Fundamentals of Philosophy

— an introduction —

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A short introduction written for use in the People’s Republic of China, where certain subjects cannot be addressed too directly.

Contents

Chapter 1

Scepticism

Scepticism is the philosophical position that we cannot know anything[1]. A true sceptic cannot even know he is a sceptic.

Reasons for scepticism

I have a pain, and my friend recommends some traditional Chinese medicine. Does this tell me that that medicine is good for me? After all, my friend, not being a physician, may be wrong. I can go to a medical doctor, but how do I know he is right? He might be just repeating what he learned, which might be wrong. He might even be a cheat, and not a real doctor at all.

I might study medicine myself, but how can I trust all the information in the books? I might do all the research myself, but how can I know the methodology is correct? And how can I know my eyes are not deceiving me, that I am not dreaming or hallucinating, that I am not making errors in drawing my conclusions?

A man with jaundice may believe the world is yellowish, because his discoloured cornea gives everything he sees a yellowish hue. How is he to know the world is not really yellowish? How can we know there is not some condition that makes us see the world incorrectly?

How can we even know there is a world out there, and that we have eyes? It might all be a dream we conjure up.

Our experience is full of hints that we cannot trust our senses, memory, or thinking. For memory this is well-known. It has been shown that it is easy to induce false memories in someone. And true memories change whenever we recall them, especially in the context of a somewhat corresponding story. And even *flash-bulb memories*, memories of shocking events such as hearing about the 9-11 attacks, as vivid as they may be, are notoriously unreliable.

But the situation is worse: how can we even – other than by memory – know there *is* a past to be remembered? We can't go back to check! So much for memory. Let us now look at sensing.

Sense input

Neurological research has discovered that what we see is only tenuously related to what is "out there". Most people know about optical illusions, but those only form the surface.

To give just one example out of hundreds it takes about half a second for the brain to process the image of an approaching car, which may mean the difference between a safe traversal and a painful death. So our brain edits the image, and moves the car forward the amount it guesses it will move in that half second – we "see" the car where it probably is by the time we have processed the image,

1 Most philosophical terms have several meanings. I'll try, whenever I use a technical term, to indicate the meaning in which I use it. Maybe you have met the term in another sense, and that other sense can also be totally acceptable.

and not where our eyes saw it. In the case of sudden changes in direction this system will not work, and arbiter decisions on whether a bouncing tennis ball was in or out are notoriously unreliable, as the advent of film has shown.

Another problem is what we *don't* see – and which leads us to complete image best as we can. For instance, a phenomenon called "change blindness" makes that we tend not to see even major changes, as long as they happen during a saccade (a shift of the eye orientation from one point to another). There are puzzles where it is hard to spot some major differences between two images, and there is a computer set-up where the screen shows a changing whirl of random letters, but the person whose eye movements are tracked sees a static, meaningful text. An amusing test was done where a student asked directions from a passer-by. During this interaction they were interrupted by two men carrying a door. Under cover of that door, the student switched with another, of the same sex but otherwise very different – and the majority of passers-by didn't remark a thing! They made up the false story that they had been speaking to a single person, and remembered that.

Other research has shown the large extent to which we see what we expect to see, even under careful scrutiny. Neurological literature abounds with examples showing how little of what we believe we see (or hear) we actually perceive. But if that is so, how can we trust our senses? And how can we trust the very senses of the neurologists who studied the brain and discovered this? Maybe all the findings just mentioned are only the result of neurologists being misled by their unreliable senses!

The diallelus

We all have met cases of false memories. Psychiatry tells us people can have really weird beliefs – so how can we know we are not madmen with utterly false beliefs?

What about safety in numbers: if I have observed something often, or if most people agree with me, I will probably be right. But without already trusting my memory, or believing I am not dreaming, how can I know that I have observed often, or that other people agreeing with me exist? Or without already trusting my thinking, how can I know there is safety in numbers? Maybe I am wrong, and general agreement is a sure sign of error instead! One million lemmings can't be wrong!

Most people, when confronted with questions such as the above, get impatient and will shrug and brush them aside, because they don't know any answers and yet are sure they can know things. And they are right: we *can* know things (and in fact, we know just that), so the scepticism that those questions seem to point to is unnecessary. But we also know we are often wrong, and with a bit of thinking we realise that any world view according to which we *cannot* know things must be wrong. And that is where the *diallelus* kicks in.

