention¹ is to maintain an object before me with a view to gain knowledge about it. My aim is thus to develop the object ideally for me as it is in itself, and so to know it. But in saying this we must be on our guard against a possible error, and we must not confine knowledge to a purely intellectual cognition. For clearly I may attend to a beautiful object while I may not be seeking theoretically to understand and comprehend it. I may desire merely in a wide sense to apprehend the object, as when for instance I listen attentively to an air, or with attention observe the development of some pleasure or pain in myself.² The process in both cases is in a wide sense theoretical or ideal, because there is an object in it to which the whole process is referred as an adjective. The object preserves for me its identity and unity and develops itself in the process before me as an individual whole, a whole in which the beginning is qualified by the end, and where on the other hand my act does not make the object to be other than it is. Any such process must deserve the title of ideal or theoretical knowledge, if that is taken in a wide sense, and we need not go on to inquire here how it is related to understanding and truth and to a more strictly intellectual mode of cognition.

It may be objected here that in attention more is really done than to develop the object ideally. The object (it may be said) is always made more prominent and is strengthened by the process, and attention therefore alters the object as well as maintains it. To this I reply that I will ask later whether in attention the object is actually strengthened, and

¹ More accurately 'my end so far as attention is concerned'. My main end may be practical and may seek to alter the thing itself, and the ideal development of the thing in me may be a mere means involved in and consequent on this. See more below.

² So far as the pleasure or pain coming from an object qualifies as an adjective this object for me—or again is taken as an adjective qualifying my self—I can of course attend to it. Otherwise and if the object merely gives pleasure, I can of course attend to the object but so far not to the pleasure or pain, since that is so far not 'objective'. Even if (to pass to another point) an object remains unaltered and does not change when maintained by attention, we may still properly call this permanence the ideal development of the object. The object preserves its ideal identity through the process of time and the change of context, and qualifies itself by that process. When Dr. Stout (*Manual*, p. 65; ed. 2, p. 71) makes attention aim at "the fuller presentation of an object," I quite agree with him, if, that is, I may interpret "presentation" in the sense of my text. I am not sure however that lower down in the same paragraph Dr. Stout does not teach a divergent doctrine. On the subject of attention I am indeed forced in some respects to dissent very strongly from some doctrines that have been urged by Dr. Stout, but I need not enter on that here.

if so in what sense. But any such strengthening, even if it exists always in fact, is none the less, I would urge, accidental. It is an alteration of the object's psychical existence which falls outside the character of attention itself, and is as external to it as are again its physical effects. The only change in psychical existence which really belongs to the essence of attention is the maintenance in and for perception of the object itself. And the object itself though developed by the process cannot be taken as changed by it. And, if it is altered otherwise, its alteration must be regarded as accidental.

Attention is thus negative of any mere psychical interference with the object and its knowledge in me. And it might be said that attention therefore is directed not at all upon the object but simply on myself. The essence of the process (it may be urged) is not to maintain the ideal development of the object, but merely to keep open my self to its appearance in me. Attention will thus consist in the suppression of any psychical fact which would interfere with the object, and its essence therefore is not positive at all, but merely negative. But any such view, though it perhaps might not take us wrong in practice, is really one-sided and in the end inconsistent with itself. And a true doctrine about the general nature of negation would assure us that any such view is false in principle. You cannot, in short, anywhere or in any way negate except from a positive basis. And you cannot suppress in particular whatever is to interfere with a special positive development, unless you have some idea as to what that development is and keep its requirements in mind. But, if so, the process can be seen at once to be more than barely negative. If, in making attention to consist essentially in a mere alteration of yourself, you do not include in that alteration the end and object for which it is made, you clearly have not defined attention nor have you said what you must really have meant. But otherwise you have qualified the process essentially by the positive development of the object. The real development in an ideal form of the real object itself is in fact the positive end¹ which against hindrance is pursued in attention. Our scruples or our prejudices may not allow us to accept what I will call this evident doctrine. But if so we have preferred to make the general fact of knowledge and truth, I do not say inexplicable, but impossible. The merely

¹ Where not itself the direct end it is included in the end as means and is so the indirect end.

negative character of attention would rest in short upon a superficial error.

Attention implies (we have seen) the ideal presence of an object, but it is not confined, we must remember, to thought in the narrower sense of that term. In what we call pure thought the object is not merely in some way developed without loss of identity, but it must itself seem to develop itself by a movement which, if not intrinsic, is at least ideal. On the other hand attention and knowledge are obviously not limited to this. For their result may come from observation and it may be given by sense-experience, and it may depend upon matter of fact without us or within us. At the same time we saw that an ideal synthesis is involved in attention, and the process may therefore be certainly said in a sense to involve thought. When I attend to a sequence of mere fact external or internal, there must be for me in the process a unity which is not merely given but is ideal. There is a single object which is qualified as a whole and at once by the series, and such a qualification cannot be merely given as a succession of facts. If we use in a wide sense the terms thought and idea, attention always, we must say, in this sense involves thinking, and it involves a knowledge the essential nature of which is to be held together by an idea.

But attention in the sense of *active* attention means more than any kind of mere knowledge. It implies (as we have seen) also a volition on my part, and we may with advantage once more here consider the actual facts. Suppose that I am sitting either listless or absorbed,¹ and that I see perhaps a rabbit move or a bird fly across the scene, do I necessarily give them my attention? If again I passively, as we say, accept the current and course of my own thoughts, must I be said also in every case to be actively attending to them? If we follow the usages of language I think we must deny this.² We cannot hold that in every such case my active

¹ These states are very far of course from being the same, and it would be a serious mistake for some purposes to confuse them. I think that they have been so confused with a bad result in connexion with the words *distract* and *distraction*.

² My attitude towards the perceived activity of my own thoughts may in fact be often felt as disagreeably passive and as anything but active. There are statements made on this point which I read with astonishment. And to urge here that a feeling of my passivity must to some extent imply a feeling of my activity would in my opinion be indefensible, at least apart from an inquiry into the meaning of these terms. We want on this whole subject, I will venture to add, less prejudice and dogma and more inquiry, and I believe that in time we shall get it. The appearance of Mr. Loveday's interesting article, since these words were written, has tended to confirm this belief. See *MIND*, N.S., No. 40.

attention must have been present, when nothing (as we should say) has excited and arrested it. Something necessary to make attention has been wanting, and that something is certainly not here the ideal identity of the object. For this may have been present, and may have been present even in a purely logical form, and yet attention itself may have been absent. And thus the reason why I have not actively attended cannot be that I have not thought. The reason is that I have not done anything myself to support and to maintain the object. There have been from time to time objects each with an identity and an ideal development however short, but I on my part have done nothing at all towards actively developing them. The idea of the object was in short really not 'my idea'. It did not go before and itself, directly or by implication, prescribe and bring about its own existence in me. There was in other words no will, and without my willing I do not actively attend. Even where, as in pure thought, an idea develops itself theoretically, we have not got will unless the foregoing idea of that development has itself been thus the cause of its own existence.¹ And where this feature is absent we assuredly have no active attention. In every observation and in all experiencing, if it is indeed actively attentive, we have, in however vague a form, the idea of my perceiving that which is to happen to the object, or we have at least an end which involves as means the ideal development of the object, an end which

