REASON AND EXPERIENCE

BY

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Metaphysics concerns itself with the question, what, in principle, is our human experience entitled to teach us about that which is real. Is experience a witness, competent when the right questions are put to her, of disclosing the nature of that which really exists? When one interrogates a witness to elicit information, two questions are at stake. Is the witness sufficiently trustworthy and competent to warrant his being summoned at all, and secondly, what, in detail, is his specific testimony? Although one is often in no position to form any judgment as to the general competence and reliability of the witness until after one has listened to his entire story, yet logical priority obviously belongs to the question, will the testimony which this witness is to give be reliable and valid.

The relation between metaphysics and science is roughly analogous to that which holds between these two queries. Experience is the witness, and the question at issue is the one concern of scientist and philosopher alike, what really exists, and what is its true nature: Metaphysics inquires into the character of the witness; science listens to her story. But we are here dealing with an anomalous and unique situation quite different from that which confronts us when we examine witnesses in a court of law. For here, in the examination of experience, we have only one witness who is also the judge. Experience, in the broadest sense of the term, comprises the totality of what is in our possession. Only in the light of what the witness is himself able or willing to disclose, can we decide as to his probity, ingenuousness, and the

credibility of his tale. There is no other witness whose testimony may serve to check and to control our judgment. I think that this broad situation supplies the true basis for the statement that metaphysical inquiry is to be carried on in an empirical spirit and method. How else could metaphysics pursue its inquiry, since experience is our only witness, the domain of all that lies open to our inspection. But to say that both science and metaphysics are empirical studies, does not obliterate all distinction between them, least of all the logical difference between the two types of question to which I have referred. I should prefer to say that while both science and metaphysics are empirical, since experience is the totality of what we possess, philosophy is primarily reflective in that it undertakes to scrutinize the credibility of experience as a whole, and to frame what notion it can of the general sort of thing reality must be when judged in the light of the credibility—or its absence—imputed to experience.

Before parting with this all too crude analogy we shall do well to observe one implication which it would seem to carry. If the analogy holds, then we should have to say that reality cannot forthwith be identified with experience any more than the deliverances of a witness can themselves be identified with the real events and objects which his testimony discloses when it is valid. We possess the witness; he is in our presence, his story we listen to; but we try to extort from him something which we do not in the same sense possess, the truth about that for which we need a witness precisely because it is not within our immediate grasp.

But it may well be that there is no term more hopelessly ambiguous and misleading, more redolent of warring philosophical traditions, than this term 'experience.' The use of the term 'experience' without anything further to qualify and to specify it, may well appear as a philosophical scandal. The term 'experience' may indeed be used in a sense sufficiently wide to include everything which we possess, all that in any way comes within the range of what we sense, feel, know, believe in, think of, or imagine. Alexander has this inclusive use of the term in mind when he speaks of "taking it as self-evident that whatever we

know is apprehended in some form of experience.''[1] But, if this be the denotation of the term, then nothing namable or thinkable remains outside of experience to be set over against it or contrasted with it. In so inclusive a use of the term it would be idle to say or to imply what I said a moment ago, that we are interested in using experience which is what we have, in order to discover something about reality which we do not possess. For, in gaining some supposed information about reality, we would be bringing reality within the area of that which we believe in or think about; it would become an object of our experience which may thereby have become enlarged or corrected, but not set over against any reality which does not belong to that which we do experience.

But the term 'experience' is very commonly used in a narrower sense. Two of these more restricted meanings of the term may here be distinguished. First, experience may be used to designate the processes or activities of experiencing, with the emphasis on the last syllable. Experiencing is the generic name for such processes as seeing, hearing, liking, believing, judging, inferring, planning, being interested in, manipulating, and behaving, in so far as these are operations in which our minds, or ourselves as conscious, engage. These processes of experiencing all terminate in something which is their object, either a direct object, as the cloud which we watch float by, or a cognate object or accusative, as in dreaming a dream or running a race. Suppose we agree that experience, in the former unrestricted sense, comprises both processes and their objects, the process of seeing and the cloud which is seen. We may still feel impelled to say that the process of seeing is more truly and literally a moment or pulse within experience than is the thing seen. I possess or even am, at the moment, the conscious process, the seeing, and I am not the cloud. The cloud is the object of my experience as an experiencing, but is in no wise comprised within it. This, the first restricted sense of the term, identifies experience with some conscious process of experiencing.

[1] *Space, Time and Deity*, I, p. 4.

But there is another meaning of the term which still restricts it to something narrower than the totality of what we may in any sense be said to experience, without confining it simply to processes of experiencing. Experience may refer to and include something which is thought to be literally and directly present within the total process of experiencing but present as a quality or content, sensed or felt, and hence distinct from any process of sensing or of feeling. But such a sensed or felt quality is so indissolubly fused with the process of sensing or feeling that if one asserts that the process is mental, one will also affirm that the quality in which the process terminates is mental. Here is then a sense datum, a *sensum,* an idea or feeling, as quality not as process, some content of consciousness. A cognate objective, a content which is peculiarly intimate to the process—the dream which I dream, the plan which I plan—is not itself any process, yet is so closely bound up with the process as to be existentially inseparable from it. The experienced, in the present meaning of the term, is literally engulfed within the mind, and is no external or transcendent object.