I can know that I am in pain, or that I experience yellow. I can know that because I myself am the paining one, or the one experiencing the yellow colour. I might be wrong regarding the cause of the pain, or even in my belief I have a body – after all I might be a dreaming ghost –, but the pain itself, or the sensation of yellow, is undeniable, as I myself am the source of that knowledge. But how can we know anything of which we are not the source?

This is the ***diallelus***: if we have a criterion to separate true external knowledge from falsehood, how can we know that criterion is correct in the first place? How can we know we can trust any given source and path of information?

(In the next chapter we shall see that an evolved brain may contain reasoning errors, just like programs may contain bugs. And that our intuition, which is far older, is in fact quite buggy.)

The diallelus states that external knowledge is impossible, because whatever criterion for truth we use in establishing that knowledge, we should first have to know that criterion – leading to an infinite regress.

And that means that only world views in which the diallelus doesn't apply have a chance of being true. If we know that we can know something, the world must be such that we *can* know that, and any world view that describes a world in which we cannot must needs be false. Under world views where the diallelus holds, it is only by blind faith that we trust our senses, our memories, and any other sources of information. But do we want to live by blind faith, maybe only believing things that are totally wrong?

Part of our goal in life is finding a situation that is good for us – where we can be happy, can do useful things, and so on. But if we blindly believe falsehoods, who knows where we will end up – maybe in the worst possible state! We may blindly believe we are on the right way, but what if in reality the road leads us over a steep cliff? Philosophy is about looking beyond the surface, to search beyond appearances for the reality, and the diallelus stands as a warning sign to separate the two.

Philosophers who take the “leap of faith” to trust our sources of information without founding that belief on something, are called *empiricists*. They simply leave the diallelus unresolved, and accept without proof the *principle of credulity,* which roughly says that we should trust our sources of information (our senses, people telling us things, books, and so on) unless we have specific reason to believe they are unreliable. In the next chapter we shall consider that principle again.

Philosophers who take the “leap of faith” to trust our reason without founding that belief on something, are called *rationalists*. They do not reject the principle of credulity, but only accept it in as far as it can be shown to be reasonable.

In this booklet we want to dig deeper, and find out *why* we can normally trust our senses and reason. In the chapter after the next we shall look into how to avoid the diallelus.

Chapter 2

Logic

Logic is the study of how to reason correctly, and a fallacy is a way of reasoning that tends to lead to false conclusions. Reliable reasoning follows specific rules, described by logic – but our thoughts do not always follow those patterns, resulting in *fallacies*, invalid arguments.

Fallacies

For instance, as we saw in the previous chapter, empiricist philosophers have developed the principle of credulity, the rule that we should trust our senses and what people tell us unless we have specific reason not to. That principle would give us a way out of the diallelus. But why should we accept that principle in the first place? It could well be wrong[2].

Circular reasoning

Maybe we should accept it for the same reason we believe most other facts: because people (empiricist philosophers in this case) tell us that it is true, and unless we have reason to believe they are unreliable, we should believe them. That is: we should believe those philosophers because the principle of credulity tells us to.

This is the fallacy of *circular reasoning*, where we accept the conclusion in order to prove it. In fact, empiricists often go on to show that the principle is reasonable – using information obtained using that very same principle of credulity: another case of circular reasoning.

Wishful thinking

Maybe we should believe it for this simple reason: unless we believe it we can know almost nothing, and that is a bad situation. So it would be bad if the principle were false.

This is the fallacy of *wishful thinking*, of accepting a conclusion because that conclusion has better consequences than its opposite. But if I am stranded on a mountain top, and my only hope of being saved it by finding shelter and wait until rescuers come, I might convince myself that just starting to climb downwards will lead me to safety. After all, it would be bad if it didn't, because then I would have to wait for a long time, in the cold, and with no food. But that doesn't make it true that there is safely in going down – it might lead to a sure death from an avalanche, for instance, or exposure on the windy slope would quickly freeze me to death. Wishful thinking is a bad counsellor.

"If this world view were true, we would not know much, therefore it must be false" commits the fallacy of wishful thinking, but "if this world view were true then we wouldn't *be able* to know *it*, therefore we cannot know that it is true" is correct. There is a lot of bad philosophy that commits errors like the first, fallacious, one. Here we shall be on guard to avoid that trap, while using the second, correct, argument as a criterion.

