



# Realistic Epistemology

Francis H. Parker, *Haverford College*

(Originally published in *The Return to Reason: Essays in Realistic Philosophy*,  
John Wild, ed. [Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1953].)

THERE IS such a thing as knowledge. The assertion of this proposition is necessarily true if there is to be any assertion at all, for its contradictory is self-contradictory. If the assertion “There is no knowledge” is true, then it is false, for that assertion itself purports to be an instance of knowledge. Thus the only alternative to the recognition of the existence of knowledge is, as Aristotle said, a return to the vegetative state where no assertions whatever can be made.

Further, the existence of knowledge is prior to the discipline of epistemology.<sup>1</sup> Epistemology depends on knowledge; knowledge does not depend on epistemology. No science creates or determines its subject matter; any which did would not be science but fiction. Epistemology does not create knowledge any more than biology creates life or anthropology creates man. On the contrary, every science is brought into being by certain vaguely felt phenomena the growing awareness of which is the science itself. Thus there are certain phenomena which give rise to epistemology and which it is the nature of epistemology to describe and explain. But any description and explanation necessarily presupposes a firm recognition of these phenomena and of their genuineness, for it is these phenomena, as the subject matter of epistemology, which necessarily govern and determine all genuine descriptions and explanations.

This fact seems, unfortunately, to have been forgotten in much of contemporary epistemology, for its explanations seem frequently to be determined by the exigencies of predetermined categories rather than by the nature of the subject matter itself. Such an epistemology may even end by

---

<sup>1</sup> This recognition is common to most schools of realism. See, for example, Edwin B. Holt, *et al.*, *The New Realism* (New York, Macmillan, 1912), pp. 66–67.

denying its own data, in which case it commits suicide by destroying its own *raison d'être*. In order to avoid such suicide, the epistemological enterprise must never lose sight of what it has at the start, its own crude data, even if it never gets any further. This point cannot be overemphasized. These basic phenomena must be taken seriously by epistemology, for they are its lifeblood. Thus if a genuine, realistic epistemology, as the disciplined attempt to clarify, describe, and explain the facts of knowledge, is to be possible, there must first be a firm recognition of the reality and character of these data.<sup>2</sup>

What, then, are the crude data of epistemology, and how are they to be described and explained? In an attempt to answer this question, let us turn first to a consideration of the *general* data of epistemology — the most basic features of all awareness — and then to a consideration of certain specific restricted data. First, then, what are the most basic generic traits of all awareness?

## I

THE MOST primitive feature of any act of awareness, as it presents itself to our inspection, is the fact that it is always *of something other than itself*. I have an experience *of war*, for example, or a perception *of a house* or a concept *of a triangle*. But as soon as we notice this primordial trait of all awareness of being of something other than itself, we immediately notice that it is not a simple, unanalyzable trait. On the contrary, “being of something” contains within itself two constituent aspects: (1) the *distinctness* of the something from the awareness of it, and (2) the *identity* of the awareness with the something of which it is an awareness. Let us turn to a separate analysis of these two characteristics.

In the first place, since any act of awareness is of something other than itself, it must be *distinct*, and hence at least minimally *diverse*, from that something of which it is an awareness. All awareness presents itself as a revelation of something other than itself. When I experience something, the experience is a part of me, It is mine; yet the *thing which* I experience need not literally be a part of me, and in any case it is always diverse from my experience of it. This much is perhaps so evident that no one would deny it. But there is more.

---

<sup>2</sup> See R. W. Sellars: “The epistemological task is not the replacement of natural realism but its development,” in *The Philosophy of Physical Realism* (New York, Macmillan, 1932), p. v.

In addition to the fact that the object of every awareness is different from the awareness of it, there is the additional fact that whenever we are aware of anything, we are aware of it *as being independent* of the precise act of our awareness of it.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean, of course, that we are always aware of an object as independent of *any* and every act of awareness or as independent of *any mind*, for obviously many of the things we are aware of are known to be mental in character or to depend upon some mind for their existence and character — such things as fictions and conceptual beings, for example. But it does mean that every bona fide instance of awareness presumes itself aware of something which is independent of it — of that *particular* act of awareness. This presumed independence of the known is given, at least implicitly, in the diversity of the object which is present in the crude consciousness which is the core of epistemology's subject matter. All experience presents itself to our inspection as a revelation into the lives of things which are wholly undisturbed by that revelation.

Now the question of whether or not the thing which we are aware of as independent is *in fact* independent evidently involves the question of the *veracity* of our awareness; and since truth is not a universal or generic character of all awareness, we must postpone a consideration of the *factual* independence of objects of awareness until we have considered the restricted datum of truth. But whether or not the object of any awareness is in fact independent of that awareness, it still remains true that it is given *as being* independent in both its character and its existence. In short, whether or not a particular object is factually independent, it is always presumptively independent. When it is one and when merely the other, we shall see later. But since the presumptive independence of the object presents itself as a character of all experience, we must consider it now. And since the object's independence which every experience presumes is precisely the same independence which an object may possibly have or not have in fact, then in considering the nature of this presumptive independence we may merely consider the nature of the independence of the object as such, leaving till later the question of whether or when such independence is a fact. What, then do we mean by the independence of what is experienced from the experience of it?

We mean that the things we experience are in no way *related* to the experiencer *by the fact that they are experienced*. This last qualification is, of course, necessary, for the experienced may be, and usually is, related to the experiencer by one or more relations other than the cognitive relation. The paper which I see before me, for example, is related to me by a number of real

---

<sup>3</sup> See R.B. Perry, "A Realistic Theory of Independence," in *The New Realism*, op. cit.

relations such as distance, dissimilarity, and so forth, and with respect to *these* relational properties, it *depends* upon me as upon another natural thing. But it is not related to me and hence does not depend on me, in any of its properties, in so far as I am aware of it. This is so because the act of awareness produces in the thing which I see no real change whatsoever which could serve as the foundation of any relation of dependence. That is to say, no act of awareness is *transitive*; no act of awareness passes over into its object to produce any real property in it whatsoever. On the contrary, every act of awareness produces its change only *immanently*, within the cognitive faculty. The fact that I see this paper, or the fact that I understand the dangers of atomic energy, makes a difference to me, of course. I am really changed by such knowledge, and hence I depend on the things I know, at least to the extent that I know them. But this fact of being known makes no real difference whatever to the things which are known. *Knowing* them disturbs *them* not in the least.

But here two cautions need to be noted. In the first place, though the awareness makes no change and hence founds no relation of dependence in the thing of which I am aware, it is evident that the *physical conditions* of awareness do make such a change. Before I can see something, for example, that thing must be illuminated to a certain extent ; the medium between that thing and my eyes must be translucent; my eyes must possess the physical properties of reasonably healthy eyes, and so on. All these physical factors do indeed make a difference to what I see. What I see will, as we say, “all depend” — all depend on the multitude of conditions and causes of sight. And these physical conditions do change the thing that I see because they act transitively on the thing to produce new properties in it. But awareness itself does not consist in these various physical changes; light striking the eye is not the same as seeing, and air vibrations striking the ear is not the same as hearing. And it is these acts of awareness themselves which produce no change in their objects.