The existence of both conscious processes and of mental contents or data has been denied, either in a complete and wholesale manner, or with reference to certain alleged classes of such processes and such contents. In Alexander's type of realism, for instance, our processes of consciousness which we "enjoy" terminate directly in those non-mental and independently real entities with which they are compresent, and which we may "contemplate." Things perceived, imagined and in any way apprehended are not present within our processes of perceiving, imagining, and apprehending, nor are they cognate objectives. They are externally present to or with these processes, as the chair is present to the floor upon which it rests. In other types of realism, so-called neo-realism, for instance, all supposed processes are analyzable into groupings of neutral contents which may be either mental or non-mental, depending upon their context and relations. But all such theories are metaphysical inter-

pretations of the real nature and status of what, within our experience, appear to be processes, contents, and objects. And the problems discussed by these theories arise precisely because experience does present us with generically distinguishable aspects and with different possible ranges of extent to be designated by the term 'experience.'

Experience then may be a concept used to denote three such fields. In a completely unrestricted sense it stands for the totality of all that which is any way experienced. Again, in one restricted sense, it stands either for mental contents and qualities alone, or such data along with conscious processes which have these contents for their cognate objects. Or thirdly, the term may be still more narrowly limited simply to these processes themselves. It is this wide range in the possible meanings of the term 'experience' which gives point to the question put by Royce, "when is experience not experience"?[2] When, in other words, are we tempted to say that we experience things whereas in strict and literal truth we do not, in our actual experience, possess them? The inquiry into what indeed it is that we do literally experience, and what the relation is between processes of experiencing, the immediate data or contents of experience, and any more remote and distant objects of experience, should such be supposed to exist, has supplied some of the major problems of recent philosophical discussion and controversy. I should myself be willing to suppose that certain positive results have emerged from these inquiries. I am constrained to believe that the substantive thing or process which alone is fairly entitled to be called experience is something more limited in its scope and narrower in its range, than is reality. Nor does this belief compel me to deny that experience, thus limited as it is, may be a disclosure and a revelation of the real. What the witness tells us, whether our attitude be that of credulity or skepticism, is not existentially identical with those real events and structures about which the witness purports to speak. The shores of experience—to shift the metaphor—are washed by waves which roll in from

[2] Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism*, p. 18.

the ocean of reality, stretching out beyond any horizon discerned by us. Experience dips into reality, touches it in spots and segments, makes intermittent soundings, throws some dim and vacillating light upon the realm of existence. Reality is, if you will, thus experienced, but reality does not coincide with experience. The island is bathed by the ocean waves, and on that very account the ocean can neither be identical with nor a part of the island. If to make some such pronouncement as this forthwith entitles me to be enrolled among the realists, I must humbly beg admittance to their hardy band. But this broad platform says, so far, nothing more than that experience is something which we do possess and of whose nature we may expect to have some adequate knowledge, while reality is that which we may wish and even hope to know, but of whose knowledge we may not be so directly confident. And if we do believe ourselves eventually to come into possession of reality or of a knowledge of reality, such possession will have a *de jure* quality and will be thus logically distinct from that first *de facto* possession of ours which is experience, in some one of the meanings above enumerated.

But experience is an ambiguous possession not only in those respects already indicated. The language of common sense as well as that of science and philosophy provides a vocabulary which suggests that in addition to our possessing data of experience, whatever their nature and range, whether processes, contents, or objects, there exists along with or within experience a region which is in some significant way distinct and specific. The terms thought, idea, reflection, understanding, reason, seem to mark off some field which has characteristics other than those possessed by mere experience, by feeling, sensation, perception. Again one notes the mischievous ambiguity of the word experience. If it is used to designate all that we have or do, it cannot be contrasted with anything else that we possess or perform, and we are not entitled to say that, in addition to experiencing things, we reflect upon them, think and reason about them. Our human way of experiencing things may be thus to reflect upon and to

interpret them, but they will have to be in some way experienced before they become subjected to the processes of thought and reflection. Unquestionably, some analysis of the nature of the processes designated by the terms reason and reflection, and of the relation of these processes either to the wider area of experience in general, or to the data of experience in some more restricted sense, must be attempted before we may profitably inquire into the central theme of metaphysics, the relation between experience and reality. It is this analysis, this question of the relation between reason and experience, which will chiefly concern us here. Only at the end of what I fear will be a long and tedious journey shall I touch, and then but lightly, upon the question as to how experience stands in relation to reality. I should wish, however, that our inquiry and analysis might serve as a useful prolegomena to that further undertaking. That it is necessary to make an analysis of the meaning of experience, to ask what it is and what makes it possible, before we raise the issue as to the metaphysical validity of any concept whatever, is sufficiently close to the critical enterprise of Kant to furnish us with a fitting theme on this occasion.[3]

What area of experience, then, what interests, motives, and processes are covered by the concept of reason, and what is the relation between reason and experience? I shall here distinguish three meanings of the concept of reason, three different interpretations of the significance and function of that for which the term reason stands, and I shall observe the relation of reason, in these three different formulations, to experience at large. These diverse interpretations of reason are not merely three possible dictionary meanings which are attached to the word. Rather do they represent three persistent and deep-seated motives of philosophical analysis and reflection. I shall wish not merely to describe them as three broad types of theory, but to give some indication, however scanty, of what I conceive to be their relative adequacy and profundity.

[3] This paper was read on April 22, 1924, the bicentenary of the birth of Kant.

