APPEARANCES AND REALITY.—I.

THE distinction between 'reality' and appearance, between what a thing really is and what it appears to be, is fundamental to our ordinary consciousness. Hence it is natural to make use of the distinction in metaphysics, and the result is a tendency to maintain one of two theories.

According to the first theory, we know things only as they appear to us; and not as they are in themselves. In particular things are not really spatial or temporal, but only appear so to us; space and time are only the appearances of a non-spatial reality.

According to the second theory, we know only 'phenomena' or 'appearances,' certain elements within our own minds; reality proper is beyond the mind and is not known at all. This view sometimes, as in Kant, tries to treat the appearances as being objects in space and time. We know them but not the thing in itself.

These positions may be said to differ in degree of scepticism. The former allows that reality is presented to us in perception, but insists that its nature becomes distorted in the process. The latter denies that reality is presented to us at all and substitutes for it another object, viz., 'appearances'. Further these positions are not always distinguished. Kant, for instance, states his view sometimes in the form 'we only know things as they appear to us,' sometimes in the form 'we only know phenomena,' and he fails to notice that the two statements are different. The truth is that the first theory is a half-way house to the second. We are forced to go from the first to the second to gain some object of which it can be said that we know in the proper sense not only *that* it is but *what* it is. But for all that the second theory is the more sceptical, because it leaves the real object wholly unknown and regards knowledge as about something else.

In both cases the result is reached by the use of the common distinction between reality and appearance. The distinction relates primarily to objects of vision, and therefore the justification of its use in the theory of knowledge requires analysis of its nature in its original application. Only such an analysis will reveal the true nature of the distinction, and consequently the legitimacy of the theory of knowledge built upon it.

It will here be contended—

(1) That it is a certain analysis of the distinction which leads to the first theory and thence to the second.

(2) That this is a mis-analysis and that the distinction really understood leads to the contrary conclusion.

We can easily trace the origin of the view that we only know things as they appear to us, by taking any case where we distinguish between 'appearance' and 'reality'. Take, for example, Plato's instance of a straight stick partly submerged in water, which, as we say, looks bent, though in reality it is straight. If some one knows nothing about refraction and confines himself to a single perception, he will assert that the stick is bent; and if he is asked why, he will answer, 'because I see it to be so'. But if afterwards he sees the stick under other conditions and has learned about refraction, he will say that the stick only looks bent and is really straight. Thus having just identified what the stick is and what it looks, he afterwards draws a distinction between them.

And this distinction presents an obvious difficulty to knowledge in general. If a thing is not necessarily what it looks, how are we to learn what it really is? A thing in the sense in question is an individual; to get at it therefore we must perceive it. But the perception, to be of value, must give us the thing as it is. And that it does so is implied by the original assertion 'the stick is bent, because it is seen to be so'. Seeing is believing. The subsequent assertion, however, denies this, 'the stick only looks bent, but it is not what it looks'. Perception, that is to say, does not give us the thing as it really is. The conclusion at once seems to follow that we only know things as they look or appear to us and not as they are. And from this it is but a short step to the second view that we only know 'appearances' or 'phenomena'.

To put the difficulty shortly. Access to things implies perception. Yet if perception only gives us things as they look and not as they are, access to things as they are is impossible. But perception does in fact only give us things as they look, for this is presupposed by the distinction we actually draw between what they look and what they are.

This conclusion can only be avoided by maintaining that the reality of the distinction is still compatible with the position that perception at least gives us things as they are in some qualified way; that after all there is *some* identity between what things look and what they are. And a closer analysis of the distinction vindicates this identity.

That the analysis may be as concrete as possible, it will be well to bear in mind three prominent types of case.

- (1) That of refraction already mentioned.
- (2) That due to the nature of perspective.

E.g. (1) Railway lines may be said though really parallel to look convergent.

(2) A horizontal building may be said to look as though it were lower in its more distant parts.

- (3) That due to distance from the observer.

E.g., the moon may be said to look as large as the sun.

These types suggest that the distinction between appearance and

reality at least primarily relates to the spatial qualities of things. The only exception seems to be the case of temporal relations ; we certainly say that a certain event appeared to take a long time, though it really did not.¹ Again these cases bring before us by way of contrast the existence of spheres of perception where the distinction is wholly inapplicable, *e.g.*, those of pain and sensation generally. A pain is necessarily what I feel it to be ; distinction between what it is, and what I feel or perceive it as, is meaningless. Similarly a noise, in the sense of a sensation as distinct from its physical conditions, is what I hear it as. In fact it is just the absence of the distinction here that gives much of its plausibility to the view that we only know phenomena. If we once allow that our objects are states of ourselves, we seem unable to deny that at least we apprehend *them* as they are, *i.e.*, that we really *know* phenomena.