In the second place, it must be noted that once knowledge is acquired, it can of course be *used in action* to alter objects. After I understand the nature of a molecule of water, for example, I can then apply that knowledge to change that molecule. But such practical application of knowledge is quite distinct from the knowledge which is thus applied.<sup>4</sup> And the knowledge itself, just in so far as it is knowledge, makes no difference in the thing known whatsoever and, therefore, produces no real relation of the known to the knower.

---

<sup>4</sup> The failure to recognize this distinction, however, is not uncommon among philosophers today. See, for example, Robert S. Hartman, “The Epistemology of the *A Priori*,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, VIII, No. 4 (June 1948), 732.

Such, then, is the nature of the independence which every awareness presumes its object to have. But such independence may be merely presumptive and not factual. Whether or when this presumptive independence of the object is also a factual independence, we must consider later during our examination of the specific data of epistemology, and more particularly after our consideration of truth.

But now let us turn to that other distinct aspect of the fundamental character of all awareness as an awareness of *something*: the aspect of *identity* — the identity of knowledge and thing known. Now this feature of cognitive identity has evidently not been so obvious or widely recognized as the trait of diversity, but it is nonetheless just as primordial and necessary a feature of awareness. All awareness exemplifies this trait. We identify ourselves with the hero of a novel. We share another person's thoughts. When I know something I know *it*; I have it in mind; and to the extent that I do not, I do not know it. This is not a mere verbalism; it is rather a necessary and evident truth about the nature of knowledge. All awareness consists in an identification with something other than itself.

This character of the identity of knowledge and thing known is, like the datum of diversity, an immediate, universal deliverance of consciousness and is, therefore, a necessary trait of all consciousness. Nevertheless, this datum of identity has been denied, especially by that epistemological doctrine called variously “representationalism,” “epistemological dualism,” the “copy theory,” and so forth, whose most noteworthy historical exponents are perhaps Descartes and Locke. But this copy theory is self-contradictory, and it therefore furnishes an indirect demonstration of the truth of cognitive identity.

According to the copy theory, our ideas are never identical with, but only similar to, their objects. But such a view contradicts the very nature of knowledge and therefore contradicts itself. First of all, the copy theory cannot, of course, be taken as a report of actual experience, for it would then imply that in every cognitive act we are aware simultaneously of two different (though similar) things, idea and object, which are related by a relation of similarity. Such epistemological diplopia, however, is clearly false. When I perceive a tree I do not apprehend two things — an image tree and a real tree. I perceive only one tree — though in the case of genuine diplopia I may have two *image* trees. In the second place, granting the fact that only one tree is given in our consciousness — the idea tree — we have then no way of knowing, on the basis of the copy theory, that there is a second tree — the *real* tree — which is similar to our idea tree. In other words, we cannot know that our ideas are

similar to something that we can never know. This is the impasse of subjectivism — the “egocentric predicament.”

Here, however, it might be objected that we can infer the external tree from the internal tree. But such an inference is impossible unless, here again, we grasp, identically, what is inferred. To infer something from something is to have the mind pass from the premise — the idea — to the conclusion — the real thing — *itself*. But if we thus infer the real thing *itself*, we grasp it, identically. But since such an identity is denied by the copy theory, there can be no inference to the real thing itself. The same remark holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, of the view that the copy idea, which is merely similar, represents or signifies the real thing. If it signifies *it*, then we are led by the sign to the thing itself, identically. But this is impossible if the sign is only a copy of what it signifies.<sup>5</sup> Thus our conclusion stands: We cannot, on the basis of the copy theory, know even that there is anything to which our idea is similar.

In the second place, if an act of awareness can never grasp, identically, anything other than itself, then we cannot even know the idea copy which is declared to be similar to an unknown real thing, since the idea which is known is certainly distinct from the act by which it is known. If it is objected that we can indeed know the idea itself, identically, then there is no necessary reason for not saying that we can also know the real thing itself, identically. And if the reply is given that, while we cannot know the idea itself directly, we can know it through another idea which is similar to it, then the same difficulty arises again, and we are in an infinite regress. Thus, on the basis of the copy theory, in so far as it is consistent, we would be able to know neither real things nor ideas. In short, on the basis of the copy theory, in so far as it is consistent, we would never be able to know anything. But such a theory is self-contradictory because, as we have seen above, it asserts that we know at least one thing, namely, that ideas are not identical with, but rather are copies of, things, which is to say, by the implication just noted, that we know that we cannot know. And since it is self-contradictory, its contradictory — that the idea is identical with its object — is necessarily true.

So, identity of knowledge and thing known is a necessary feature of knowledge. “The soul *is, in some sense, all things,*” as Aristotle said.<sup>6</sup> But in what sense? Surely it is evident that the sense in which knowledge and thing

---

<sup>5</sup> This criticism does not hold, of course, when the idea is thought of as a formal, rather than as an instrumental, sign, for the nature of a formal sign is precisely identical with its *signatum*.

<sup>6</sup> *De Anima*, 431b, 20–21.

known are identical cannot be a physical or material sense, for no two physical things are ever identical. The photograph is *like* the subject, but it is *not* the subject. The wax impression is *similar* to the signet ring, but it is not *identical* with the ring. But in awareness such an identity actually occurs. Hence it cannot be a physical identity. Thus if we are to explain the fact of cognitive identity, we must at once recognize that all awareness necessarily involves a mode of being which is not physical or material. In brief, all awareness necessarily (by its primitive feature of identity) involves an immaterial mode of being. In what sense are knowledge and thing known identical? In an *immaterial, non-physical* sense.

Thus immateriality is the very root of all awareness. It is so because it is necessarily and directly entailed or presupposed by the fact of identity which, in turn, besides being *given* in awareness, is, as we have seen, entailed as a necessary feature in the structure of knowledge, whose existence, finally, cannot consistently be denied. This fact is so crucially important that it bears repeating. Knowledge is necessarily real, in so far as man is man and not merely a vegetable. Knowledge necessarily involves an identity with the thing known. And identity necessarily involves an immaterial mode of being, since no two material beings can ever be identical. Hence there is a mode of being which is immaterial and which constitutes the necessary core of knowledge.