I offer at once a preliminary and approximate characterization of these three interpretations. First, reason may be used as a term to designate the mind's interest in the maximum of attainable certainty, certainty which is indubitable and which can provide an unshakable foundation for the structure of knowledge and, if possible, for man's practical undertakings as well. Reason, so defined, is contrasted with that portion of experience which is not rational, in so far as this latter area, whether theoretical or practical, is subject to doubt, uncertainty, and confusion. The rational will be that which, whatever its other characteristics, is purged of uncertainty and fluctuation, and which stands forth clearly as a solid and sure possession, a *ποὺ στῶ*, capable of meeting every challenge and every doubt. In the second place, reason may be said to denote the mind's interest in the maximum of attainable meaning, where meaning implies mutual implications, inclusiveness, continuity, and coherence. The rational is now the systematic, the well-organized, some synthesis of details held together by an unbroken thread. The area of rationality, in this second meaning of the concept, is contrasted with the non-rational parts of experience in so far as these latter are partial, momentary, and fragmentary, an aggregate of items detached, having neither totality, continuity nor coherence.

These two principles or motives to each of which has been given the epithet 'rational,' the interest in certainty and in continuity of structure, have appeared under various guises in the history of philosophy. These two motives are represented in the philosophy of Leibniz, for instance, by the principles of identity and of sufficient reason. For, as I shall presently note, one type of certainty is supplied by the presence of an identical content, so that the search for identities, for self-identical entities, is the mark of reason and the path which leads to certainty. The principle of sufficient reason, on the other hand, connotes an interest in wide ranging continuous structures, held together by the bond of causality, or by some thread which links part to part within something total and inclusive. Again, the two criteria of necessity

and universality, as the two proper characteristics of all rational judgments, would seem to point in these same two directions. Necessity spells certainty and the rigid exclusion of any alternative possibility; universality connotes that which holds and is valid for some sweeping and inclusive area. I am not however here inclined to lay weight upon any specific historical forms in which the two principles of certainty and of continuity may have appeared. I suggest these merely as possible and, I think, legitimate illustrations.

The third interpretation of the nature of reason and the rational, I find somewhat more difficult to designate concisely. It is the outcome of observing that the human mind or spirit has a nature which is, in some sense, its own; it has, that is, interests, purposes, and intentions, and when the mind either constructs or finds anything which embodies or expresses these, its own ways of doing or thinking, it recognizes in them a meaning of a distinctive sort. The rational character which belongs to objectively continuous and coherent structures, to mathematical systems, for instance, and which exemplifies our second interpretation of the meaning of that which is rational, seems to me to be different, at least prima facie, from the rational significance which any situation or object possesses because it expresses or fulfils some purpose and intention. Adapting the distinction which Royce has made familiar, though not using it here in just his sense, we may say that the former of these two meanings, that which objectively continuous structures possess, is an "external meaning," while the meaning which attaches to whatever I recognize as in some manner continuous with my own life, my own nature and needs, possesses an "internal" meaning. This, then, is our third interpretation of the concept of reason. The rational is now that which expresses the mind's purposes and intentions, and stands in contrast to the non-rational portions of experience in so far as this latter region presents us with something alien, with sheer brute data, with that which we cannot understand precisely because it is in no wise continuous with our own purposes and ways of behavior.

Here are three diverse interpretations of the province and function of reason. Each of them has its own version of the relation between reason and experience. Each carries certain implications as to the possibility and the results of metaphysical inquiry. But each one of these three interpretations of reason and the rational is sufficiently broad and flexible to admit of a considerable measure of diversity. This is emphatically true of our first interpretation of the meaning of reason, its definition in terms of the desire to attain the maximum of certainty. For, the mind's interest in certainty, in possessing among all of its experiences that which may rightfully serve as an indubitable premise and foundation for any of the mind's ventures—theoretical or practical—has found expression in two divergent directions. That which is most certain is, on the one hand, that which is most immediate, that which lies nearest to us. Uncertainty increases with distance and remoteness. I may hit a bull's eye two feet away easier and oftener than one twenty feet away. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. That which I literally and immediately touch and see, I know and am certain of; the absent and hidden which I must infer or posit is always more dubious. The possibility of error increases with the number and complexity of steps intervening between data and conclusion, between what I hold and have and that which I hope eventually to reach. The only ineluctable certainty belongs to that which I most immediately possess, to that which most directly confronts me, and only at the very moment when I so have it before me. At another moment, even the next—if there be one—I may have no such immediate assurance of *it,* for it belonged wholly to the moment which has now vanished. Certainty spells complete and utter immediacy.

But, on the other hand, certainty has commonly been thought to lodge in and to characterize only such ideas or contents as possess complete clarity and simplicity. That alone is certain which, being just itself, some one quality, essence, or content, repels everything other than its own simple nature; or rather,

which, in its own self-identity and isolation, is not called upon to repel anything for, from its own standpoint, there is nothing other. A transparently clear and distinct idea would be such an essence, in which all confusion, all suggestions of internal and external otherness, are wholly absent. To admit any such complexity and confusion, other than what the self-identical nature of the one content itself demands, would be really to contradict that nature. It would be to set up conflicting claims which would challenge the simple and clear integrity of the one content or essence itself. Clarity and certainty thus imply and require the complete absence of self-contradiction; confusion and complexity are but the beginning of such contradiction. For confusion and obscurity are not compatible with that self-identity which simple, clear, and certain ideas require. Certainty thus connotes clarity, clarity means simplicity and identity, the absence of confusion and of all internal contradiction. Such clear and "simple natures," as Descartes calls them, are the seeds of certainty in all of our knowledge.