¹ Cf. here MIND, No. 49, pp. 25-26. It may indeed be contended that *all* thinking does in the end imply will in this sense. Without pausing to discuss this view I will state in passing that I certainly cannot accept it. Of course, to pass to another point, I should agree that at first in the main the moving ideas in will are practical. The idea of myself, for instance, catching a beast causes me under certain conditions to keep still and to watch the movements of the object. And it can be argued that in the end every theoretical interest is thus ultimately practical. I cannot discuss such a large matter in passing, but I do not think that such a contention in its crude form is defensible. It is one thing to hold that no theoretical or æsthetic interest is in the end barely theoretical or æsthetic. It is quite another thing to propose to subordinate such interests to what is barely practical, without even asking whether a mere practical interest is not itself also in the end incomplete.

Since writing the above I have had the advantage of reading Prof. Royce's interesting book, *The World and the Individual*. I hope that at some future time I may be able to discuss the doctrine there advocated with regard to the internal meaning and purpose contained in all ideas. As I understand this view, I however find myself unable to accept it. I cannot see how in the end and ultimately it is an idea which makes the selection which takes place in knowledge, and I have not succeeded in apprehending clearly the relation of thought to will as it is conceived by Prof. Royce. I hope however to profit by further study of this volume.

is felt in that development to be carrying itself out. And this idea of end operates in determining the process in which itself ceases to be a mere idea and becomes actual fact. Active attention in short everywhere implies volition.¹

But in what sense (this is now the question) does active attention imply will? We must here on each side be on our guard against error. In the first place attention is not the same thing as will. We have noticed already that in its absence volition may be present, and I shall hereafter return to this point. I shall therefore dismiss it here and ask how attention, itself not being will, implies will in its essence. I will begin by dealing with a mistake of a different kind. Attention certainly does not imply volition in the sense that all attention is willed directly. The attention itself is not always the aim of my will. It may or it may not be itself my end, according to the circumstances of the case, and the facts, as soon as we look at them, seem to put this beyond doubt. I may often of course have an idea of attending to this or that, and so go on to attend to it, but no one could say that apart from this there is no active attention. For, in carrying out some purpose without me or within me, I may be undoubtedly attending, and yet, having felt no tendency to wander mentally from my aim, I may as undoubtedly never have directly willed to attend. In short attention is a state which may itself be willed directly, but which certainly need not be so, and which far more usually is not so willed. Its essence is not to be itself an end and object of volition, and it is enough that it should be implied in an end and object which as a state of mind it subserves.

Wherever an end, external or internal, practical or theoretical,² involves in and for its realisation the maintenance and support of an ideal object before me and in me,—that is active attention. If I will to capture an animal, this purpose may imply the keeping of its movements, and perhaps also my own, steadily before me. If I mean to solve a problem, the idea of its solution entails my dwelling theoretically on the means. If I see and desire to go on seeing some show, that idea in carrying itself out involves my abstinence from distracting movements and thoughts, and it involves positively the keeping my eyes and mind open to the continuous perception of the object. In all these cases the attention comes

¹ The doctrine of an attention contrary to will, which is advocated by, for instance, Mr. Shand, in *MIND*, N.S., 16, p. 452, seems to me quite indefensible, if at least attention is to mean active attention.

² These distinctions, the reader should remember, are not the same.

from my will¹ and it is active attention, but you cannot say that the attending itself is itself that end which I willed. But it becomes this end, and it is this end, where the delay and the hindrance to the realisation of my idea is apprehended as in some way consisting in my failing and distraction. The attention itself then goes on to be included explicitly in my idea of the end, and the state of attending is now itself directly willed, and not as before implied incidentally and even conditionally.

Active attention, we may say roughly, is the dwelling ideally on an object so as to do something practical or theoretical to that object or with regard to it. But this dwelling is certainly not always itself included in the idea of my end, it is certainly not always itself the direct aim of my will. If you take a state such as observation and active expectancy,² that state will without doubt always include attention, but it will not include in every case the will so to attend. My immediate end here is to get to know more about the object, to realise it ideally, with or without a further end theoretical or practical. In this direct end is implied the adoption of the necessary means, in other words here my keeping the object before my mind and my assisting it to develop itself in me. But this assistance of mine is not in every case itself specifically willed. It is not itself directly willed except where

¹ The reader will not forget that for me there is no will at all without an idea, and that volition is essentially the self-realisation of an idea. Dr. Stout (*Manual*, pp. 248-251; ed. 2, p. 258) holds that we may have attention and even search without an idea of the object. I cannot agree that in any such case we have a right to speak of active attention, and if I agreed to this I can see then no reason why I should not descend even lower, and speak of attention being present even there where there is perhaps not even so much as perception. The pathological case, as Dr. Stout reports it, does not seem to me to show that the subject had in each case no idea (in fact I think it shows the contrary), but merely that his ideas were exceedingly vague and exceedingly restricted. But, if the opposite could in some way be shown, I should without the least hesitation refuse to admit the presence of either mental search or active attention in such a case.

² The assertion that all expectation implies will is in my opinion indefensible. What we call active expectancy and a sustained attitude towards the future does certainly imply will, but expectation is used also, I should have said, with a wider meaning in which no will is implied. Expectation certainly need not always involve what we call observation. A mere suggestion as to the future or an anticipation of it on which I do not dwell, and again even a judgment about the future need, I should say, none of them imply attention or will, and they clearly need not involve desire. Expectation, as containing essentially attention and a will to know, is used, in short, in a sense which is artificially narrowed (cf. *MIND*, No. 49, p. 16). I have already mentioned that I cannot accept the doctrine that all interest is practical.

its absence, actual or possible, has been brought before me. The delay or the failure in the realisation of my object is one thing, and my failure in respect of this is another thing, and it is only the second of these which calls forth a direct will to attend.

Active attention may therefore be defined as such a theoretic or perceptive occupancy of myself by an object as is due to and involved in a volition of some sort directed on that object. The ideal development of the object in me is thus, directly or indirectly, the realisation of my will. And whatever psychical support, positive or negative, is required to maintain this development, issues therefore from my will and must be regarded as my work. Wherever on the other hand an ideal content is so interesting in itself as of itself to produce, apart from my will, whatever is required for its own psychical maintenance, that maintenance is not active attention and cannot be taken as the work of myself.