From this recognition of the necessity of an immaterial mode of being for awareness, there follows an important corollary: Epistemology depends upon, and logically presupposes, metaphysics. Immaterial being is a mode of being and hence must be studied by the study of being as such — metaphysics; and since knowledge depends upon this immaterial mode of being, the study of knowledge — epistemology — depends upon the study of being — metaphysics. Put differently, being is prior to cognitive being, so metaphysics is prior to epistemology. The general modern refusal to recognize this priority of metaphysics to epistemology — due at least in part to Kant — has resulted in much confusion in modern epistemology. As one example of this, note on the one hand the declarations of epistemological isolationism by American neorealism and critical realism,<sup>7</sup> and on the other hand the fact that they have, as one commentator has said, “been occupied almost wholly with questions

---

<sup>7</sup> See W.P. Montague’s article in *Philosophy*, XII (1937), 143; also Durant Drake *et al.*, *Essays in Critical Realism* (London, Macmillan, 1920), p. vii.

which could be better described as metaphysical” since “their central issue is metaphysical.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus awareness necessarily involves an immaterial mode of being which is a part of the proper object of metaphysics.<sup>9</sup> But to the extent that this immaterial mode of being is the root of awareness, it may and must be examined by epistemology. To refer to this mode of being as “immaterial” or “non-physical” is, of course, only to say what it is not — that it is not that physical or material mode of being with which we are first and most frequently confronted and with which we are consequently most familiar. This negative signification is legitimate and important, however, for it is through its contrast with physical being that we come to understand this non-physical mode of being. But what, now, is this immaterial mode of being which is involved in all awareness? How can its meaning for epistemology be more narrowly and positively restricted?

Its essential meaning for epistemology has already been given in describing the basic traits of awareness as those of identity and diversity and at least presumptive independence; and its essential meaning as disclosed in these traits may now be summed up in the embrasive trait of *intentionality*. The intentionality of all awareness is thus simply what we have already referred to as its property of being about something other than itself. Thus to say that awareness is intentional is simply to say that it is identical with something diverse from, and at least presumptively independent of, itself. This active relational structure is exhibited, as we have seen, in every instance of awareness. Every sensation, image, concept, proposition, and so forth is *of* or *about* something; it actively tends to, or intends, that of which it is an awareness. Though this term “intention” is more commonly applied only to acts of volition or purposiveness, it has, as is well known, been used technically to signify that dynamic relational structure which constitutes any and every phase of psychic life — cognitive and conative.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, conative acts are intentional

---

<sup>8</sup> R.M. Eaton, “What Is the Problem of Knowledge?,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, XX, (1923), 178, 180.

<sup>9</sup> See John Wild, “Phenomenology and Metaphysics,” in *The Return to Reason: Essays in Realistic Philosophy* (Chicago, Henry Regnery Company, 1953), p. 36 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Gretd, *Elementa Philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae* (Friburgi Brisgoviae, Hader, 1909–12), I, 91–93; II, 306–7; also Harmon Chapman, “Realism and Phenomenology,” in *The Return to Reason, op. cit.*, pp. 22 ff.



precisely because they contain a cognitively intentional element — because they are “cognitively mediated.”<sup>11</sup>

What, then, is this cognitive, intentional, non-physical being? It is primarily and fundamentally that relational existential act (“being” in the participial sense) which consists in being identical with something which is yet different from, and at least presumptively independent of, the cognitive being itself. Thus we may say of this cognitive being that its act, in contrast to the act of material being (participial sense), is such that it makes no real change in the object which terminates it and thus founds no new real relation of that object to the act or agent. In short, its act is immanent in contrast to the transitive act of physical being. And because its act is immanent, making no real change in its object. We may say of this mode of being, secondly, that it relates its agent to its object itself, unchanged and identical, rather than to some new entity which arises in the case of the transitive action of physical being.

This cognitive being is not merely a relation, for it is the act that results in the relation, “knower of.” Yet it is basically relational in structure. Perhaps the best we can do is to say that it is a unique, *sui generis*, relational act, terminating immaterially in an at least presumptively independent object, which in any case leaves unchanged and with which it therefore unites its agent in a relation of immaterial union. That this cognitive being is unique we already implicitly recognize when we think of the fact that it, unlike the physical being with which we contrast it, enables its agent to transcend the spatiotemporal bounds of his physical relatedness and to identify himself with things physically near and far, past and future, and in fact with things not physical at all — in short, to range the whole, of reality without physically changing his place.

Thus the root of knowledge is immateriality, and hence the radical principle of epistemology is the recognition of the fact that there is a non-physical mode of being uniquely different from physical being in that it is a relational act of identification with something which still different from, and at least presumptively independent of, the relational act itself. But now let us return to that other generic trait of awareness which has so far seemed less troublesome — the diversity of knowledge and thing known — and especially to the question of its relation to the trait of identity.

---

<sup>11</sup> See R.B. Perry, *General Theory of Value: Its Meaning and Basic Principles Construed in Terms of Interest* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), Chap. 12, *passim*.

The datum of cognitive diversity and the datum of cognitive identity, and the necessity of each for knowledge, have been separately grasped by various schools of epistemology; but they have seldom been jointly affirmed by any one school. Thus the fact of diversity has rightly been stressed by the school of representationalism; but, as we have just seen, the fact of diversity is there so overemphasized that the fact of identity is denied. The fact of identity, on the other hand, has also been rightly stressed by neorealism and idealism; but here the identity is regarded as so complete that the fact of diversity is denied. Thus, in general, the theories known as epistemological dualism and epistemological monism each contains an important truth, but each denies the truth of the other. And it is here, in the joint assertion of cognitive identity and diversity, that one of the most difficult problems of epistemology lies.

On the face of it, these two traits might indeed seem to be incompatible. If our earlier remarks are correct, both traits must be equally given and necessary. Yet how can they be? How can knowledge be identical with what is different from it? Clearly the two traits can be present only in different senses — only if knowledge and thing known are identical in one sense and different in another. But in what sense are they identical and in what sense different? How can the coexistence and equal necessity of cognitive identity and cognitive diversity be explained?

We have just seen at least one sense in which knowledge and thing known are identical, namely, in a non-physical sense; so it might seem that we need now only conclude that knowledge and thing known are diverse in a physical sense. But this answer, while containing some truth, is unfortunately neither completely meaningful as it stands nor sufficiently specific. It is, as it stands, not completely meaningful because two things cannot meaningfully be called physically diverse when one of them (knowledge) is, as we have seen, not physical. And the answer is not sufficiently specific, for any physical thing is composite, including, most basically, its nature or essence and its existence. Consequently, we must carry our answer further, trying to make as precise as possible the sense in which knowledge and thing known are different. Well, then, what can we say about the nature of this cognitive diversity which will not deny it or any of the other fundamental facets of awareness?