Here are, then, two divergent types of that certainty, whose quest is the mark of reason and whose presence is the criterion of rationality. Certainty means either immediacy or such clarity and simplicity as exclude all confusion and otherness. If, to define the area of rationality requires the exclusion of whatever is subject to doubt and uncertainty, then one will banish from that area either all that is not immediate, or else everything which is confused and complex, all that falls outside the boundaries of clearly definable, constant, and identical essences. Descartes appears to have thought that immediacy and simple clarity were not only compatible with one another but that, in one important instance at least, each implied the other. The certainty of self-consciousness, vouched for by its immediacy—for what lies nearer to me than my own process of thinking, of being conscious—provides a model and pattern of that which any clear and distinct idea should be if it is to be a source of certain knowledge. Were self-consciousness not something so utterly imme-

diate it would not be so simple, so lacking in complexity and mediation. Such absence of any germ of internal discrepancy and contradiction constitutes, for Descartes, precisely the mark of simplicity and of clarity, and hence of certainty. I think that there is some good ground for supposing Descartes to be right in thus linking immediacy and such clarity as excludes all internal confusion and obscurity. The present immediate moment, however specious it be, has a relative simplicity of content which wider areas of experience, such as remembered tracts of past time or anticipated stretches of future time, do not possess. That which lies nearest to me does commonly lack the articulation and complexity of detail which things at a distance, seen in a wider perspective, appear to possess. Immediately present data, whatever they may be, do constitute for each of us the center of the total area of experience. As one goes outward from this center both sheer immediacy and relative simplicity of content are replaced by mediation, diversity, and complexity of content.

But whether or not these two renderings of certainty, as immediacy and as that self-identity which "simple natures" possess, are mutually compatible, they share in common one important characteristic with respect to the relation between the area of certainty and experience at large. The domain of that which is certain, understood in either way, is much narrower than the total field of our experience, when the term experience is used in its unrestricted and most inclusive sense. Much or even most of what we experience, in this meaning of the term, falls outside of the area of certainty either because it is remote and not immediate, or because it is diverse, confused, and obscure. Hence, if the rational is the certain, then most of our experience is irrational, and the field of certainty and rationality is a precarious and tiny island surrounded on all sides by the sea of uncertainty and irrationality. I desire to lay some stress upon the relation between reason and experience implied by this first interpretation of the nature of reason, to suggest some illustrations of it, not only because of its importance in the history of thought, but

because, as we shall note, this relation becomes reversed when we turn to the second interpretation of the province and function of reason.

If reason be supposed to search out or to elaborate clear and simple ideas, if the whole life of reason be lived only amongst such fixed and constant meanings as permit of no change and diversity, if the principle of identity be the core of logic, then those philosophers would seem to be right who report the existence of a fundamental antinomy between logic and experience. Or, since after all our logic obviously belongs to our experience, we had better describe this relation between reason and experience by saying that reason draws from experience only a thin and abstract web of concepts—static, discrete, and frozen—infinitely poorer in content and meaning than experience itself. And, it need scarcely be mentioned, this has formed the theme of numerous types of irrationalism and anti-intellectualism, of the appeal from logic to intuition and experience. There is a steady drift in this direction throughout the development of James' thinking from his early essays and his *Psychology* to the frank and explicit statements of *A Pluralistic Universe,* in which he definitely discards the "intellectualistic logic," the logic of identity, and comes with a final sigh of relief to the ultimate discovery that life and reality are irrational. "Reality, life, experience, concreteness, immediacy, use what word you will, exceeds our logic, overflows and surrounds it."[4] It can form no part of my plan to go over again the familiar ground of this critique of logic, based upon the alleged fact that logic can concern itself solely with identities, whereas experience is rich in diversity and is in constant flux, never the same from individual to individual, nor from moment to moment. That ideas contain less than experienced perceptions, that scientific laws resume only an abstract and partial aspect of concrete facts and events, that no concept or definition is adequate to the full nature and reality of an experienced individual, these well-worn theses are

[4] W. James, *A Pluralistic Universe,* p. 212.

repeatedly set forth as the outcome both of empiricism and of the "idealistic reaction against science." This is true of traditional empiricism, because in the development of impressions into ideas very much is shuffled off and faded, so that what remains in the idea, the concept, is far poorer in content than is its original. And from the same interpretation of the nature of thought and ideas arises that disbelief in the competency of the sciences to discover what is real because science is conceptual and symbolic, its "symbols representing the likenesses among individuals and the likenesses among these likenesses, so tending indeed towards an abstract and spurious unity, but farther and farther away from the living whole."[5]

Meyerson, first in his *Identité et Realité,* and ten years later in *De l'explication dans les sciences,* has offered a penetrating analysis of the actual rôle which the search for identities plays in scientific explanation. To explain a phenomenon, to render it intelligible to our understanding, is to discover an identity of content between it, its antecedents, and its surroundings. For instance, rationally to comprehend any diversity in space is to replace that apparent diversity by a real identity and homogeneity so that a genuinely rational matter would be ultimately nothing but space itself, which is what Descartes supposed.[6] I have no intention, even were I able, to inquire into the validity or adequacy of views of this type, with respect to the logical requirements of scientific explanation. I mention them as illustrations of what is, I think, the outcome both historical and logical, of the Cartesian interpretation of reason as the intuition of clear and distinct ideas, of "simple natures." This interpretation carries with it the implication that the area of rationality is far narrower and more restricted than is the total domain of our experience. And it is in this respect that this interpretation of certainty joins hands with the other definition of certainty in terms of immediacy.