2 For instance, if we think of the principle while dreaming, or after waking from a sleep during which someone has secretly fitted us with a Virtual Reality suit, it *will* be wrong.

The fallacy of fallacies

The fallacy of fallacies is the argument that, since an argument is false, its conclusion must be too.

Consider the common form of wishful thinking that runs as follows: “There ought to be justice, but in this life clearly there isn’t, to there must be an afterlife where things are corrected”. In fact, that reasoning commits other fallacies too: Hinduism wouldn't conclude to an afterlife, but, on equally false grounds, to reincarnation. In a valid argument the conclusion cannot contain terms that the premisses don’t already contain in the same sense. Another fallacy is the step from “ought to be”, via “must be”, to “is”. “Must be” has two senses, and one can get from “ought to be” to “must be” in the ethical sense, and from “must be” in the metaphysical sense (it cannot be otherwise) to “is” – but there is no step from the one sense to the other, This is called the fallacy of the undistributed middle: there is no single middle term (a single sense of “must be”) that is distributed over the two premises.

That doesn’t mean there is *no* such afterlife (or reincarnation), only that the argument is misconstrued. Concluding that there is no afterlife because the reasoning is fallacious would be to commit the fallacy of fallacies.

Reason

Circular reasoning, wishful thinking, and so on are just a few of over a hundred kinds of fallacies that people tend to commit. There are books listing them, just as there are books teaching logic. Here is not the place to do that, however, because our fundamental question is still unresolved.

We believe that only arguments that follow the rules of logic are valid, and fallacies are not – but how do we know that? Even mathematics and logic do not escape from scepticism. How do we know the thinking rules we are following are reliable? And we cannot reason without using our memories – how do we know our memories are reliable? Any argument that purports to establish the basic reliability of our memory or thinking is based on that very memory, that very thinking. They are classic cases of circular arguments. How do we know the rules of logic we follow are not approximations that are not really correct – the way Einstein discovered that Newtonian physics was only an approximation? Or that they are *so* wrong that they cannot even be used to reason out *that* they are wrong?

Thought versus intuition

Evolution tells us our brains have only recently developed from monkey brains that are incapable of advanced logic thought – so how can we trust the conclusions drawn by those brains[3]? There are many so-called *veridical paradoxes*, cases where intuition (which exists already in the invertebrates) clashes with rational thought – and why believe rational thought in such cases?

3 As Darwin put it to William Graham (3 July 1881): “*But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?*” That is, if blind evolution is true, we can never trust the mind that discovers that fact.

A case in point is the Monty Hall problem. A TV show host has the habit of offering the contestant the choice from three doors, one of which hides a prize. After the contestant has chosen a door, the host opens one of the other doors, always a losing one, and offers the contestant the option to switch and choose the remaining door instead. Most contestants stick to their original choice, whereas a little thought tells us that switching doubles one's chance of winning. Are those contestants wrong in trusting their intuition, which has been tuned for more than a billion years of evolution, over their thinking, which has had only a million years of evolution, and that in a very small and only slowly replicating population?

Or take Simpson's paradox, which, in a somewhat simplified form, occurred as follows. It was found that a Californian university with two faculties (Science and Art) discriminated by sex: male students got higher grades than female students. The question came up whether both or only one faculty favoured men, but upon investigation it was found that either faculty gave higher grades to female students. Again intuition made many people declare that this was impossible.

In all such cases, careful reasoning tells us that thinking has it right, and intuition has it wrong. Does that mean that we should choose thinking over intuition? That would again be the fallacy of circular reasoning – already trusting our thinking in order to vindicate thinking. Indeed, thinking may tell us that thinking is better than intuition, but intuition is likely to tell us otherwise.

Chapter 3

Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge: what is needed for someone to know something.

Direct and indirect knowledge

The most basic facts we have been questioning are what is called *direct knowledge*[4], things we know before experience (knowledge a posteriori) can teach us: unless we already know that we can trust our eyes – and that we have eyes in the first place – we cannot learn from visual experience, and the same is true for the other senses. Examples of direct knowledge include the fact that we are not mad, believing believe things that are utterly wrong; that we are not dreaming, and deluded by our own fantasy; that there are truth and falsehood, good and evil, a world "out there", other minds, time …

We *do* know that we know these things, so we must live in a world in which we *can* know such things. What kind of world is that?