We may now proceed to the analysis. The general form of statement to be analysed is, 'a thing looks or appears so and so, though we know that it is not so in reality'. The following seem the main points:—

(1) Such a statement is in no sense about 'appearances'.

For (a) its subject is not the appearance or look of the thing but the thing. When I assert that the moon looks as large as the sun, I make an assertion about the moon and not about its look.

(β) Its predicate is always 'real,' *i.e.*, it is always of a kind appropriate to real things, as opposed to their look or appearance. Thus the stick looks *bent* ; the moon looks *as large as* the sun ; the railway lines look *convergent*. If we seek for a predicate suitable to 'appearances,' we naturally think of such terms as 'deceptive' and 'untrustworthy'.

Our statements then about appearances are expressed in the same terms as the reality from which we distinguish them. It at once follows—

(a) That statements about appearance imply that we at least know enough about reality to say that real things have certain *possible* predicates, *e.g.*, bent or convergent. To deny this is to be wholly unable to state how things look.

(b) That the issue involved in distinguishing appearance from reality concerns not the general character of the attributes of real things but their relation to a particular subject. The question is not, 'Is convergence or bentness the attribute of *any* real thing?' but, 'Is it an attribute of particular real things, this stick or these lines?'

It follows that the distinction between reality and appearance relates solely to the details of our knowledge and not to its general or structural character. The attributes of reality cannot belong to *γέν* different from those of appearance. Doubt about its details implies certainty as to its general character.

¹ 'Appearing' and 'looking' are treated as distinct in meaning from 'seeming'; they stand for *φαίνεσθαι* as opposed to *δοκεῖν*.

(2) Whenever we say that a thing only looks so and so, we are really questioning some immediate judgment of perception. But this presupposes that, at least in certain cases, such judgments are not to be questioned but give us things as they are. Thus the assertion that the moon looks as large as the sun implies that there is something in perception which suggests that the moon is as large; and this is only possible if, under certain circumstances, perception gives the real relative size. And under certain conditions, it does so. If objects are equally distant from the observer, perception successfully gives their relative size. If we thought that there were no circumstances under which we should perceive the real relative size, we could never assert that one object *looks* as large as another. Similarly the statement that the stick looks bent implies that, given certain physical conditions, we should see the true shape of objects. Ever in the case of perspective the same thing is true. If we really mean that the roof of a building looks converging towards the ground, we must allow that in the right position we should see it as it really is, *viz.*, horizontal. It may be objected that the necessity of foreshortening renders this impossible. But the answer is that if we admit the impossibility, we at once reconsider our original assertion and maintain that after all the roof does not look sloping.

(3) Our possession of the distinction between appearance and reality and our power of determining in particular what is appearance and what is reality presuppose that we understand how our apprehension of objects is conditioned by relation to us as observers. It is only because we know that our distance from an object affects its apparent size, that we can draw a distinction between the size it looks and the size it is. If we forget this, we can draw no distinction at all. The same knowledge is presupposed by that power to discount difference of distance which enables us to determine the real relative size of two objects. It is the same in the case of refraction. To be able to say that a stick looks bent, we must be aware that our perception is somehow physically conditioned, and we can only determine its real shape if we know the special nature of the physical conditions. Similarly it is because we understand the conditions of perspective that we can discount them and assert—if we do assert—that objects look different in shape from what they are in reality. Lastly it is precisely because there are no such spatial relations between observer and observed in the case of pain, that, with respect to it, no distinction between reality and appearance can be drawn.

It follows that the distinction, as used in our ordinary experience, arises from the special nature of the spatial relation between the object and the observer. Hence its application to knowledge in general and in a different connexion should arouse suspicion.

To apply these results. The essential feature of the first theory referred to, is that things suffer distortion in being presented to us. Two kinds of attributes are presupposed, those belonging to things

as they are in themselves, and those belonging to them as presented to us. And we know only the latter.

The falsity of the theory should now be obvious.

(1) Even if we allow the distinction between the attributes of things as they are in themselves and their attributes for us, we are obliged to allow that we know the general nature of the former. Accordingly we must know not only the detailed nature of the attributes for us but also the general nature of the real attributes.

(2) The distinction just referred to is wholly false. There is no such thing as an attribute of a thing as presented to us. All attributes used in stating how things look are primarily applicable to things as they are. The theory takes a distinction of detail and converts it into one of general structure. And the preceding analysis, if successful, shows that the distinction between reality and appearance presupposes that we at least know the *general* nature of reality.