The meaning so far given to active attention will, I think, be found in the main to agree with the ordinary employment of that term. The various divergent senses, in which we commonly make use of attention, will be seen by us to waver naturally and pass one into the other. And that sense, which in the above account I have tried to fix and define, hits, I venture to think, the point amid these variations which may be called their centre. In our ordinary use the chief divergence is between active and passive attention. The latter seems equivalent to what may be called the mere occupancy of myself.¹ A sensation or a feeling or an idea, if these are

¹ It would be a reasonable proposal to limit this wide use of passive attention, and to apply the term only in cases where I am occupied by an object before me. The fact that my organs and my mind are given a certain 'direction' towards an object, may perhaps be taken as implied in the ordinary use of attention. To such a limitation I should not be averse, so long as two points were kept clear. (i.) In the first place the aspect of exclusive domination is (we must remember) quite essential, and this aspect is not contained in the mere fact that my mind possesses an object. We have seen that, where I have a variety of objects before me, I may be inattentive to some of them or even to all. (ii.) In the second place, even where an object occupies me and so I passively attend to it, if its control over my mind comes from the activity of the object itself, this control is not my work and there is no active attending. Now these two essential features, first of domination and next of maintenance by my activity, will tend, I fear, to be obscured by the proposed limitation of passive attention. For always in having an object before me my mind naturally may be said in a sense to be 'active,' and, if so, this mental state naturally will tend to be called active attention. And it will be called so where my mental state could not be fairly taken as my own work, and it will be called so even where we have not the domination

sufficiently strong or sufficiently influential, may be said to dominate me or engross me, or also perhaps again to move me, in an eminent sense. Attention here, it will be seen, may be intelligent but is not so essentially, and if, following this line, we make active attention to be the willed procurement of such an occupancy or domination, the element of intelligence, of ideal dwelling on the object, if present is once more not essential. The article which some years ago I published (*MIND*, No. 43) did in fact follow this line, and in the sense which it gave to active attention it to some extent conflicts with the account I now offer. And this is a point which perhaps we must be content to decide arbitrarily, in whichever way we decide it. But with regard to attention which is not active on the part of myself but consists in my domination or passive occupancy, the account which I have given above does not exclude such a meaning. Whether in psychology we are to use attention in this sense I do not attempt to decide, but I am sure that it is a sense the existence of which we cannot afford to forget. Where an idea extrudes others and dominates me simply and so produces volition, my attention to the idea evidently will so far be but passive. Where after the advent of a sensation or a perception I act at once and without delay, my attention, so far as it exists, once more is passive. The action itself certainly is not an attending, and the action may even be not psychical and only physical. And we must decide in the same way where a sensation is, as we say, 'apperceived,' and is modified by the activity of what we call a 'disposition'. This will not be my active attending unless I can be said as a result of my will to maintain and to dwell ideally on the object. Activity is present, if you like, and this activity again may be said, if you please, to cause in a certain sense attention to the object. But the attention once again, so far as it exists, will itself be but passive, and the activity, to whatever subject I refer it, will most certainly not be active attention employed by my self.¹ For we do not have that until, as we have seen, we have an idea and a volition.

I will now go on to show briefly how the main senses of attention pass naturally one into the other. If we begin

which is involved in passive attention. Hence, in the presence of this misleading tendency with all the confusion which it entails, I think it safer to take the line which is followed in the text. But the limitation, I agree, would keep us nearer to everyday usage.

¹ I shall touch on this subject again lower down, and in the meantime may remind the reader that the activity here and the subject of it is taken by some psychologists to be simply physical.

with attention in the low and perhaps improper sense of psychical domination or occupancy, such a psychical fact must normally tend to become the object of a perception. And a prominent object of perception, even apart from its practical side, must tend naturally to become a thing to which I actively attend. It will probably, if it lasts, be dealt with in some volition theoretically or practically, and this will tend to imply a dwelling on it more or less directly, and an ideal maintenance and support thus proceeding from myself. For the suppression of conditions in myself hostile to the undisturbed presence of the idea seems involved in its continuance and development before me. And this suppression, we have supposed, will arise, not directly from the object itself, but at least in part from that object as a means to and as included in my end.¹ And with this we clearly have arrived at an active attending. And such attention tends to pass further into the attention which is itself the end and object of will. For so far as there is mental wandering the original purpose will tend to be frustrated, and hence the remedy of that frustration, if the purpose holds, will normally be suggested as a fresh idea. And this idea realising itself is itself in general my will to be attentive actively. I do not think that any account of attention, which differs materially from the above, will be able in the same way fairly to do justice to the facts alike of language and of experience.

Active attention is not the same as thought or will, but in its essence it implies each, and it therefore possesses the characteristics of both while identical with neither. I will proceed at the cost of some repetition to enlarge on this thesis, using thought as before in a wide sense so as to cover the entire theoretical attitude.

(i.) In the first place attention is not wholly identical with thought, and thought can certainly exist without active attention. Even if thought implied attention, the attention itself would be but one aspect of the thought, for the attention itself does not qualify the object. But it is not even

¹ It may be asked whether that ideal development of the object which is a means to my end may not in itself become so interesting as of itself to engross me, and whether in this case we any longer have active attention. Any difficulty in answering this question arises, I think, from the difficulty of making in fact the abstraction required. So long as and so far as we take the end to remain dominant and controlling, we must speak, I should say, of an active attention. For, so long and so far, the repression of competing psychical factors is taken as coming, not from the mere idea itself, but from the end willed by me.

true that all thought implies active attention, and it cannot be said that in all thought I actively maintain and support an ideal object. There must certainly in thought be on the positive side an ideal continuity, and on the negative side an absence of psychical interference. But no one would say naturally that in all cases I actively procure this result. We might perhaps as naturally say that in all thought I am passive, while the object itself actively produces the result in me. But neither of these extremes would really be tenable. (a) Let us consider first what happens when, as we say, my thought is concentrated and I am fully absorbed in it. Let us take the case of an intense intellectual or æsthetic activity, where the object seems to develop itself before us without help or hindrance. If you insist that here in all cases and throughout I myself am actively attending, I would ask you what it is that I myself am doing with or to the object or myself. And for myself I cannot find that I at least am *always* actively attending. For so far as the ideal development of the object is interesting in itself, the psychical control over my mind is naturally taken to proceed not from myself but direct from the object. (b) Let us examine next my state where, as we should say, I am inattentive altogether. Can we assert that in such a case there actually is no thought at all? My mind is wandering doubtless, and there is no one single object which emerges from the general background and develops itself ideally throughout. But are there no passing objects here that develop themselves ideally before me even for a moment and to the very slightest extent? I cannot myself see how in the face of facts such a view could be sustained. (c) Where I am not (as we say) generally inattentive, but am occupied by, and am perhaps also actively attending to, one continuous central train of thought, is there outside of this central train not any recognition and judgment? It would be, I think, difficult to deny wholly the existence of such thoughts, however passing and sporadic, and yet, if we cannot, then apart from or outside of our active attending we shall once more probably have found thought, and shall certainly have found at least the fact of 'objective reference'. We may in any case rest our conclusion on the two previous instances, if about the third we are inclined to doubt. Thought may certainly exist apart from active attention, and attention itself is not wholly identical with thought.