We have just mentioned that any physical thing possesses both its physical existence and a certain nature or essence. This being so, may we say, then, that the diversity between knowledge and thing known consists in a difference in both essence and existence? This, as we have already seen, is exactly the point of view taken by the representative theory of knowledge, the view, namely, that what is given in awareness is a different existent from (though similar to) what

is believed to be known. The origin of this view, as we are now in a position to see, lies in the reduction of that immaterial mode of being, whose action is not transitive but immanent, to material being, whose act is transitive and whose effect is therefore something different from its object which is for that act only a *patient*. Such a theory may be called “subjectivistic” because its materialized or quasi-materialized cognitive being brings about a physical or quasi-physical alteration which inheres subjectively either in the object known or in the knower or in both (since for every physical action “there is an equal and opposite reaction”).

Such subjectivism has had a wide vogue during the last several hundred years. Indeed, the landmarks of modern philosophy consist of the recurrent impasses of solipsism and the subsequent tours de force which inevitably flow from the inner contradiction of this theory. Thus there is the Cartesian egocentric predicament and the tour de force of an external world, the occasionalists’ Cartesian solipsism and their tour de force of “vision in God,” and the Leibnizian windowless monad and the tour de force of pre-established harmony. The same generic type of sequence is repeated at the sensationalist level in the British empiricists: Locke’s restriction of objects of knowledge to ideas and his tour de force of “sensitive knowledge” of material substance, Berkeley’s “*esse is percipi*” and his tour de force of other minds, and finally Hume’s impressions and ideas and his tour de force of custom. This subjectivism or materialization of awareness infects knowing at its very heart, so that the attempt of any disciple to cure one of these materialistically diseased epistemologies within the subjectivist framework is itself a tour de force — witness, for example, the neorealists’ “panobjectivism,” the flinging of Hume’s impressions, and ideas outward into the “objective” world.<sup>12</sup>

Now the impossibility of this subjectivistic epistemology has already been sufficiently elaborated so that we may perhaps dispense with any further treatment of it here. Such a theory which states that the diversity between knowledge and thing known is both an essential and an existential diversity is impossible because it contradicts that other primitive trait of awareness — identity — and thus, as we have seen, contradicts the nature of knowledge. But if we must reject representationalism, may we not say with the critical realists that knowledge and its object are essentially identical but existentially diverse — that the “what” of knowledge is identical with the “what” of the object, but that knowledge and object are two different existents? Evidently we must, for if

---

<sup>12</sup> See Perry, *Present Philosophical Tendencies* (New York, Longmans, Green, 1929), p. 307: “Modern realism [namely, neorealism] is closer to the monistic realism of ‘ideas’ suggested by Hume....”

knowledge and thing known are not different existents, then the knower would literally *be* the thing that he knows, since the *cognitive* existence is admitted to be a phase of his existence. But, as Aristotle said, “The soul ... is certainly not the things themselves [which it knows], for it is not the stone which is in the soul, but rather its form [that is, nature or essence].”<sup>13</sup> The only apparent way of avoiding this view is to follow neorealism in its implicit metaphysical position of denying the reality of existence as anything distinct from essence or quiddity. But this position is impossible, for any awareness of anything is an awareness of a *being*, of something that in some sense *is*. To affirm that this *esse* is not distinct from the essence to which it is attached is to affirm that every conceivable or imaginable thing (essence) exists *necessarily*, and thus eternally, which would be to deny all change and contingency. And on the other hand, to affirm the awareness of an essence which has no *esse* or existence of any kind, which in no sense *is*, is to affirm the awareness of *nothing* — which is no awareness. It was one of the great contributions of the critical realists that they firmly reminded us of the fact that “existence, itself, is not an essence.”<sup>14</sup> Consequently, the very nature of awareness as being of something other than itself — and of something which *is* and is *other* — would seem to compel us to maintain that knowledge and thing known must be existentially diverse.

But such an answer at once raises one of the most difficult problems of epistemology. If we say, as apparently we must, that knowledge and thing known are existentially diverse, how can we ever *know existence*? If knowledge necessarily consists in an identification with the thing known, as we have seen, and if knowledge and the thing known are existentially diverse, as we have also just seen, is it not, then, literally impossible, by the very nature of the case, that we should ever be able to know the existence of things? Or, to state the contrapositive: If we really know existence or existents qua existents, must we not deny that knowledge and thing known are different in existence (existentially diverse)?

This is the terrible dilemma which critical realism faced and tried, unsuccessfully, to solve. Since the critical realists saw that knowledge necessarily involves an identity of essence between knowledge and thing known, and since they affirmed that knowledge and thing known are always existentially diverse, they had to say that the existence of the thing can never be known, that existents always and necessarily elude cognition. “*Existence itself,*

---

<sup>13</sup> *De Anima*, 432b, 29–30.

<sup>14</sup> Durant Drake’s article in *Journal of Philosophy*, XXVIII (1931), 239.

not being an essence *can not* be given” in awareness, as Professor Drake said.<sup>15</sup> It can only be “posited” on “animal faith,” to use Professor Santayana’s terms. But this consequence also contradicts the primitive data of awareness, for awareness always reveals itself as of something that in some sense *is*, as we have just seen.

Thus it would seem that we are faced with the following dilemma: Either knowledge and thing known are existentially diverse, in which case we can never know existence or existents, or knowledge and thing known are existentially identical — the very same existent with one and the same nature or essence — in, which case the previously established datum of diversity is denied.<sup>16</sup> Now both horns of this dilemma are untenable if our earlier remarks are correct. And since both horns of the dilemma are untenable, we cannot say that knowledge and thing known are, without qualification, either existentially identical or existentially diverse. Is there, then, some way of escaping between the horns? There is.

There is a third alternative which allows us to say that knowledge and thing known are, in *specially qualified senses*, both identical and diverse — and both identical and diverse not only in existence but also in essence. The key to this third alternative lies in a refinement of the analysis upon which the dilemma is based, and in our earlier recognition of the fact that cognition is *relational* and, more particularly, that it is a relational act of identification of the mind with something other than itself.

Now in every ordinary or predicamental relation there are four elements the *subject* of the relation, the *foundation* of the relation, the *relation* itself, and the *terminus* of the relation. Thus if we consider the relation, “Chicago’s being north of Louisville,” “Chicago” is the subject, its geographical location the foundation, “north of” the relation proper, and “Louisville” in its geographical location the terminus. All four of these elements, just because they are different elements in the structure of the relation, are different from each other; they are not the same.

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>16</sup> There is, of course, the further possibility, noted earlier, of denying existence as anything distinct from essence, so that there is no existence to be either identical or diverse. This is the position, usually implicit and often explicit, of American neorealism. See especially *The New Realism, op. cit.*, p. 368.