(3) It has been pointed out that to distinguish between reality and appearance, we must be aware of and understand a special spatial relation in which we stand to objects as observers. Such a presupposition is excluded where the problem is the purely general one of the relation of reality in general to us as percipients.

It should now be possible to formulate more clearly what constitutes (1) the plausibility of the theory in question, and (2) the wrong step in the argument leading to it.

The plausibility is due to the real fact that in making use of perception to judge of the nature of an object, we have to take into account the special relation of the object to the perceiving subject, and that consequently we must discount what we should judge it to be, if we relied on the verdict of immediate perception. This suggests that in *knowing generally*, we must discount an element which belongs to objects only in appearance through their relation to a perceiving subject, *i.e.*, that relation to a percipient affects for the percipient the general nature of reality as well as its details.

The mistake in argument arises from a mis-statement of the real fact. 'The moon looks as large as the sun' is taken to mean 'while I do not believe it is as large, I perceive it to be as large, *i.e.*, for my perception it is as large'. The distinction between what a thing looks and what it is has to be stated, and it is stated by saying that *for perception* it is one thing, while *in itself* it is another. Then perception being the only means of access to the thing, it follows that we only know the thing as it is for perception.

But (1) the statement that something is so 'for perception' is vicious in principle. An assertion claims to be the recognition of objective fact, *i.e.*, of what is. If the words 'for perception' are significant, they constitute a restriction; they must mean 'only for perception'. But the assertion that something is so only for perception is a contradiction in terms. For perception is perception of what is; it involves judgment and its formula is, 'we perceive something

to be so and so'. And it is just this objectivity of perception which is the main factor in the transition from the view that we know 'things only as they appear' to the view that we know only appearances. We hesitate to assert that objects are so and so for perception and therefore transform this statement into another, viz., that the appearances of objects are so and so. By making the appearance into a new object, we gain a new and suitable subject of assertion because, as an appearance, it admits of no distinction between what it is and what it is for perception. The new statement, however, is obviously false. Not only is the assertion 'the look of the moon is not as large as the look of the sun' not the equivalent of 'the moon looks as large as the sun' but it is not sense. There is the same absence of meaning in the statement in which Kant's view that space is a phenomenon ought to find expression, viz., 'the look of things-in-themselves is spatial'.

(2) The statement 'the moon looks as large as the sun' is only in appearance an assertion about present perception. It is not true that I now perceive the moon to be as large as the sun. It is not so for my perception. For, as has already been urged, perception implies the belief that what I perceive is as I perceive it. The true meaning of the statement is, 'If I were to forget my position as an observer, I *should* assert that I perceived the moon to be as large'. The theory in question takes 'look' to mean 'is for perception,' which as opposed to what 'really is' involves a contradiction. 'Look' properly means 'would be perceived to be, if certain conditions were forgotten'.

The proper way to describe the process of taking into account the conditions under which we perceive, is to state it as a process of 'discounting' or 'correction'. We begin with an immediate judgment of perception, 'I perceive the moon to be as large as the sun'. Then reflexion on my position as an observer forces me to modify this judgment, and I assert, 'The sun is really larger, though if I were to forget the difference of distance, I should say that I saw it to be as large'. The point is that the immediate judgment of perception does not remain side by side with the judgment that corrects it. And only if it remained could I say, 'for my perception the moon is as large'.

The fact is that the hold of the phenomenalist view upon us arises from the almost inexpugnable conviction that the distinction between appearance and reality involves two distinct things, objects and their appearances. It is this conviction which lends colour to the view that when we have discovered that something is not really so and so, it still is so for perception. For it enables us to assert that the appearance remains, even when we have discovered that it is only an appearance.

Yet it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that there are no such things as appearances at all. An appearance seems necessarily to mean one of two things, either (1) a perception, or (2) simply a sensuous image. In the former case a judgment is

involved, but a judgment which disappears upon reflexion on our positions as observers. In the latter case the desired result is not gained even if we disregard the activity of thought necessary to apprehend the image. For the image stands in no relation to the object, except possibly as its effect. And whatever it is, it is not *its* appearance or the appearance of anything. And if that be so, no distinction between reality and appearance remains. There are two kinds of reality, objects without the mind and images within it, and we know the one and we do not know the other. Lastly, examination of instances leads us to the same result. However much I see an object distorted through bad glass or in reflexions, it is the thing which I see. There is strictly speaking no 'look' or 'image' of the thing; there is only the thing with its characteristics distorted. The word 'look' or 'appearance' properly refers to a judgment, and that not a judgment I make now, but one which I should make under certain conditions.

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