The most acute problem is that of knowledge and truth. Maybe goodness, or minds, can be explained some way or other by the structure of the world – but we cannot rely on the structure of the world to explain truth and knowledge, because without already knowing that truth and knowledge exist we cannot know about the structure of the world to start with.

What can be the source of that knowledge? We cannot trust any source of purported knowledge unless we already know that source to possess the truth, and to be reliable. I can tell you that John is Mary's brother, but unless you already know that I am not wrong myself, and that I am not lying to you, my words do not give you knowledge about Mary and John.

On top of those two requirements, we must be able to trust the communication path: nor my mouth, nor random sounds in the air, nor your ears or auditory nerves should deceive.

This explains why the diallelus does not forbid me to know that I am in pain, or experiencing yellow. I can know that I am in pain, because I am the source myself, and the communication path is of zero length – the knowledge is immediate. But that source cannot tell me anything about the external world, if there is one. The pain is there, but the stubbed toe may not exist.

If external knowledge is at all possible, there must be a first source of knowledge that we can trust – and that we can *know* we can trust. But for any possible source in the world, we have no grounds to trust it. So how can we know anything external?

4 Direct knowledge can be broken up in *knowledge a priori* (all the stuff we "just know" without having to learn it through experience), and *direct experience* (such as the knowledge one is aware of pain, if one is).

Thoughts[5]

For this paper we define a ***thought*** as an *intentional abstract* – as an abstract thing that is about something. (*Abstract things* are non-material things, such as numbers, beliefs, guilt, and so on.)

Let's look somewhat deeper at thoughts. There are all kinds of thoughts: emotions, longings, convictions, fantasies.. Fantasies show us that minds can produce worlds, and worlds with other minds. And there is something interesting: if I am dreaming, I cannot be wrong about my dream. If I dream that Mary has red hair, then in my dream she does have red hair. If I don't lie to the characters in my dream, I can be a reliable source of knowledge for them. And since they are my thoughts, the communication is immediate – all the criteria are satisfied!

We define a ***mind*** as *the medium in which thoughts, including fantasies, exist*. That means that a mind is intentional, in that its thoughts are about something.

My dreams and fantasies, stories in books, the fantasies of characters in my dreams – all of these are worlds, and all of them have a transcendent mind (the mind that thinks them) on which they depend. And those worlds form a forest: every world depends on a mind, and that mind may live in a world again – all the way up to our world. Would we be the top? Or would there again be a mind above us?

Science, that is: knowledge beyond immediate experience, is based on the *principle of uniformity*, the assumption that the same fundamental principles hold through everywhere[6]. We assume that there is gravity on Jupiter, because here on earth mass causes gravity. We expect magnets to attract iron tomorrow, because they do so now and have done so in the past. The principle of uniformity implies that if we find something to be true in all cases that we can check, then we should expect it to be true too in all similar cases. Applied to our question: if all worlds where we can check it have a governing mind that explains the existence of that world, then we should also expect it for the one world where we cannot check it – the one we live in. But expectancy does not yet imply certainty.

We shall use the word ***dream*** to mean *any fantasy, story in my mind, daydream or actual dream* – so in the remainder of this booklet it is a technical term, and it may be better to think of an author inventing a story in his mind than of actual dreams, which are often erratic and may be utterly incoherent. Likewise we shall use the term ***dream world*** to mean *the world imagined* by that dream.

The actual world

We know there is a world out there, but so far we haven't discovered yet *how* we can know that.

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5 The ideas in this part are explained in more detail here: https://philpapers.org/rec/DURTMI.

6 The principle of uniformity (also called the Copernican principle, or the principle of symmetry) allows *induction*, the process of generalising from a set of observations to a rule that also holds beyond those observations. Without it no generalised learning is possible. I may learn that at this moment the world is such and such, but I need uniformity in time to conclude that my house will probably still be there tomorrow. This principle of uniformity itself must again be knowledge a priory, because it cannot be learned from experience – the so-called *induction problem*: without already trusting induction I cannot take the fact that induction has worked up till now to conclude it will probably work tomorrow.

We define ***actual world*** to mean *the world out there*, the world we do not dream, but live in.

Given the existence of the actual world, there are two possibilities: either it is like all others, thought by a transcendent mind, or it is exceptional in not having one. (That is the *law of the excluded middle*, another bit of a priori knowledge.) Here we shall look at the case that the actual world is an exception, and has no transcendent mind. In the next chapter we shall investigate the other option.