Now identity is also a relation, and therefore it also exemplifies this fourfold structure.<sup>17</sup> In the cognitive relation of identity, “my knowledge of my car,” the subject of the relation is “I” (in virtue of my mind), the foundation is the cognitive species in my mind — that character *by* which I know — the terminus is the object before my mind (“my car”), and the relation proper is the identity between the cognitive species and what is before my mind (“my car”).<sup>18</sup> Since this cognitive relation is peculiar just because it is a relation of identity, the foundation and the terminus are the same. But since it is a relation of identity, they are different in so far as one is the foundation, and the other the terminus, of the relation. Thus the thing known, in so far as it is the terminus of the cognitive relation of identity, is different from the other elements in the cognitive relation, and hence it is different from the whole cognitive relation. More precisely, if K is the knowledge, S its subject, F its foundation, R its relation proper, and T its terminus; and if O is the object known, then O is, identically, T in K (S, F, R, T), and O is *not* S, F, R, or K.

Thus the thing known is identical, both existentially and essentially, with the knowledge of it in the sense of being the terminus of the latter’s relational aspect; and yet the thing known is different, both existentially and essentially, from the knowledge of it in the sense of not being the non-terminal aspects of the knowledge, just as every terminus is distinct from its relation, foundation, and subject. Hence knowledge and thing known are, so to speak, *terminally identical yet non-terminally or relationally diverse*.

Thus the possibility of escaping between the horns of our dilemma, and the possibility of reconciling the crude data of identity and diversity, rests upon the recognition of the fact that knowledge is relational and, more particularly, a relational act of identity; and the dilemma itself rests upon the treatment of knowledge as if it were merely a simplex term or nonrelational entity. So long as knowledge is treated nonrelationally, the knowledge and the thing known are

---

<sup>17</sup> It is possible that the cognitive relation may be better described as a so-called “transcendental” relation rather than as an ordinary “predicamental” relation. If this is done, the foundation of the relation and the relation proper will be regarded as merged into one element of the relational structure: the foundational act of knowing which is the cognitive species together with its reference to the terminus — the object. But the choice between these two interpretations will not make any essential difference to the present analysis.

<sup>18</sup> In this sentence the expression “what is before my mind” is used to denote the *presumptively* independent object and the expression “my car.” the *factually* independent object, according to the terminology employed earlier. Whether or not these two actually coincide must be postponed, as mentioned earlier, until the question of truth is considered.

both considered as merely terms and thus as belonging to the same mode or type of existence. And so long as knowledge and the known are thus taken to belong to the same terminal, nonrelational mode of existence, their evident difference has to mean their mutual exclusiveness; that is. their difference has to be interpreted as a difference between two instances of the same mode, which two instances are, of course, mutually exclusive since they can be distinguished only by their instantiation. But this mutual exclusiveness, so far as it is an exclusiveness of the existence of knowledge and the existence of thing known, has to mean that no non-cognitive existence can ever be known by a cognitive existence, that we can never know existents. If we really do know existents, on this unimodal, nonrelational view, cognitive existence and non-cognitive existence have to be conceived either as numerically one or as unreal (neorealism), which means that diversity is denied. And if diversity remains, then cognitive existence and non-cognitive existence, on this nonrelational view, have to be exclusive (numerically two), which means that any knowledge of existents is impossible (critical realism).

But if we drop this nonrelational view and recognize the fact that cognition is relational in mode, and moreover a relational act of identity, then there is no longer any reason for denying that it can terminate in the identical other existent without *being* the very existence of that existent. In brief, cognition is that unique relational act whose terminus is another existent essence which itself, as the terminus of that relation, is not identical with the relation itself, or its foundation or subject.

Thus our earlier way — and the usual way — of stating the alternative answers to this problem. as those of “essential identity” or diversity and “existential identity” or diversity *simpliciter*, prejudices the question and makes it impossible to find a satisfactory answer. Knowledge is in one sense both essentially and existentially diverse from the thing known (so far as its relational aspects are concerned) and in another sense both essentially and existentially identical with the thing known (so far as the terminus of its relational aspect is the very existent essence known). Thus the idea and its object are *relationally* or *nonterminally* or *modally* diverse, and yet *terminally* identical. Or to put it in a less technical form, we can know by one immaterial mode of existence the very thing itself, its essence and its existence.

Here the question might be raised as to how our knowledge of *knowledge* could be relationally or modally diverse from that knowledge which is known, when the knowledge known is itself relational and hence modally the same as the knowledge of it. But such a situation presents no special problem, for the above analysis applies just as well here. It does so because the knowledge

known is identically the terminus of the relational aspect of the knowledge of it while at the same time *not* the non-terminal aspects of that knowledge. Thus if  $K'$  is the knowledge known (itself a relational act of identity),  $S'$ ,  $F'$ ,  $R'$ , and  $T'$  its subject, foundation, relation proper, and terminus, respectively; and if  $K$  is the knowledge of that knowledge ( $K'$ ), and  $S$ ,  $F$ ,  $R$ , and  $T$  its subject, foundation, relation proper, and terminus, respectively; then  $K'$  ( $S', F', R', T'$ ) is, identically,  $T$  in  $K$  ( $S, F, R, T$ ), and is *not*  $S$ ,  $F$ ,  $R$ , or  $K$ . Thus knowledge and knowledge known are both identical and diverse, but in different respects: They are terminally identical and non-terminally or relationally diverse. And therefore we can know instances of knowledge, as in the case of other existents, without the knowledge known and the knowledge of it being wholly identical.

Thus awareness presents itself to our inspection as being fundamentally a relational act of immaterial identification with something other than, and at least presumptively independent of, itself. Knowledge is identical, in essence and existence, with its object, because what is known is the terminus of a relation of identity. And yet knowledge is different, in essence and existence, from its object, which remains at least presumptively independent of its being known, because knowledge is an immanent, relational act which is, as such, different from its terminus upon which it does not transitively act. In short, awareness presents, as its most basic generic traits, its identity with, and diversity from, an at least presumptively independent object; and these traits can be explained only by recognizing that awareness is essentially an immaterial, immanent, relational act terminating in an existent essence.

## II

SO FAR, however, we have considered only the *generic* data of epistemology — those basic traits which pervade all awareness. Now we must turn to a brief examination of certain *special* data of epistemology — of certain special traits of restricted areas of awareness. These special, restricted traits are of two basic types: those of *sense* and those of *reason*.

Thus we find in our consciousness two main kinds of objects, each with a peculiar advantage and disadvantage. I find on the one hand, for example, a visual image of this sheet of paper, and on the other hand a concept of paper. The sensory image of this sheet of paper is characterized by the fact that it is utterly individuated and unique, absolutely restricted to the here and now, and consequently unrepeatable and incommunicable. Neither I nor anyone else ever has had or will have this particular sheet of paper in his consciousness again.



Nor, consequently, can I communicate this image to anyone else; it is utterly private, lonely, and isolated. This uniqueness and incommunicability is the disadvantage of sense; and it is caused by the fact that the sensory image is necessarily conditioned by a unique *physical existent* and its physical action on my sense organs — either now, as in the case of present sensation, or in the past, as in the case of sensory memory. But this very cause of the disadvantage of sense is at the same time the cause of its corresponding advantage, namely, the fact that sense apprehends (though uniquely and confusedly) something actually existent, something actually exercising its physical existence on my organs of sense.