(ii.) Active attention (to pass to another point) is not the same as will, though it involves will in its essence. Will can undoubtedly exist in the absence of active attention, and, even

where that is present, will must still in a sense be superior to it and prior. (a) Let us first take the case where, without pausing to think about my suggested action, I act at once. We are to suppose that there is present here an idea of what I am about to do, for without such an idea we should certainly not have volition. But in the case supposed the idea realises itself forthwith without any further ideal development, and in such a case we have in the proper sense no attention. I certainly perceive an object, and that object may, as we say, violently strike me, and I may also be dominated and overpowered by the idea of my action on the object, but with all this, if I go on to act at once, I do not actively attend. My attention will under certain conditions, it is true, follow as a consequence, but it has so far had no time in which to develop itself, and so far in fact it is not there. (b) We may do well in this connexion to consider also the case where my attention is willed actually and as such. There is here a special will, a will, that is, to produce the state of attending. We have therefore present here the idea of myself attending, and this idea carrying itself out into existence is the special will to attend. But if any one maintained that this idea also itself must be actively attended to, he would be surely opposing himself to the evidence of fact. And, if we keep to the facts, we must admit here the presence of a will which is itself certainly not attention but which on the contrary conditions it. The idea of myself attending dominates me, and the idea so produces the existence of my attention, but clearly I do not at the same time actively attend to my idea. That would require a further idea and a further volition, and we should thus be driven to enter on a fruitless regress. We assuredly never should arrive at an idea at once the ultimate condition of my attention and itself ultimately attended to. But probably no one could hold with us that will is implied in active attention and that an idea is essential to will, and at the same time maintain that this idea itself must be an object of attention.¹ If then our premises are right we may conclude that attention and will differ, and that attention implies, while on the other hand it is not implied in volition. We must insist that without attention there may be will, and that where both are present both are not the same or even co-ordinate. Attention is an ap-

¹ If we believe that there is will and active attention without the presence of an idea, of course in that case the argument of the text does not apply; but I have already dismissed this doctrine. What in such a case the fact of, a will to will, really would mean I do not know, and it would be unprofitable for me to consider.

plied will, and it is therefore in this sense something clearly subordinate and lower.

(iii.) We have seen that attention¹ is not the same as either thought or volition. But on the other hand, since it implies these, it will possess the characteristics of both, and I will go on to enlarge for a space on this head. I shall not attempt to exhaust the subject or in discussing it to follow a strict order, but I will offer some remarks which perhaps may be useful.

(a) Attention, we have seen, involves thought, if thought is taken in the general sense of the perceptive or theoretical attitude. Attention has always in other words an object qualified in me by ideal adjectives. And this attitude implies on my part a certain passivity. In attention I must be passive first in the sense that I do not go about to alter the object but receive and accept it. And there is again beside this a further sense in which in attending I am passive. My self must more or less be occupied and affected by the object, and I (we may say) must suffer this object as mine and in me. And more or less clearly I must also feel and be aware of this sufferance. In fact a feeling of this sort, which is present always in active attention, may go some way towards obscuring there my sense of being active. I shall very soon return to this and shall point out something which this felt passivity implies, but for the moment I will pass on to notice another mark of attention.

(b) Attention, being will, must of course give us, beside the sense of passivity, a sense also of being active, though this sense again can under certain conditions be weakened. And, as will, attention involves naturally the more or less clear awareness of my active relation to the object of my attention. The practical attitude implies always within what is experienced the opposition of my self to the not-self, and I must also be aware of these terms and of their relation. The same thing holds with a difference in the theoretical attitude, for there the relation and its terms must again be experienced though not quite in the same sense.² I cannot properly attend without an experience of my self as passively affected and again as actively affecting. This awareness may be present of course in very various degrees of distinctness. It may be vague feeling or again it may be clear self-consciousness,³ but it never fails to be present.

¹ The reader, I hope, remembers that apart from a special warning he is to take attention as *active* attention.

² I cannot enter on this matter here.

³ I think that Mr. Shand is more or less exaggerating when (in *MIND*, N.S., 12, p. 459) he speaks of "a clear awareness" in all attention. The

I will before proceeding lay stress on a point which I have mentioned already. We have, I presume, undoubtedly a sense and an experience of being active and passive, and I mean by this that we have an actual awareness of our selves in both these characters. But unless both self and not-self and their relation are actually experienced—and I mean by this are present within the experienced as parts or aspects or features of its content—I cannot see how a sense of activity or passivity, in attention or in anything else, is to be either explicable or possible. To be aware of activity and passivity without being aware of that which is active or passive, and without this also entering itself into the content of the experienced, is to my mind in the end a thing quite without meaning.¹ Others perhaps may understand how this is possible or at least may know that it happens, but in this understanding or knowledge they fail to carry me with them. And in their dealing, so far as they can be said to deal, with this fact of experienced activity, too many psychologists excite in me an astonishment which does not end in admiration. There is doubtless here, as we are told, a familiar distinction. There is the activity of a thing which is aware that it is active, and there is again the activity of a thing which has no such feeling and experience. We all in this latter sense should speak of the activity of a volcano or of a pill, and in this latter sense we may also in psychology make use of the term 'active'. And I might claim, even myself, without any very prolonged struggle to have possessed myself of this distinction. But having perhaps risen so far there remains a point at which I am still left behind. I fail to perceive how this distinction, even when we have attained to it, can either rid us of the fact of experienced activity or can entitle us to treat such a fact with neglect. I still do not comprehend how the knowledge on our part of this distinction—I do not even see how even the ignorance of it on the part of others—can excuse us when we make apparently no attempt to find out what experienced activity contains. Such neglect still appears to me to be in short inexcusable, even though apparently its consequences with a little good will may conduct us to Theism.

In attention then I am practically related to an object, but this practical relation (I would once more repeat) is of a limited kind. Attention, being will, must involve the altera-

awareness certainly always is present, but in what sense and to what degree can it be always called "clear"?

¹ Compare here the remarks in *MIND*, N.S., No. 40.

tion of existence, but on the other side, as attention, it must not alter its object. The object, we have seen, is not changed by me but develops and reveals itself within me. What then is that existence of the object which really is changed by attention? It is, we answer, the psychical existence which belongs to the ideal development of the object. In all perceptive knowledge there are these two sides which are indissolubly united. And in active attention we have on one side the willed self-revelation of the reality in and for me, and on the other side the psychical existence and the alteration of that existence without which the object cannot appear.¹ In attention you cannot, as we have seen, leave out either of these factors. Attention does not merely consist in the alteration of my psychical existence, and again it cannot even by an abstraction be regarded merely as the ideal movement of the object.