Without a transcendent mind

If there is no transcendent mind, then the actual world is fundamentally different from all other worlds. This goes against the scientific principle of uniformity. It also goes against Occam's razor[7], because we need to assume two different kinds of world: dream worlds, and the actual world.

For all our philosophical questions about dream worlds, we have a good answer: the transcendent mind. If the actual world has no transcendent mind, then those answers will not apply there, and we are left with a whole lot of unanswered questions, such as:

- How can matter create minds (human beings are matter, but mysteriously have minds)? In dream worlds, minds share in the transcendent mind.
- What provides unity between the parts of the world; what is the structure that makes that one particle or part of a field can influence another? In dream worlds, the unity of the transcendent mind provides the unity of the world.
- What is the source of identity, what makes that the me of ten years ago is me, even though my body no longer has the same matter. In dream worlds, the intention of the transcendent mind (who wants this identity) is the source.
- What is the source of the uniformity, the laws, of the world? In dream worlds, again, the intention of the transcendent mind to have exactly those laws provides the uniformity.
- .. and so on, and so on. A world view in which the actual world has no transcendent world still needs all the answers for dream worlds, but besides that needs different answers (that no one has found so far) for the actual world. Such a world view is like a centaur, having lots of reduplication.

But worst of all: if the actual world has no transcendent mind, then we cannot know anything external. Why is that?

Well, whatever the source of such external knowledge may be, without a governing mind it must be something in the actual world. Dream worlds below us are part of our thoughts, and are fully internal, and there is nothing *above* the actual world, so other things *in* the actual world are the only option. But things in the world we can only know by indirect experience. In order for such other things to be sources of knowledge, we must first know they are reliable, and then that the communication path from them to us is also reliable – and we cannot know that because that is already external knowledge. Also, no source or collection of sources of information can declare

7 Occam's razor or the *law of frugality* is the principle that we should not postulate more entities than necessary to explain something.

itself reliable. Both the liar and the truth speaker will claim to speak the truth[8]. Catch-22: we cannot pull ourselves out of that morass by our bootstraps.

And if we cannot know anything external, then we cannot know the rules of reason, such as the law of the excluded middle we used above. That means we cannot trust any reasoning we make, including the reasoning in this article. We are reduced to meaningless babble, the cackle of the madman who makes no sense, whatever his feelings about making sense may be.

This means that any claim that the actual world has no transcendent mind cannot be correct. If there is no transcendent mind, the claim has no meaning, and if there is a transcendent mind then the claim makes sense, but is obviously wrong. We shall look at the other option in the next chapter.

8 Which is why the sentence “I am lying” is a paradox: neither a liar nor a truth speaker would say it.

Chapter 4

Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the philosophy of being: what does it mean to be, or to exist; what is the fundamental nature of being; and what are the primary things that exist.

We have seen that the hypothesis that the actual world has no transcendent mind leads to all kind of problems. But what if we *do* assume a transcendent mind?

The actual world with a transcendent mind

If the actual world does have a transcendent mind, the situation is very different. In that case the situation is uniform (all worlds are ontically the same), and Occam's razor is satisfied. All the philosophical questions for the actual world are easily answered, because we know the answers for dream worlds, and for the actual world they are the same.

Finally, a transcendent mind can be a valid source of knowledge[9]. If I dream, I can decide what the characters in my dream believe or know – just like I can dream, say, someone who is fearful, I can dream someone who is knowledgeable. But is that real knowledge? Let's look at the criteria:

- If some mind dreams me, I am a thought of that mind, and likewise my thoughts, knowledge, understanding, and so forth are all thoughts of him. That means any communication is immediate; there is no need for any (possible unreliable) communication path.
- Because the dreamer is master over his dream, he can give me justified knowledge that the a priori knowledge he gives me is reliable.
- A dreamer is necessarily omniscient and infallible regarding his dream, because his dream *is* his thought.
- That leaves us with the last criterion: is he good? If he is a possible liar, whatever information he gives me is not knowledge. If, on the other hand, he is good, then his information will be knowledge, and he can give me the justified knowledge *that* he is good (because he knows it, and I can share that knowledge in an immediate way). More precisely, he must be loving.

We define ***love*** as *the intention (the will) to be good to others*.