My rational concept of paper, on the other hand, is not at all individual and unique; it is by no means restricted to this particular sheet of paper at this particular time and place. On the contrary, it is indefinitely repeated in all the innumerable sheets of paper that ever have existed or that will or might exist. Consequently, my concept of paper is quite communicable and public. This is the advantage of reason — its universality — and it is due to the fact that the concept itself is not directly conditioned by any particular physical existent. But this advantage of reason has also, in turn, its corresponding disadvantage, namely, the fact that the rational concept does not in itself refer to any actual existent but only to a universal possibility, and can therefore be thought of whether or not any such object actually exists. Thus the advantage of sense and the disadvantage of reason is that the former apprehends an actual physical existent whereas the latter, by itself, does not; and the advantage of reason and the disadvantage of sense is that the former apprehends a public, communicable object whereas the latter does not.

Such, then, are the two main different types of objects into which we find the contents of our consciousness divided: the conceptual object and the sensory object (whether of immediate sensation, imagination, or sensory memory). But every cognitive act or intention is necessarily specified by, and appropriate to, the object which it intends. Consequently, these two types of object presuppose two types of cognitive act: the acts of sensory cognition and the acts of rational cognition.<sup>19</sup>

Both types of cognition are absolutely indispensable to the acquisition of knowledge. Sense alone apprehends the individual, the absolutely unique existent entity which is actually there physically acting on the perceiving agent. This is the great insight of nominalism and nominalistic “empiricism.” Since

---

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed account of sensory and rational cognition, see John Wild, *Introduction to Realistic Philosophy* (New York, Harper, 1948), Chaps. 18 and 19.

we live in a world composed of existent individuals which we can know, and since only sense yields an individual existent, the sensory mode of cognition is absolutely indispensable to knowledge. But if sensory cognition were our only genuine mode of cognition, as is maintained by nominalistic “empiricism,” we would be as lonely and isolated as the objects of sense, and we would have no communicable and stable knowledge at all. But since communication is a given fact, and since communication requires a stable, common, universal object to be communicated, there must be another mode of cognition — that of reason. Reason alone grasps the common, the universal, the stable which is the *sine qua non* of communicable and scientific knowledge. This is the great insight of rationalism. But on the other hand, reason cannot be the only genuine cognitive faculty, as the rationalists maintain, for then we could never know real existent individuals but only essences, possibilities — since the object of reason is universal and common.

Thus an understanding of knowledge requires the recognition of the genuineness of both types of cognition — sense and reason. Furthermore, it requires that these two types of cognition be understood as interfused in an extremely intimate interrelation. This statement is, of course, denied by that widely current view which radically separates the act and object of reason from the act and object of sense to yield the two divorced categories of the “a priori” and the “a posteriori.” According to this view, only sense is revelatory of the nature of reality, and reason is confined to the housekeeping job of filing and arranging the data of sense.<sup>20</sup> But this theory is untenable precisely because it makes stable, communicable knowledge of extramental reality impossible. On this view the really cognitive part of our experience is incommunicable, and the communicable part is non-cognitive — that is, not revelatory of any extramental reality.

The only way to avoid this difficulty is to recognize the fact that the object of reason is materially the same object as that of sense but is a different formal aspect of it. Or, to put it more precisely, sense and reason have the same material object but different formal objects. Thus my visual image of this pencil contains in itself in a primitive and confused way a number of objects, for example, pencil, length, wood, and so forth, which reason alone is able to apprehend as such. Thus reason, as well as sense, is revelatory of reality.

---

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed criticism of the distinction between the a priori and the a posteriori, see Wild and J.L. Cobitz, “On the Distinction between the Analytic and the Synthetic,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, VIII, No. 4 (June 1948), 651 ff.

The object of sense is thus a confused welter of natures, each of which can be abstractly and specifically considered by reason. This first operation of reason is the act of conceiving, the act of focusing on some one of these formal traits alone, considering it quite apart from all those other traits with which it is confused in the object of sense but from which it may be, so far as its inner nature is concerned, altogether distinct. Thus there is nothing about the nature of wood as such that requires that it be in the shape of a pencil or in any other particular shape, so that we may consider the wood quite in abstraction from shape (and other traits).

It is in this way that we apprehend the first object of reason — the stable nature or essence which is grasped in a concept as a universal possibility. But such natures or essences alone do not constitute knowledge in the full sense. Knowledge does not consist merely of such elements as pencil or length; before knowledge in the full sense can arise, these elements must be combined in assertions. Such combination into complete discourse or propositions is the function of the second rational operation of judging.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to, and underlying this combining function of judgment, however, there is a deeper, more important function that it performs. This function is the apprehension of acts of existing. Now it is true, as we have gone to some length to indicate, that existence is also in a sense apprehended by all other, nonpropositional acts of awareness. But by these other acts existence is not apprehended strictly and abstractly as such. Thus sense grasps the *existent*, an *individual which* exists — this white sheet of paper here and now physically acting on me. Conception, on the other hand, grasps an essence or nature as a merely *possible* existent — such as paper, white, and so forth — and existence in general, the universal possibility of existing. But the proposition, finally, intends some essence or essences as existing in some definite mode, some essence in its very act of existing — such as, “The sheet of paper *is lying* on the table.” And since what the proposition intends is an essence as existing (or as *not* existing), it, and it alone, can properly be called true or false — for truth and falsity pertain to, and are determined by, what is or is not. And such propositions are verified, as we have seen, only by reason acting together with sense, the former supplying clear, analytic insight, the latter, an apprehension of actual existence in the concrete.

---

<sup>21</sup> For a treatment of the third rational operation of reasoning or demonstrating, which we shall not here consider, see “For a Realistic Logic,” by Henry Veatch ([thornwalker.com/recoveries/logic.pdf](http://thornwalker.com/recoveries/logic.pdf)), pp. 19 ff. [in Wild, pp. 192 ff.].

This brings us to the problem of truth and falsity, and at the level at which it first arises — the level of the judgment and proposition. That there is error in sense perception is, of course, true, but that a judgment is necessary before this error can arise is fairly generally agreed. Thus Professor Montague says that perception can be false only when “the word *perception*” is used to mean “the appearance together with the ... judgment that accompanies the appearance.”<sup>22</sup> Though such perceptual judgments are probably seldom explicitly formulated, they are nevertheless always implicit in perceptual experience in so far as it can be called veridical or erroneous. And since perception is veridical or erroneous only qua judgmental, we may perhaps abstract from the perceptual aspect here and consider only true and false judgments or propositions. Even this more restricted topic, however, cannot, of course, be adequately dealt with in the brief space available here. But nevertheless it may perhaps be possible to sketch a few considerations on this thorniest of problems. What, then, can we say concerning the nature of true and false propositions?