It is for this latter reason that we are not said to attend to anything except what is 'presented'. Mr. Shand (*MIND*, N.S., 12, p. 467) has noticed this usage, which appears to be well marked, but he has not, I think, pointed out the principle and the reason which underlies it. But the reason is that, being will, attention, like all will,² must be directed on immediate existence. We cannot, as Mr. Shand remarks, properly attend to another man's thoughts or to what is happening at the antipodes. And yet obviously I can attend to an idea, say the idea of attention. I can attend to it so far as it is taken as an idea existing now in and for me, and is therefore in this sense 'presented'. But if on the other hand you abstract from this side of the idea, I can attend to it no longer. And in speaking of another man's thoughts or of an event at the antipodes, you are naturally

¹ I may perhaps once more be permitted to remind the reader of a vital point. That alteration of my psychical existence which is involved in the maintenance of the ideal development, must not, where we have active attention, come direct from the object itself. For, wherever this happens, it is the object which is taken to be active and not I myself, and naturally with this we can speak no longer of my actively attending. In active attention the ideal development issues from and is implied in my will, and its maintenance also is thus taken to be willed and to proceed from myself.

² Mr. Shand would, I understand, not admit this. He adduces (*MIND*, N.S., No. 18, p. 463) the fact of intention and resolve as a proof that will is not always an action on immediate existence. But except so far as intention and resolve are or imply such an action, I cannot agree that they are volition, and I think that when they are defined so as to exclude this aspect no one would call them will, or would call them anything beyond mere intention and mere resolve. I have touched on this subject in my *Appearance*, etc., p. 463, and I shall have to recur to it in a future article.

taken for the purpose in hand to abstract from the existence of these things in my knowledge. Hence you cannot attend to them, since it is of the essence of attention to imply this aspect of psychical existence and its alteration. Whether we can will an event outside of and quite apart from our psychical existence, as we certainly can desire it (MIND, 49, p. 21), I need not here discuss. But my willed attention to such an event is, as we have just explained, self-contradictory.

(c) I will now briefly indicate another feature which belongs to attention in its character of will. Attention may itself vary in strength, while its object either does not vary at all or becomes indifferently more or less.¹ In the first place I may be occupied and dominated more or less by an object, while that object, taken in itself, remains the same. The object may in a certain character and on a certain scale remain of the same degree, while the range and extent to which my self is involved and disturbed may change indefinitely. But that occupation and disturbance is of course not the same thing as my active attending. My attention will in the proper sense be strong or weak, exactly in the way in which we speak of volition possessing these characters. The strength of a volition is a topic to which in another article I hope to return, but it consists, we may say briefly, in the strength of the idea with which the self is identified and the amount of tension and struggle set up between this idea and existence. The extent up to which the whole self is involved in this idea and is excited by this conflict and is identified with one side of it, gives, I should say, the degree of volition. With this of course is connected the felt amount of pleasure and pain. On the other hand the experienced strain on an organ, unless so far as it is included in the above, does not count towards fixing the degree of the tension. And my passive occupancy by the object once again is not a factor, except so far as it subserves and increases the struggle. I do not think that I can with advantage here enlarge on this subject.

We have perceived the essential nature of active attention, and have surveyed its main features from the side alike of volition and of thought. I have now to deal with some other problems, and in particular will discuss the meaning of the phrase "object of attention". But first I will glance at a question about attention's effects. Are we to

¹ On the excessive ambiguity of a psychical 'more and less' see MIND, N.S., No. 13.

say that it does or that it does not intensify its object? I could not here enter at length into this controversy, even if I were qualified to do so, but I will venture in passing to offer some remarks. Very serious ambiguity attaches not only to "psychical intensity," but also, as we shall presently see, to attention's "object".¹ And without a previous inquiry into the meaning of these terms any discussion of the question, it seems to me, must in part lead to nothing. I should be inclined, if I might venture an opinion, to agree that attention does not *essentially* raise the strength of the object to which I attend, if and so long as this object is considered with reference to its own scale. If, that is, I am comparing one visual object with others, or even generally one psychical object with others, it is not of the essence of attention to raise in the scale one of these objects against another, so long as the scale enters into the whole object to which I really am attending. In other words so far as you attend to a whole field of comparison, your attention does not essentially strengthen one part of this connected whole as against other parts. And, if this conclusion seems trivial, I can only reply by asking that it may at least not be forgotten. On the other hand I should agree that in general the effect of attention is to strengthen and to make clear,² and hence it may in fact incidentally falsify for the purpose of comparison some part of the object. I will not attempt further to enter on this matter, but before proceeding will offer a necessary remark. Attention is not something abstract and general, but is always individual and special. It is, we have seen, in effect a will to develop perceptively an object in me. And with regard to the nature of objects and their ways of development the greatest diversity prevails. And hence the strength

¹ When Mr. Shand (*MIND*, N.S., No. 16, p. 464) says that, though attention does not arrest a disappearing sensation, will on its side may do so, I find the statement extremely ambiguous. If the will is simply to observe what happens within a certain field, the attention does not alter, or at least it ought not to alter, any one element in that complex. But on the other hand if the will is directed to an end which in itself involves a continued attention to some idea that naturally wavers—surely here the attention both can and often does arrest. From my point of view there would of course be no meaning in saying here that will can do that which attention cannot do. And so far as Mr. Shand understands by will an action that takes place without any idea of it, I radically dissent from any view of this kind. Mr. Shand's very interesting article is pervaded throughout by that ambiguity as to the nature of the "object" which I am shortly to discuss. With regard to attention strengthening and not strengthening, the reader will find some instructive hesitation in Wundt, *Phys. Psych.*, chap. xv.

² I cannot discuss here the meaning of 'clearness'.

and clearness which are essential to attention are not always one thing. They are in each case prescribed in amount and character by the particular matter and purpose. Whatever is enough to meet this particular demand will be sufficient, however little there may be of it, and only so much as this is really essential to attention. And a further end and purpose for which the attention exists, we must remember, is not the attention itself.

I will now proceed to an inquiry into the meaning of attention's 'object'. We can attend, as will presently be shown, to but one thing at a time. Except under certain abnormal conditions we may say that attention never really is divided, and before explaining this I will very briefly state why the fact must be so. There would be much more to say here if I had space at command, and I must content myself with giving what seems the main reason while ignoring other aspects of the matter. Attention is single, we may say in a word, because will is single. And will is single not in the least because it is a faculty—there is too much of this kind of 'explanation' still on hand—but, we may say, because, if it were not single, it would have perished with its owners. Without the habit, and so in the end the principle, of doing and attending to one thing at a time, no creature could have maintained its existence and its race. This, I would repeat, is not offered as being by itself the whole reason, but it seems enough to show why attention must normally be single. And with this I will pass on to inquire further about the 'object' of attention.