[5] G. Ward, *Naturalism and Agnosticism,* II, p. 91. *The Domain of Natural Science,* by E. W. Hobson, has but recently offered a similar interpretation and criticism of the exact sciences.

[6] Cf. Meyerson, *De l'explication dans les sciences,* I, p. 177.

How much of any specific experience is literally and utterly immediate, what core of experience remains when all construction, all mediation and inference, all probability and belief, when anything even slightly transcendent to the immediately given, is stripped away? What is the *datum datissimum* of experience? This question, always, of central importance, becomes especially pressing if rationality and certainty are defined as immediacy. To answer this question in detail and with precision offers, for me at any rate, very great difficulties, and I am far from trying or wishing to attempt an answer here. But I may rightfully be called upon to choose between two alternative types of answer, and so far as that broad choice is concerned, I myself can have no hesitation. Either, we must say that everything which I in any way experience, all that I perceive, remember, image, hope for, or believe in, is an entity directly presented or contemplated, hence immediately before me, at the time when I do so experience it. This implies a direct, presentative realism, far from naïve, I should suppose, for I doubt whether any philosophical theory is or should be naïve. Or, we shall say that literally presented and immediate data are something less or other than objects perceived, remembered, and believed in, and that some process of inference or of construction supervenes upon the immediate data to yield the world which we experience and within which we live and act. I say that as between these two broad alternatives, my decision is not difficult. The immediate is, I should hold, always less than the experienced, save at a possible ideal lower limit of experience. Some of the grounds for this choice I shall presently mention. For the moment I would urge merely that if reason is interpreted as the interest in and the possession of whatever is certain, that if, further, the certain is defined as the immediate, then rationalism issues in skepticism because the immediate is always far narrower and more restricted than the objects which we are said to know, in whose existence we believe, and with which our practical dealings hold commerce. It is, I think, one large merit of Santayana's recent volume, *Scepticism and Animal Faith,* to have made plain so much as this.

"Nothing given exists," and it is with what exists, with what is really there in the offing, ready to aid us or to overwhelm us, that both our practical and our cognitive interests are concerned. Only essences are immediately given, and essences are not existences; they are no substances, no portions of matter and the stuff of nature. They are indeed the possible contents or objects of our intuition when we, ceasing to know or to act, are willing merely to gaze upon the immediately given; they are, too, the terms of our human discourse, not the real beings of practical pursuit and avoidance, nor the things we desire to know and to fathom. An earlier lecture in this series has afforded a brilliant analysis of Santayana's central thesis, and that shall be my excuse for carrying my own exposition and illustration no farther.

I have wished primarily to observe the deep analogy between the type of theory and analysis represented by Santayana, and that represented by James and Ward, with respect to the relation between the domain and extent of what is rational, and the wider range of our total experience. Both kinds of theory, profoundly different as they are in other respects, agree in interpreting the rational as the logically certain, the indubitable. That which is rationally certain is, for both types of theory, vastly less than that which is experienced. For Santayana it is less, because the certain is defined as the immediate, and things known, constituting the world of belief and of our practical life, are simply not anything immediate. In James and Ward, the rational is the domain of fixed conceptual entities, clear and distinct ideas, identical contents, while experience with its diversity and its change, its life and its flux, vastly exceeds the capacity of reason thus defined to disclose or to represent, save in the most schematic, symbolic, and even distorting fashion.

But I must turn to our second interpretation of the meaning and function of reason. I have said that it consists in defining reason in terms of our interest in coherence, in continuity, in the discovery of that which links the immediate to that which is wider, more objective, and more remote. Now the result of that analysis which formed the basis of the first interpretation of

reason was to isolate a smaller area of certainty, of rationality, within the wider circle of experience. That field of immediate certainty will be small indeed, immeasurably narrower than the world which we experience, within which we act and which we apprehend. But as this region of certainty and rationality contracts and shrivels to pure immediacy or to the insight that A is A, the meaning which the immediate data or the simple, self-identical natures possess also diminishes. The concept of meaning, as I here employ it, is nothing recondite or difficult. For any entity to have a meaning, as I now use this term, signifies simply that the entity points to something other than or beyond itself. Meaning implies relations, some context and setting, some orderly structure and configuration which reaches out beyond the datum or entity which possesses meaning. Do we experience meanings in this sense of the term? I must answer both yes and no, depending on the denotation of the term experience. In its completely unrestricted sense, of course we experience meanings as well as data. Otherwise we should never speak of them, think of them, or raise questions about them. But if by experience is meant only what we immediately and literally experience, I must give more of a negative reply to the question, for reasons which I have still to mention. But I now call attention to the fact that that element or function which builds out the smaller circle of immediate experience into the wider field of experience at large has frequently—and I think legitimately—been identified with reason, thought, ideas, judgment, inference. So pervasive throughout all the levels of our experience are meanings, that the difficulty of isolating an absolutely immediate datum of experience, purged of all mediation, seems to me very great, if not overwhelming. A statement of certain of the difficulties attendant upon this attempt will supply the grounds for my assertion that experience normally comprises much more than anything immediate, and may also serve to justify the use of the concept 'reason' to indicate those processes whereby the mind transcends the immediately given.