True propositions would not seem to pose any special problem, for they simply intend an act of existing as it really is by virtue of that unique act of identification discussed earlier. Thus in the true affirmative proposition, for example, “Man is an animal,” one or more concepts, each intending an essence as a possibility, are logically unified into one complex concept; and this unity (the proposition as a whole and fundamentally the verb in its existential sense) intends one complex essence as existing in some definite mode of existence — actual, real existence, in our example. And in the true negative proposition, “Man is not divine,” for example, the constituent concepts, each intending an essence as a possibility, are logically divided; and their division unified as the whole proposition (and fundamentally the verb in its existential sense) intends these essences as existing separately, or as not existing together, in some definite mode of existence.

But what of false propositions? The possibility of falsehood lies in the diversity between the two modes of existence involved in all knowing — the distinct, terminal existence of the thing which is known, and the intentional, relational existence of the knowledge of it. But as we have seen, great danger lies in overstressing this diversity — the danger, namely, of making knowledge of the act of existing impossible, as is the case with critical realism. On the other hand, if we overemphasize the closeness of the two modes of existence, we run into the danger of denying the datum of diversity and thus making falsity impossible. Thus if we say that a false proposition, for example, “Men are divine” or “Men are not animals,” simply intends an act of existing itself,

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Ways of Things* (New York, Prentice Hall, 1940), p. 270.

then we seem to be forced into the following dilemma:<sup>23</sup> Either the false proposition intends a real act of existing, or it intends a merely cognitive act of existing. If the proposition intends a real existence, then what it intends is, identically, as it intends it, which is to say that the proposition is true. Or if the proposition intends a merely cognitive existence, then what it intends is, again, identically as it intends it, which is to say again that the proposition is true. In short, if we say that a false proposition simply intends an act of existing, without qualification, then it would seem that falsehood is impossible. But on the other hand, if we say that a false proposition has no existential intention at all (that is, no *propositional* intention), then we reduce the proposition to a mere complex concept, which as such merely intends a complex essence in the mode of possibility. But this latter alternative makes *both* truth and falsity impossible, since truth and falsity, as we have seen, follow the act of existence; and this alternative, in addition, makes it impossible to distinguish *actual* instances from merely *possible* instances of the essence.<sup>24</sup>

Thus if the false proposition simply intends an act of existing, without qualification, then it must be true, for it truly intends what it intends; and yet if it does not intend any existence, then it is not a proposition. But there *are* false propositions (for there are pairs of mutually contradictory propositions one of which must be false), so evidently they must both intend existence in one sense and not intend existence in another sense. But what are these two senses?

In order to discover these two senses, we must return to our earlier analysis of the structure of cognition as a relational act of identification and now introduce into that analysis one further refinement. It may be remembered that we saw earlier that every instance of awareness contains as its relational parts a subject (the knower), the foundation of the relation (the cognitive character or species in the mind), the relation proper, and the terminus of the relation (that which is before the mind, that which is known).<sup>25</sup> And we saw at that time that in so far as this is a relation of identity, the terminus is identical with the foundation; and yet that in so far as it is a relation, the terminus qua terminus is different from the foundation qua foundation and also different from the other parts of the relational act and hence different from the relational act as a whole. And we saw further that since this relational act is immanent and immaterial, it

---

<sup>23</sup> See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 187A ff.

<sup>24</sup> This last alternative seems to be the view held by Professors C.I. Lewis and H.M. Sheffer. See Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, Ill., Open Court, 1946), pp. 48–49.

<sup>25</sup> Again, this relation may be interpreted as transcendental rather than as predicamental without affecting the present analysis. (See Note 17.)

consequently makes no new real change in its object or terminus at all and hence leaves its object at least presumptively independent of itself. But now we must introduce a further distinction, a distinction which is the key to the sense in which a false proposition intends existence and the sense in which it does not, and consequently the key to the nature of falsity.

This key lies in the recognition that the terminus of an immaterial, immanent, relational act may have two facets or statuses. In the first place, it has its status just qua terminus, and with respect to this status it is, qua terminus, a necessary part of the relational act and hence dependent upon that relational act. That is, there cannot be a terminus as such without there being a relation which is thus terminated. Now every relational act, since it is relational, has a terminus qua terminus — if it did not, it would not be relational. And hence every intention intends something, namely, the terminus qua terminus. Now a false proposition is an intention, and, moreover, it is the kind of intention which intends an essence in an act of existing. Hence every false proposition intends an act of existing in so far as an act of existing is the terminus of that relational propositional act. So much, then, for the sense in which a false proposition does intend existence.

But this is not all. Though an essence in an act of existing is always the terminus of every proposition, true or false, it is never intended as *being a terminus*; that is, it is never intended in its *capacity* as the terminus, but rather, as we saw earlier, as being *independent* of that intention or relation. This is so because the relational act is an immaterial, immanent act which does not change its object and thus does not intend what it intends as dependent on itself. But while a proposition never intends its terminus merely as being a terminus, yet it may nevertheless be merely that; what the proposition intends may be merely its terminus qua terminus. And when this situation occurs, the proposition is false; it is deprived of its full completion because the terminus that it intends not merely qua terminus is in fact merely a terminus. That is, what it intends is merely a terminus, yet it does not intend it merely as such. Hence the sense in which a false proposition does not intend existence is the sense in which the false proposition does not intend its terminating existence as it merely is — as merely a terminal, qua terminal, existence.

Thus every proposition is an intention of a terminus which is an essence in an act of existing, but it does not intend this terminus as a terminus. Since, however, it may *be merely* a terminus, the proposition may be false. Thus, for example, my relation “grandfather of” relates to a grandchild, though not to a grandchild merely *as* the terminus of this relation. But since the grandchild is merely that, the relation is “false” (that is, false when formulated as a

proposition). Thus the truth of a proposition consists in the coincidence of a merely terminal, judgmental, dependent act of existing with a non-terminal, extrajudgmental, independent act of existing. And the falsity of a proposition consists in the failure of the merely terminal, dependent act of existing to coincide with any non-terminal, independent act of existing. Or to express the same point in another way, a true proposition presumes to, and actually does, terminate in an independent, extrajudgmental act of existing, while a false proposition merely presumes to do this, and does not actually succeed in it.

Hence, in conclusion, we may say that truth is the coincidence of the two modes of existence (the terminal and non-terminal, or the dependent and independent), and falsity is the lack of such coincidence. Or in other words, truth consists in the presumptive independence of a propositional object being also a factual independence, and falsity consists in the lack of this. And this independence can be verified, as we have seen, only with the aid of sense which necessarily terminates in some existent object, though one which is only confusedly apprehended.