The object of attention, it will be said, is in fact very far from being single. And, it will be added, the object is so far from being one and not many, that authorities have differed and have even experimented about the extent of its plurality. And if the object really has all the time been one, this seems not possible. But it is more than possible, I reply, if the term 'object' is highly ambiguous, and if some psychologists have taken no account of its ambiguity. And I will forthwith state the main conclusions to which we shall be led.

- (1) There is in attention never more than one object, the several 'objects' being diverse aspects of or features within this.
- (2) Within the one object the unity is of very different kinds.
- (3) The nominal object and the real object may be very far from being the same, and the latter may contain within itself the former as a feature which is subordinated and even negated.

(1) The first of these heads I may pass over rapidly, since I can refer the reader here to the works of Prof. James and

Dr. Stout.¹ Apart from oscillation, and again apart from abnormal states, to attend to a plurality is always to attend to it as one object, and it is not possible to have really several objects of attention at once. The idea that we can do this comes from a want of insight into certain truths about the object, and I will at once, under (2) and (3), proceed to set these out. I would add that these truths have a wide and important bearing, and that any neglect of them can hardly fail to result in error.

(2 and 3) Attention, we all know, may in various degrees be diffused or be concentrated, but we may fail to perceive that this concentration and diffusion itself falls within the object and qualifies that. The extreme of diffused attention would be, I presume, to observe impartially the whole detail of a complex scene. Its aim would be to observe at large everything which happens in and to this general object, to notice in other words any and every kind of change which takes place before my mind. But even in this supposed extreme we should have the unity of my world, as perceived here and now, and we should have the idea of my noticing whatever may happen in this field; and thus every diversity would be comprehended in and would be subordinate to the unity of this general object. The plurality even here would be the adjective of one thing, but the various features of this object would be of precisely the same rank. They are thus taken as simply co-ordinate, and they are coupled, we may say, by a mere 'and'. We are to attend to an object the several contents of which are A and B and C, where A, B, and C are equal and all stand on exactly the same footing. A case so extreme, I at once hasten to add, cannot actually exist. If one is to observe really and in fact, one cannot observe really at large, but in order to act one must act, as we say, in a certain interest. But this means that our attention is never equally diffused, and that more or less we are compelled to select and to limit. An animal, that searches when hungry, will search not for anything and everything, but always for something more or less special while neglecting the rest; and the animal must thus always select more or less from the totality of what in general it perceives,

¹ Prof. James, *Psych.*, i., 405, ii., 569, teaches the right doctrine that there can be but one object. I do not know if it is quite consistent with this when, p. 409, he speaks of a plurality of "entirely disconnected" systems of conceptions. Prof. James's use of the word "object" is however (i., 275 foll.) to the very last degree loose. As to oneness of attention Dr. Stout teaches the right view throughout, *Anal. Psych.*, i., 194, 211-212, 280.

and even from the limited totality of that which it sees or smells. The extreme of diffusion will therefore not be present actually and in fact, since with regard to the whole object some neglect and some selection is necessary.

There will in the first place be features of our scene, or in other words of the total object before us, to which we give really and in fact no attention at all. Our object is thus so far divided into two fields, one of inattention, we may say, and the other of attention. And passing by the first let us look at the second, the field and object of attention. Will all the details of that object be without exception attended to equally? Is none relatively neglected while another is in comparison more prominent? Is everything within attention's object still simply co-ordinate and coupled still by a mere 'and,' the one feature being no more important and attended to no more than is the other? If this is ever so, it assuredly is not so always, and, where it is not so, we have even within the chosen field at least some subordination. We find in short no longer a mere 'and'. It is not a case of attending simply to A *and* to B, but of attending to A while not omitting to notice B. And B has with this become lowered to the rank of a condition or circumstance. It is a mere adjective, a more or less subordinate detail in the object, and subordination once begun can be carried to a great length. We may find in short that in the end what we call attention's 'object' may be very different from the true object and aim of our attention. That true aim, that real object, may be even the exclusion or the destruction of the nominal object of attention.

We have in attention (a) that part of the whole object to which we do not at all attend. This must be distinguished on one side from all of the moment's feeling which is not even an object, and on the other side from that part of our whole object to which we attend. We have next (b) this real object of attention with all its internal detail. And we have last (c) the nominal object. The nominal object is that part of the detail, or that aspect of the whole process, which for some cause we select and call the object of attention. And there is a tendency here to confuse, and to put this nominal object, this mere fragment preferred mainly for the sake of convenience, in the place of attention's real and entire object. And from this origin rises a whole train of more or less disastrous mistakes.¹ I will proceed to explain and to enlarge on this statement.

¹ The metaphor of the visual field and focus which in Wundt and his followers appears as a doctrine, has, I venture to think, in its results

The 'object of attention,' far removed from being a term clear and precise, is, as we have seen, a phrase full of ambiguity. But in too much psychology, as in common life, this phrase is used with no regard for its uncertain meaning. The 'object' of attention is in this respect like the 'subject' of a judgment. In a judgment the nominal subject may be something very different from that about which the assertion really is made, and the logician who fails to see this and to remember it will not avoid error. I will point out at some length this ambiguous character of attention's object. If we take such an instance as the pursuit of a prey by a man or a beast, the real object of attention is not the mere animal pursued but the whole pursuit of that animal. And hence every detail in the scene which in any way bears on this pursuit, whether as contributing to it or as hindering it, is or may be included within the real object attended to. Or let us take the instance where a woman's object in going to some party is in fact to promote the success of her daughter. We might say here naturally that, apart from oscillation and failure, her daughter was throughout the time the real object of her attention. But this way of speaking, if convenient, is not correct. Her true 'real object' is the observing, the doing and the preventing this and that thing with regard to her daughter, and, we must add, in a certain interest. And hence it is hard to say what detail in the scene may as a condition or circumstance fail to be included in the object which she pursues—to be attended to and to be contained in her attention's real object. And it is from this point of view that we must understand also the *diversion* of attention, for diversion once more is an ambiguous phrase. When we say that something occurs to attract the mother's attention to something other than her daughter, our meaning is doubtful. We may mean first that, for a longer or shorter period or periods of time, she does not think at all about her daughter or in any way notice her. And, if so, during those periods her attention to her daughter has ceased, except in an improper sense to be noticed below. But on the other hand our meaning when we speak of diversion may be widely different. For the new pursuit and the old one may be co-ordinated in various ways into one whole object. And in this case the diversion of my attention from A will not imply that I cease to attend to A *because* I now attend to B. For

been decidedly mischievous. The metaphor appears in Lotze's *Med. Psych.*, p. 503, and I should presume that Wundt owes the doctrine to Forlidge's *Psychologie*, but he himself is, I suppose, responsible for its prevalence so far as it has prevailed.