The first observation is that of the well-worn fact that very much of what seems to be given in experience involves an inference, and is not literally given just as we do experience it. I hear a noise and I perceive it to be the noon chimes of the campanile. I see a colored shape, and I say that it is Mt. Tamalpais. My perceptions are shot through with inferences and interpretations. They are drenched with meanings which are not immediate in the same sense as are the literal masses of immediate experience, call them sense data, essences, or what you will. I am not denying that all which I perceive may be every whit as objective as are the qualities immediately sensed. I am not implying that we, in perceiving, create or project into the void some halo of meaning around a nucleus of objective data. I do hear the campanile chimes; what I see is the real Mt. Tamalpais; I remember a real past. But in doing all this, I infer and interpret as well as merely recognize an immediately given. With the pronouncement of Bradley I must concur, that "if we cannot demonstrate that every possible piece of fact is modified by apperception, the outstanding residue may at least perhaps be called insignificant."[7] A surprising paradox it may be, that our processes of apperception, inference, and construction should yield, instead of an artificial and unreal fabrication, a more adequate disclosure of the real than any immediately given data, a paradox to which I shall revert at the end.

There is a second difficulty in the attempt to isolate an island of immediate certainty where everything is given, and where there is no hint of anything not given. It lies in the character of incompleteness which every immediate datum seems to me to possess. Such incompleteness is something lying wholly within the present datum, to be sure, but it is also something which prevents its absolute isolation from any outlying region. It appears to me indubitable that my present perceptual field, perceived objects and events in space-time, is experienced as standing in some relation to a wider context which is not in the same

[7] F. H. Bradley, *Essays on Truth and Reality*, p. 109.

immediate way given. The perceptual field is perceived as having an edge, not sharp and not constant. It shifts spatially as I turn my head, as I watch moving objects, and as I perceive the flow of events. Some wider context of space and time qualifies my present perceptual field. What I perceive is not only suffused with inference and meaning within, but it is perceived as enclosed by wider spaces and times, itself partial and fragmentary, a present moving between past and future, a spatial field bordered by spaces which I do not perceive. This characteristic of my experience is not properly to be labeled an inference. It is apprehended along with the perceived field as the converse, so to speak, of the latter's fragmentariness. It is not a subsequent inference, and is not dependent upon prior perceptions of other spaces and of earlier times. Whether it be better to say that space and time in vastly wider stretches than we ever directly perceive are intuited or are thought, in either case their apprehension enters into and qualifies what I here and now perceive.

Consider, in the third place, the status of Santayana's essences. It seems to me that when I try to gaze upon some essence which has just now 'swum into my ken,' when I greet it and contemplate it as an essence, know it for what it is as just this essence and no existing natural object, I also do something more. I somehow locate it in a realm of essence, a realm impalpable, but no less one of which this particular essence is but a single denizen. That is, my intuition of *an* essence is related to the wider context of the realm of essences much as my present perceptual field is apprehended as belonging to a wider spatial context. In saying this, I think that I am but repeating the argument of Bradley against the existence of "floating ideas." The one essence present to my intuition is indeed a floating specter, detached from the solid world of nature's objects; but it is not floating in respect to just this realm of essence. It is recognizable as an essence because it inhabits this world. In its intuition there is implied a reference to that realm. "Because there are many worlds, the idea which floats suspended above one of them is attached to

another. There are in short floating ideas, but not ideas which float absolutely. Every idea on the contrary is an adjective which qualifies a real world, and it is loose only when you take it in relation to another sphere of reality.''[8] These three observations then, that experience is replete with inference, that experienced (perceived) fields are apprehended as incomplete, and that the intuition of any one datum posits a realm wider than the single essence itself, suggest some of the difficulties which attend any attempt completely to isolate and to sever a pure area of immediacy from anything beyond. I must omit any discussion of perplexities which attend the alternative interpretation of certainty in terms of clear and simple natures, and of the analogous difficulties of isolating such pure threads of identity amidst the flux and confusion of experience.

It is such considerations as these which I have just mentioned that compel my recognition of a function which builds out the range of our knowledge beyond anything we possess in immediate experience, and this function is ascribed to ideas in the interpretation of reason now before us. But once more the ambiguity of the term experience deserves mention. When experience is used to designate the totality of all that we possess and do, it is idle to say that ideas and inference, perception and belief, memory and anticipation expand the area of experience. But a mere cataloging of these varied and diverse objects of our experience, which is, I think, all that certain types of realism amount to, serves only to obliterate and to conceal the real problem. When experience is used as a name for that which is so intimate, so much a part of us, something so immediate that merely having experience is seen to be widely different from having knowledge, there arises the plausible possibility of defining reason, thought, as that which enables our minds to know and to dwell amidst structures which encompass vastly more than one fragmentary and partial experience. This is, in any case, a second interpretation of the meaning and function of reason. Reason now signifies

[8] Bradley, *ibid.*, p. 32.

universality, objectivity, coherence, continuity, mutual implications, system. It connotes distance and remoteness, the possibility of transcending immediacy. Each one of these concepts will suggest some familiar type of philosophical theory, the barest outline of which would go beyond anything which I should here attempt. What I wish to observe is that if the capacity and function of thought and ideas are so interpreted, then, instead of reason being a little island surrounded by experience, it is now experience which is small, partial, and fragmentary in relation to those outlying, distant, and objective structures which reason and ideas apprehend. Experience becomes the island, and the realm germane to reason the surrounding ocean.