So, without a governing mind for this world, no knowledge is possible – we saw that immanent entities can be no primary source of knowledge – but with the right kind of governing mind knowledge *is* possible. In other words, *knowledge is possible if and only if the actual world has a loving transcendent mind*.

Without a transcendent mind there is no knowledge – but that would be a contradiction, because that very fact itself constitutes knowledge. This is the *epistemic proof of the existence of a transcendent mind*.

9 This is worked out in more detail here: https://philpapers.org/rec/DURKIT-2 .

In order for the transcendent mind to give us knowledge, he must be able to govern the world he has created – he must be sovereign to that world. We often find that we cannot dream what we want, because the world around us restricts us (as in having a nightmare after having seen a horror movie). Likewise the mind transcendent to our world can influence us, or we can simply be too limited to imagine the world we want to imagine. In all those cases, the information we give to the actors in our dream may be incorrect – and information that may be incorrect is unreliable, and is not knowledge.

So a transcendent mind that is able to confer knowledge to us necessarily is unbounded, and unrestricted by a world around it or a meta-transcendent mind above it[10].

Avoiding circular reasoning

But aren't we falling in the empiricist's trap again? Assuming there is a transcendent mind only because it has the right consequences – we can know things, and so on – would be the fallacy of wishful thinking, and that is obviously not what we want to do.

And we don't. The principle of mediocrity, and the rules of logic, are *correct direct knowledge* – but to *know* this, and to know their precise shape, we need the further correct direct knowledge *that* all these bits of knowledge are direct and reliable. And for that we need to open ourselves up to the transcendent mind, allow it to restore the connection that we broke in our freedom-gone-wrong. But the fact that the knowledge is direct saves us from any reasoning, let alone circular, and from the diallelus. (Though here, of course, we can only give reasons and arguments through a fallible channel.)

In further chapters we shall see how to get this basis, this connection to truth, repaired.

Empirical knowledge (knowledge a posteriori)

With these prolegomena we can now turn to the world as we experience it. In light of the preceding, one fact presents itself with force: our actual world contains evil. We had seen that only a good transcendent mind can confer knowledge, so how can its product, this world, contain evil? After all, goodness is transitive: goodness implies wanting the good for the other, and if the transcendent mind is good for, sovereign over, and has full knowledge of the world, then one would expect the world to be good too. In order to answer that question we shall have to look at the nature of goodness.

Both the transcendent mind and our minds are intentional – they can be *about* something. Goodness for intentional beings has two aspects beyond goodness for unintentional ones.

1. *Intentional* goodness must be a free choice. A pillow is good if it does what a good pillow should do – nobody requires that it *freely* do so. But a man who does good under compulsion only is not considered a good man. Doing good and being good do not coincide, because he does not act from a free intention.

10 There are in fact several solutions, but from our point of view they all amount to the same thing: the transcendent mind providing knowledge and ruling our world is the most high.

2. In beings capable of intentionality, goodness implies love, wanting the good for the other. If the other also has the capacity for intentionality, “the good for the other” will include love in the other as well, so necessarily love will want love in that other too.

As a result of these two facts, a good transcendent mind will want love in us – free love. He must enable us to choose the wrong, in order for any choice for the right to be a good choice. In other words: the goodness of created intentional beings is inherently unstable – It can turn into evil.

We know that some things are good and others are evil. We may disagree or be unsure about *what* is good and *what* is evil, but we know that the difference exists. Without transcendent mind, this is inexplicable: the world is governed by amoral physical laws. A good transcendent mind, however, would distinguish between acts that agree with how the dreamed world ought to be and acts that go against it.

Good and evil

The good transcendent mind necessarily has dreamed a good world, but our world contains evil, so we know that the free beings in that world have chosen evil – against the intention of the transcendent mind. This has a whole lot of implications, some of which we'll try to discover.

1. If our dream doesn't go the way we want, and we are not constrained (as in a nightmare), we simply discard the dream and make another, which pleases us better. This is because we do not really love our dream characters. A perfectly good and loving mind does not have that option – just as loving parents will not discard a handicapped child. True love is unconditional.
2. A perfectly good mind cannot freely deal with evil thoughts. That means there is a barrier between the dream and the dreamer that is not there when the dream is completely good – the dream is in quarantine, so to say, and no longer directly ruled by him. That means that much more can go wrong – and that is exactly what we see happening: there is evil beyond human decisions, such as earthquakes or snake bites.