I may attend at once to both B and A as co-existing adjectives in one pursuit or scene, or I may subordinate B to A in various ways as a more or less accidental detail, circumstance or condition. The question is here not of 'Yes or No' and of 'Either one or the other'; the question is really about both, and it concerns the degree in which each is present, and again the relative position in which the one stands to the other. The diversion of attention in short takes place here within the attention itself. And hence the division and the diversion of attention are phrases the meaning of which can never anywhere be assumed as known. The meaning will vary in different cases and it will vary perhaps vitally, and it must be investigated for each purpose in hand before conclusions are drawn. And I doubt whether even with the regenerate man of the psychological laboratory this necessary investigation has always taken place. The object of attention, even where our attention is concentrated, is not that aspect of it which for convenience we may abstract and may entitle the object. The real object is on the contrary always a process with this 'object'. It is a more or less systematic whole of action and scene in which the nominal object may be more or less reduced to a detail or condition. That which, for example, Mr. Shand has called the "set of the interest" (*MIND*, N. S., 12, 454) is really an integral part of the attention's object, and this may be true again of the whole present scene with its background and environment. When I attend to the decay and to the disappearance of a sensation, this mere sensation is not the real object to which I attend. And the fact that I observe the cessation surely proves that any such view is erroneous. The object which I really observe is the sensation in its relation perhaps to a certain special system or scale, and at least in its more general connexion with a wider order and scene. And if we forget this then, as we saw above with regard to the question of intensity, our inquiry may be ambiguous and our conclusions may be vitiated beforehand. In short between the real and the nominal object of attention the divergence may be vital. Our real object (as we saw) may even consist in the negation of what we call our object. I may thus be said to attend to a thought which persecutes me, while I really attend to the extruding of this thought from my mind. My object here is the process of extrusion together with, all that this process, implies. But I, taking into view the thing on which I am to act, for convenience call this my object, and I thus am led into error both in theory and practice. My real object, the process of extruding A, is a negation, which like all negation,

involves a positive basis, and A itself is a detail which has no right to appear except as a condition thus positively negated. And if this essential subordination is for a moment wanting, and if A for one moment is set free, my object and my attention have at once been changed surreptitiously and radically. There are probably few of us who in practice have no acquaintance with this error. We have resolved to attend to the not thinking of something which tempts us. Our resolve here, if genuine, and our true object is to drive out this idea when it occurs, and to do this by keeping our minds fixed on that which will extrude it. And the Devil, when he knows his business, induces us by some pretext to keep the temptation before us. He suggests that it is even our duty always to bear this temptation in mind, of course always qualified by the idea that it is a thing which we reject. And thus the idea naturally, by being held before us, tends to free itself at least in part from its mere subordinate phase, and so in the end acts positively and independently. And our object and our attention have in this way been essentially transformed. We may note again the same natural transformation in the case of repentance. The repentance, we may say, that allows itself ever to think of the past deserves to be suspected. And repentance, we might even add, is a luxury permitted only to those who are morally rich.

The bearing of this whole question is so wide and its importance is so great¹ that I will ask the reader to delay and to consider carefully a further instance. And I will take this instance from Mr. Shand's article in *MIND*, N.S., 12, p. 457. We can, of course, attend to a pleasure or a pain and make it our 'object'. But the effect of our attention upon this object may vary indefinitely and may go to strengthen it or again to expel or to weaken it. And hence, if in each case we assume that our object is the same, we seem landed in a difficulty. But the real object, as we have seen, is in each case not the same but different, and to attend actively to a *mere* sensation or to a *mere* pain is in no case possible. The sensation or the pain or the pleasure never is and never could be the entire and real object. It is but one feature in that larger object to which I really

¹ In the end it takes us back to the question of the true essence of negation, and I think that wrong views as to this have in certain points injured psychology. The possibility of a negative will and the real nature of aversion are points to be discussed in a future article. For the second of these see *MIND*, No. 49, p. 21. The doctrine of our text will be shown in another article to have vital importance also with regard to the question of mental conflict and of imputation.

attend and which in each several case may differ widely. Thus with pain my true object may be the means which I use to remove it, or I might possibly attend to the dwelling on my self as a sufferer from this pain, indignant or unresisting or calmly resigned. My object and my attention in each of these cases is something different, and, if the effects vary, that result is surely natural. Again I may attend to a present pain not as to a thing by which I now am perturbed, but as to a fact in which I take theoretical interest. I may wish to observe this pain as a given psychical phenomenon, or I may wish to view it in its wider bearings either as this pain or more generally, and in either case as an element in the moral world or in the Universe at large. The object even of such theoretical attention will not be the same in each case. And even here the effects may be more or less diverse, but the *general* tendency is here, we may say, to subordinate the pain as now felt and so to weaken it. From this I may go on to attend in a different way. I may fix my mind on the pain as a thing which should not be attended to except with contempt. Here my real object is the practical degradation or extrusion of the pain, and this negative process involves a positive object and a positive volition. My aim is to carry out that idea of my self which satisfies me and of which I approve, and such an object implies the negation of the pain. But there is, I think, no occasion to enlarge and to dwell further on this instance. Enough has been said to make clear the essential ambiguity of the 'object'. There is in brief never any presumption that what we are disposed to call attention's object is the real object of attention; and that real object may even on the contrary consist in the positive suppression of the nominal object. Hence every inquiry must begin with this preliminary question, What in the case before us really is contained in the true object of attention?

I will now briefly touch on a point which I have noticed already, the meaning which should be given to a 'permanent attention'. We should all say naturally that perhaps for weeks we have been attending to something, and it is of course obvious that through all this time we cannot actually have attended. And in the same way we 'keep watch' where through all the time we have not been actually watching.¹ We mean, I presume, that we have had

¹ See here Prof. James, *Psychology*, i., 420. There is no doubt that sustained active attention generally means a succession of willed acts, but it is not clear what are the limits of such an act. There must be an

throughout a constant will to observe, and the sense to be given to a constant or permanent will can be best discussed further in a later article. But here as elsewhere, whenever we speak of attending, we mean a special attention with regard to a certain particular purpose. And if through any period our amount of actual attention has been sufficient for that purpose, we naturally express this by asserting that through all the time our attention has been there. It has not really been there, but what has happened has been this. The idea of carrying out the proposed end has been associated with my inner and outer worlds in such a manner that, given the occurrence of any change sufficiently connected with this idea, my actual attention to the means will at once be aroused. And thus by a licence our attention is said to have been present throughout, since it has been present conditionally. And it has been actually present so far as our end and purpose requires, and everywhere the necessary amount of attention is and must be measured by the purpose and the end.