I shall but mention two considerations of wide import which throw light upon this interpretation. Reason is a term fairly applicable to the possession and use of ideas. Now one general function of an idea is definable as that which increases the area of our world which we may take into our reckoning and which we may know. This capacity of ideas I have dwelt upon at some length in a previous paper.[9] Vision is more intellectual and ideal than touch, for it is a distant touch. Memory and anticipation, dependent as I believe them to be upon ideas, bring before the mind stretches of past and future time, beyond the present moment which alone is immediately experienced. The increase of distance, depth, and scope in the world known and reckoned with, when ideas come upon the scene, is not merely quantitative. At least certain types of order, of relations, of universals, and of meaning are known through ideas. Conversely (and this is the second consideration) the more immediate experience is and the less it has of ideas, the more partial and selective it is. I perceive only what my own type of sense organ and nervous system and my own practical interests determine shall be selected out from the total infinite wealth of my environment. Experience is primarily practical; what I perceive is an enormously compacted

[9] "The Nature and Habitat of Mind," in *Issues and Tendencies in Contemporary Philosophy* (Univ. Calif. Publ. Philos., IV, 1923), pp. 47–73.

and simplified symbol of objects needful for me to discriminate and to take into my practical reckoning. That our perceptions of secondary qualities have chiefly a practical and biological significance was clearly stated by Descartes in the sixth meditation. The practical utility of perception, which presumably justified its origin and further development, necessitates its partial and selective character. To perceive anything is to fasten an exclusive attention upon it and to be inattentive to the infinite range of things which are real and which are theoretically knowable, but whose perception is not relevant to the immediate practical situation.

But this discernment of the selective and partial nature of perception broadens out into the recognition of a profound antinomy between all experience in so far as it is practical and reason as theoretic and contemplative. If I set out to know my world, I must include in my knowledge or theory every fact which is discoverable. All facts, merely as facts, are of equal value. My theoretic insight must comprehend and 'save' all of the appearances. Catholicity and inclusiveness are the marks of such theoretic interest. This is but the necessary implication of that prime function of reason and ideas, to widen and to deepen the range of the mind's vision. On the other hand, a selection and choice, an exclusive preference for this as against that, a loyalty to one cause to the exclusion of all other competing causes, of such is our practical life. To know is always to be impartial with respect to everything which falls within the world to be known, and in the end that world has no boundaries. To act is always to be partial to some one object of exclusive interest, attention and loyalty. The very concept of 'practical reason' seems thus to be a misnomer, since practice means selective partiality while reason connotes impartial comprehensiveness and totality. Such narrowing down of what we might theoretically apprehend, to a highly restricted and partial object of our interest and choice thus appears to characterize all practical experience along the entire line of development from perception to deliberative will.

For my will acts are the rejection of all possible and theoretical alternatives save the one decided upon. Reason may contemplate a wide theater of simultaneous possibilities—it is the business of reason and ideas to comprehend broad and deep vistas—my practical choice seizes upon one possibility and annihilates the rest.

And so this relation between reason and experience is precisely the opposite of that implied by our first interpretation. There the rational was the certain, either as the immediate or as the simple and self-identical, and experience overflowed far beyond any such area of certainty. Now, experience is the practical, the immediate, the thing here and now to be attended to, while reason and ideas bring before the mind vistas and perspectives far wider and more inclusive. Experience is partial and narrow; reason is impartial, objective, and total.

But there is a further manner in which this tension between reason and experience may be portrayed and interpreted, and a hasty mention of this will send us at once to still a third interpretation of what reason is and does. The data of experience as they come to our minds unsought not only undergo a process of selection, we not only narrow down through attention and practical interests the far wider area which is there for our theoretical ideas to apprehend, but our experience both theoretical and practical is also a process of building up, through construction and interpretation, structures which shall possess significance for us. I know not how else civilization may be described except as the totality of structures which man's spirit has built up because they provide a habitat more fitted to the energies of his spirit than are just the data which he merely finds. Science itself is an expression of the mind's activity as it seeks to transform the raw material of experience into something more intelligible and more significant. To assert this is certainly not to say that any mind has contrived the objects of our scientific apprehension. But these objects would never be discovered were not our minds ceaselessly striving to discover meaning, order, and continuity which are not

found in the same manner as are the data of experience thrust upon us willy nilly. Science is the never ending activity which seeks to render the data of our experience theoretically intelligible and significant; it is itself the child of civilization which is but man's enterprise of fashioning some fit home for the needs and the life of the human spirit. The Greek city state, surrounded by the barbarian world, represents such a partial but permanently significant conquest of reason, building up and domesticating for the mind a domain of rationality. The structures thus provided are rational not because they possess immediacy or mere simplicity, and not only because they expand and fill out the meagerness of our immediate personal experience into something more total and inclusive, but chiefly because they are in some fashion adapted to the deeper requirements of the human spirit. I find more than a hint of this interpretation of reason in a paragraph of Coleridge's *Table Talk* which I shall read:

> I am by the law of my nature a reasoner. A person who should suppose that I meant by that word, arguer, would not only not understand me, but would understand the contrary of my meaning. I can take no interest whatever in hearing or saying anything merely as a fact—merely as having happened. It must refer to something within me before I can regard it with any curiosity or care. My mind is always energic—I don't mean energetic; I require in everything what, for lack of another word, I may call *propriety*.[10]