But this brings us back to the question which was raised above in Section 1 — the question of whether or not the presumptive independence of the object of awareness is ever also a factual independence. We saw there that the object of every awareness is given *as being* independent, in its character and existence, of the awareness of it; but it was also suggested then that the question of whether or not the object is *in fact* independent of the awareness is a question of the veracity of the awareness. Having now touched upon the nature of truth and falsity, we are in a position to consider this question of the actual, factual independence of the object.

Now if truth consists, as we have suggested, in the coincidence of the terminal qua terminal existence, which as such is dependent upon the relational, propositional act, with an extraterminal, independent existence, while falsity consists in the lack of such coincidence, then it would seem to follow that the object of knowledge is in fact independent of the knowledge of it only in cases of true knowledge. Though every object of awareness, whether veridical or nonveridical, is given as being independent of the awareness of it, only the object of veridical awareness (that is, awareness containing at least implicitly a true proposition) is in fact independent of the awareness of it. And if truth consists basically in the coincidence of the terminal, dependent existence with an independent existence, then evidently there can be truth (and falsity) only if we can intend in propositions an independent existence. But can this doctrine of the factual independence of veridical objects be justified? What evidence is there to support this view?

In the first place, starting from the presumptive independence of, and diversity from, its act of awareness which every object possesses, we can by various processes of testing infer the factual independence of certain objects of cognition. Thus by checking one sense by another, we often find that the object does not vary to our sense of touch, for example, by the fact that we open or close our eyes, and so forth. And by checking with another observer, we find that the object does not vary to his observation by the fact that we observe or do not observe it. And so on. Such tests of invariability and independence are also tests which we commonly use for the veracity of our experience — which fact may be taken as additional confirmation of the view that truth consists basically in the factual independence of the propositional object.

In the second place, the view that things which are *truly* known (that is, “known,” in the usual and honorific sense of that term) are factually independent of the acts by which they are known may also be established by a *reductio ad absurdum* of its contradictory. Suppose that every object of knowledge is dependent upon the act by which it is known. Now if this is so, it will be so in virtue of some new real property — “being known” — having been produced in each object by the act of knowing it, for it is with respect to such a new real property that the object is dependent upon the act of knowing it as upon its at least partial producer. But if this is so, then in knowing anything (and hence in knowing anything truly) the knower would not know it, but only some new and different entity which his act of knowing had produced. Thus to know something is not to know it, which is a contradiction. But true knowledge is a fact, for as we saw at the beginning, its contradictory contradicts itself. Thus since true knowledge is a fact, true knowing produces no real change whatsoever, and hence no relation of dependence, in the thing known.

This doctrine of independence has been recognized and stressed by many who call themselves realists, but its explanation has not always been successful. Neorealism, most notably, recognized the truth of the fact of independence and rightly stressed its fundamental importance for any adequate theory of knowledge. Neorealism’s attempt to explain the fact by its doctrine of external relations, however, introduced other difficulties which ought, if possible, to be avoided. Although the idealist theory of internal relations, which the theory of external relations was devised to combat and supplant, is indeed inconsistent with the fact of independence and is therefore rightly to be rejected, it nevertheless does not necessarily follow that the theory of external relations is thereby acceptable.

This theory of external relations is partially right and partially wrong. It is right in denying, against the idealist theory of internal relations, that what is



truly known is in any way really altered by the fact that it is known — the relation “known by” is “external” to (that is, not really a character of) the thing which is known. But it is wrong in suggesting that there is any relation at all, internal or external, *from* known to the *knower*; and it is wrong in at least implying that the cognitive relation is external to the knower in the same sense that it is external to the thing known — that is, that what is known does not alter the knower.

For these reasons the factual independence of the truly known can be explained better by saying, with Aristotle, that the relation of the knower to the known is *non-mutual* rather than external; that is, that while the relation of knower to known is a real character of the knower — and thus may metaphorically be called “internal” so far as its subject and foundation are concerned<sup>26</sup> — there is no real converse relation of the truly known to the knower at all. It is for this reason (and the deeper reason that the act of knowing is immanent rather than transitive) that the known is independent of the knower, *qua* knower, and his act of knowing. The peculiar relation “known by” (that is, *truly* known by), finally, is not a real attribute of the thing at all, but only a mental relation set up by the mind when, in reflection, it moves back from the terminus of the *real* relation “knower of” to the foundation of that relation in the knower.

Thus there are instances in which the presumptive independence of the object of cognition is also a *factual* independence, and these instances, when they occur in propositions or propositionally mediated awareness, are just what we call true knowledge. Every proposition, being a relational act, has a terminus which it intends as being not merely terminal in status but rather as independent of the proposition itself. Speaking structurally or analytically, we may say that when the terminal, dependent existence of the object is also a non-terminal, independent existence, then we have truth; and when we fail this we have falsity. Speaking from the point of view of verification, we may say that if sense gives us a concrete existent object in which or by which the proposition is intuitively manifest, then it is true; if not, it is false and terminates *really* merely in a possibility. Truth can be achieved only by sense and reason working together in intuitive co-operation. And there are instances of such propositional termination in independent existents; we do have truths. The mind, by virtue of its immaterial, immanent, relational acts terminating in

---

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted, however, that the idealist view that all relations are “internal” tends, in effect, to destroy the distinction between substance and attribute. For a treatment of this distinction, see Manley H. Thompson, Jr., “On the Distinction between Thing and Property,” in *The Return to Reason, op. cit.* pp. 125 ff.

independent existents, can know real independent things as they really are in themselves.

### III

THUS WE have treated of the existence of knowledge, the generic features of all awareness, and the special features of sensory and rational cognition. There is such a thing as knowledge, and it possesses certain necessary traits. The most basic of these traits, which are presented as the data of epistemology, is the intentionality of all awareness — that dynamic relational activity of identification of the mind with something other than and at least presumptively independent of. itself. If any of these traits is denied, knowledge itself is denied, which is a contradiction. Hence a responsible, truly realistic epistemology must take these data as it finds them, acknowledge them, and then proceed to the difficult task of describing and explaining them as carefully as possible.

One such attempt, in the briefest outline form, has been presented here. In knowing, our minds are identified in an immaterial, intentional way with something distinct from, and at least presumptively independent of, our knowledge of it. In sense, this thing is apprehended as a confused individual existent, pregnant with natures which only reason can deliver. In conception, the first act of reason, some one of these natures or essences is apprehended in a pure, abstract form, free from all other essences and from actual existence. And in judgment, the second act of reason, this essence apprehended in conception is intended as existing in some mode of existence, where that existence may be either merely terminal and dependent (as in the case of false propositions) or also nonterminal and independent (as in the case of true propositions).

But any individual attempt to give an adequate explanation of the phenomena of knowledge cannot but fall short of its goal. Anything approaching a fully satisfactory explanation of these phenomena requires the co-operative efforts of all those who believe that there is a world of real existence independent of human minds and that this real existence can be truly known as it really is. 