From this I will go on to offer a few remarks about the fixation of attention. If we remember that active attention involves will, and that will is the self-realisation of an idea, we can at once reply generally to the question how attention is fixed. Active attention is fixed always by the idea of an end. The idea, we have seen, may be the idea of an activity which is no more than theoretical, but in some form the idea of an end is essential. Wherever it is absent, there at least for the time we are without active attention. We may be in a sense occupied and engrossed, we may be in such a state that whenever we deviate we are brought back, and hence, as we have just explained, attention is present in such a state conditionally. But, apart from an idea which realises itself, we are not actively and in the proper sense attending. We may say then that always and in principle attention, in the sense of active attention, is fixed by an idea. And if we endeavour to pass behind this idea to a more fundamental attention, we are led either to a fresh and more remote idea or to something which certainly is not active attention and will. We may doubtless ask a further question as to how ideas themselves become fixed, and this question is doubtless as important as it is wide and difficult. But I do not think that

idea which realises itself, and, when that is over, the act is over, until again we have an idea, either the same or another. But suppose, *e.g.*, I have willed to occupy myself with a subject and the occupation goes on, at what point does that occupation cease to be the realisation of my idea and so to be my act?

such a problem falls within the limited scope of this article, and at any rate it is impossible to deal with it here. A question which involves difficulties such as would be raised, for instance, by any discussion of what are called "fixed ideas," deserves to be treated with some respect.

How and under what laws the idea acts in attention is again a question which I cannot attempt here to answer. Without entering on this I will briefly notice our employment of outward objects. As a help to concentration on an abstract problem we are used to gaze on something prominent in our field of vision and so to anchor our thoughts. This familiar process has two sides. It is in part negative and serves to inhibit distracting sensations and movements, but in the main and in principle it is positive. The outward object has itself now become part of the content of an idea, the idea of myself pursuing a certain end. And hence the object itself now on occasion resuggests the pursuit and so resists deviation.¹

I will conclude with some observations on a point which bears on the foregoing, the connexion between attention and what is called 'conation'. We have here again a term which is dangerously ambiguous.² Conation may be used for something which is either not experienced at all, or at least is not at all experienced as conation. But, passing by these senses, I should deny that conation is involved in attention, unless conation is used merely as a general head which includes volition. If it were used more narrowly and taken to imply an experienced effort or striving, we could not truly say that all volition and attention contain it. Attention, being will, must involve an opposition between existence and idea, but I cannot agree that this opposition must entail an effort and struggle. The resistance of the fact may be no more than what comes from inertia, and to remove it actually may cost little more than to anticipate its removal ideally. And if the alteration of existence implies always a struggle, I at least can often neither perceive this nor feel it. And hence I could not admit that, used in this emphatic sense, conation belongs to all active attention.

¹ On the unmeaning movements made in attention see Prof. James, *Psychology*, i., p. 458. He however omits to notice that, beside "drafting off," these movements, if monotonous, may fix positively. A movement with one character may serve as a fixed object. How far, if at all, without a fixed external world any attention and any self-control would in the end be possible, is an interesting question on which here I of course do not touch.

² With regard to conation I may refer the reader to *MIND*, N.S., No. 40.

It is true (to pass from this point which is of little importance) that our attention corresponds on the whole to our permanent interests. Our attention may be said to answer in the main to the felt wants and the unfelt needs of our nature and to conduce to their satisfaction. But to turn this broad correspondence into an essential unity, or even into a necessary connexion, is indefensible. It is an attempt to force a construction on the facts against which the facts, unless we close our eyes, most evidently rebel. Thus to identify every 'disposition' with an actual conation is plainly unjustifiable, so long as we use conation for that which is experienced and of which we are aware. And if on the other hand we take it as something either not experienced at all as conation, or at all events not so experienced by that consciousness of which we speak, we should at least make clear what it is that we do and that we do not assert. But, if apart from such hypotheses we go by the facts, one conclusion becomes plain. We may will and may attend actively because we have first been compelled to 'attend' passively, because, that is, we have been somehow impressed and laid hold of by an idea.¹ And if attention is used in this improper sense, we often will because we have attended, and do not attend in the least because we will. If one follows the known facts one must admit the existence of volition, where the idea realises itself quite apart from any antecedent desire or conation, and where these have not even contributed to the origin and suggestion of the idea. We may end in such cases, and we probably do end, by attending actively to the idea, but we may do this because and only because the idea has laid hold of us passively. Thus our will to realise this idea in external action and in inward knowledge is but the self-realisation of the idea which so has possessed us. And you cannot, if you keep to facts, maintain even that the suggestion holds us in all cases because it arouses desire or even pleasure. For in some cases these both are absent, at least from the known facts, while in other cases we may find even the presence of their opposite. In short the attempt to get rid of ideomotor action, or to deny that at least some ideomotor actions are volitions, is founded on error and leads to a conflict with fact.² The suggested idea which moves us does not, to repeat this, always move us because in any sense it corresponds to an actual conation, if, that is, conation means something

¹ 'Idea' here includes any suggestion even when coming straight from a perception.

² I hope to show this at length in a future article.

which we know and experience. This idea may come from an association, or it may arise from some kind of external or at least sensational emphasis, or we may be unable in any way to assign to it a psychical origin. There are cases where all that we are aware of is that the idea somehow is there, and that in itself it does not please us nor do we desire its fulfilment. But the idea remaining there, and because it remains there, becomes insistent and goes on to realise itself, and in this way unfeeling forces, we may say, our will and our active attention.

If it is urged that we have a general disposition to realise all our ideas, I have no wish to gainsay this. I am not, however, prepared to agree that such a disposition is ultimate, and in any case the assertion that it essentially depends upon pleasure or pain or essentially answers to a conation, I must once more repeat, seems really contrary to plain fact. You may add again, if you please, that, without some special disposition in each case, no idea could hold and possess us. And once more, if you will not in every case assert the necessary presence of pleasure or pain or of conation or desire, I am ready to accept and even to endorse this doctrine. But in some cases I must insist that this disposition is but physical, physical I do not say entirely but for the most part and in the main.¹ If you are true to facts, and if you keep to that individual soul with which alone you are here concerned, you cannot in all cases take the disposition as psychical. But to suppose that, with a physical or with even a psychical disposition, a step has been made towards refuting the doctrine which we have advanced, would in my opinion be most mistaken. It is a subject which however cannot be further pursued in the present article.

¹ What I mean is this, that, however right you may be in saying that for psychology a certain disposition is merely physical, you will never be right in asserting that its psychical result comes merely from it, and that psychical conditions have contributed nothing to that result.