This thesis as to the meaning of reason, that it stands for that active process of interpreting and organizing, of building out and filling in all data of experience so that our meanings and our nature are portrayed in the structures which we acknowledge as significant and as real, this thesis is one rendering of the Kantian analysis of experience. It is a reading of Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the Categories upon which Royce constantly wished to lay stress. The first definite statement by Royce of this as the outcome of Kant's teachings was set forth in substance in a paper upon "Kant's Relation to Modern Philosophic Progress," read at the Kant Centennial (the Centennial of the publication

[10] Coleridge, *Table Talk*, March 1, 1834, Bohn ed., p. 275.

of the *Critique*) in 1881.[11] It is held to be the central thread in the development of Post-Kantian Idealism in Royce's posthumous *Lectures on Modern Idealism.*

> The world of our experience (I quote his summary in his own words) becomes a rational realm to us in so far as we can interpret it in terms of ideas that adequately express our own conscious purposes. . . . . The world is, at least in appearance, irrational in so far as it refuses at any moment to express our meaning, to embody the categories of our thought, to realize the ideals of our conduct, to permit the unity of consciousness to come into synthesis with the brute facts of sense and of emotion.[12]

That experience is not only a finding, a sheer recognition of the given, but also an active process of selection, of interpretation, and of construction, and these latter in a sense more profund than psychology brings to our notice, I can have no doubt. But once we recognize this double aspect of experience, we are confronted with a tension and cleavage more disquieting and more pervasive than that which we noted above to sever the life of knowledge from the life of our practical interests. To reflect upon this new and deeper antinomy is to be brought back again to the question of the relation not only between reason and experience, but between experience and reality. For, in so far as the mind does anything whatever to the bare data which it might merely find, the structures thus modified acquire indeed a significance and rationality which alien and mere data do not possess. But they seemingly acquire this meaning at the expense of their reality, their objectivity and their independence. The data of experience would seem to belong to the real; they are the gifts and offerings of nature. They came to us from beyond ourselves, and if we could catch them and hold them fast just as they begin to hover within our own possession, they might tell us of the realm from which they have come. In contemplating them before they become tarnished by exposure to the processes of our own nature, we would be nearest to the knowledge of reality. But we are not content merely to accept these gifts, we seize upon them only to interpret them, to use them, to organize them, to build upon them

[11] Published in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy,* XV.

[12] J. Royce, *Lectures on Modern Idealism,* pp. 245, 247.

such rational structures as shall embody our meanings and purposes. It would appear to follow from this situation, so hastily sketched, that the world which is real because it is the source of the given is not the world which has significance and value for us, and the world which we acknowledge as rational is not the real world. I should myself hold that something like this is the deeper and final meaning of Hume's skepticism. Impressions alone yield knowledge of the real, or are the real. We add to impressions through custom and imagination, we impute connections, order and stability, causality and substance, into impressions thereby spoiling their worth as transcripts of reality, but making them humanly significant. We can live only in a world thus organized and domesticated, but the world thus build up is artificial and not real.

I have elsewhere used the term "significant structure" to designate a structure which is both objective and real, and also rational and charged with meaning because it is, in some fashion, linked with our own intentions, attitudes, and interests. Significant structures in some sense indeed exist, which are the objects of our theoretical insight and also of our practical loyalties and affections. Our ideas and our purposes terminate in such structures. But are these significant structures owned by reality? Or, are they patterns woven merely from the terms of our human discourse, inhabiting at best the shadowy realm of essence, hovering midway between our minds and the recondite life of nature which they caricature rather than disclose?[13] To know what really exists is indeed possible, if at all, only through observing in detail what it is that our world gives us. Reality *is* that which we find, and not those merely human and artificial structures which come into existence only as they are contrived by our minds and our human discourse. But reality does not exhaust itself in her first gifts and messages, in bare impressions and perceptions, nor in any immediate experience. Science would be something trivial

[13] Cf. Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, p. 104: "The ideas of things are not fair portraits; they are political caricatures made in the human interest."

were all the achievements of human reflection and interpretation but fabrications of human discourse, adventitiously added to the first crude and fragmentary data which nature offers us, and which we receive more for their practical utility than their cognitive value. These never ending active processes of interpretation, the framing of these intelligible structures which we name science, which call for so much inventiveness, imagination, and the genuinely constructive activities of our reason, may also be discoveries and disclosures of the nature of things. For, I do not know how, in the end, I am to distinguish between invention and discovery, between the artificial and the natural. Science is both a creation of the human spirit and a revelation of the nature and life of things. Nor do I see how, in principle, I am to draw any decisive line between the theoretical interests which find expression in science and philosophy, and those other interests which we like to distinguish as practical and non-theoretical; as if science were nothing but a finding, and all else in civilization nothing but a making. Of all these significant activities of the human spirit, I should say that they too, like science, may be disclosures of the nature of things, not the easy and obvious discoveries of prima facie data, but of what reality is and is capable of yielding to us in the deeper reaches of our experience. For, once more, I do not know how, in principle, I am to sever the theoretical and the practical. Bradley seems to me quite right in saying that "between that which is practical and that which is not practical we thus seem in the end unable to maintain any difference.[14]

But I have no desire to leave behind any impression that this third manner of envisaging the relation between reason and experience sets us at once upon the high road which leads to an adequate metaphysics. I think myself that it is a road worth following as far as it may lead. But every road will be tortuous, and each fresh turning will disclose both unforeseen barriers and, it may be, unexpected vistas.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 103.