Lies and errors

Because of these conditions evil remains in existence as long as we choose it, and this evil has two influences on our ability to know.

1. We can choose evil. Epistemically that means lying. We believe one thing but communicate another. This communication can be through words or through behaviour. There are many kinds of lies, but here the only relevant thing is that if we don't know whether someone is lying we cannot trust whatever he tells us (again, through words or through behaviour).
2. Because the world is in quarantine, there is impersonal evil. This leads to errors. Again, there are many kinds of errors, but the important element is that in the presence of potential errors we cannot trust any process – be it reasoning, communication or otherwise.

So this brings us back to the beginning, and explains *why* we cannot trust any mediate knowledge. The fact *that* lies and errors exist is external a priori knowledge again – only the transcendent mind can let us know that we should not be totally naive.

The transcendent mind[11]

Above we saw that if we can know anything external at all, it is true that there is a transcendent mind – but we didn't learn much about it, other than that it is good (and therefore loving) and unrestricted. But in fact, from it being unrestricted we can derive many more properties – including another proof of his goodness.

In order to see this, we must look at an important distinction: prior properties versus posterior properties.

Prior properties can exist on their own, whereas ***posterior properties*** can only exist by the grace of the corresponding prior property. For instance, take 'rest' and 'movement'. Rest can exist on its own: a world in which all is at rest is perfectly possible. Movement, on the other hand, requires an anchor point: something moves *with respect to* something else, which is then considered at rest. So 'rest' is prior, and 'movement' is posterior.

Or look at 'absolute' and 'relative': it is impossible that everything is relative – that absolutely everything is relative. Likewise, 'plural' is posterior to 'singular', 'false' to 'true', 'negative' to 'positive', and so on.

If something is the only thing, it can only have prior properties – because if it had a posterior property, something else would need to have the corresponding prior property. That means that the transcendent mind can only have prior properties. And in fact, the properties of the transcendent mind we have found so far (unboundedness, goodness, love) are all prior.

The *metaphysical proof of the goodness of the transcendent mind*: Deviations from a standard are posterior to that standard, so evil is posterior to goodness. Therefore the transcendent mind is free of evil.

Imperfection, as a deviation from perfection, is also posterior, so the transcendent mind is perfect.

Plural is posterior to singular, because the plural consists of several singulars. Therefore the transcendent mind is single. Likewise, a composite is posterior to its parts, so the transcendent mind has no parts: it is simple.

Along the same lines we can prove he is benevolent, unchanging, absolute, et cetera – so we see that we can derive quite a bit about the transcendent mind. And what we derive corresponds with what we learn from other sources. We already saw that with respect to unrestrictedness and goodness, but it is true for other properties too.

Omniscience is a prior property, and we already saw that minds are omniscient with respect to their dreams. We also saw that we could know things about ourselves, and as there is nothing but the transcendent mind and his dream(s), it is plausible that he can know everything.

Omnipotence is another prior property – and indeed, if there is no external influence, an infinite mind would be omnipotent with respect to its dreams. (In fact, even we are already quite powerful over our daydreams).

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11 The thoughts in this section are described in more detail here: https://philpapers.org/rec/DURHTS.

So we see that the information we get from different arguments is coherent and consistent – underlining the strength of our conclusions.

Our world

Then there is our world. The transcendent mind may dream myriads of other worlds – we don't know that –, but we *do* know our world is there.

Chapter 5

Existentialism

Existentialism is the philosophy of our relation to the world. It has sometimes been called the philosophy of the grammatical persons, because as we shall see it is about first-person, second-person, and third-person relating.

Tertiary relating

To start with the latter: tertiary relating is what the sciences do, and what we all tend to do when we see objects. We see things "out there" and tend to think about them without at the same time thinking about ourselves as observers of those things.

It is in fact this tendency we have to forget our own rôle in the process of perceiving the external world that gives materialism its superficial plausibility: we can only see matter and its behaviour.

When scientist try to interpret behaviour, they either can find a law that predicts that behaviour completely, or they cannot. In the first case the behaviour is called *deterministic*, whereas in the second case it is called *random*. Remark that randomness is not about cause of the behaviour, but only about the ability of the scientists to predict it. People who don't understand this sometimes talk about some behaviour "caused by randomness", but that is nonsense. Scientists try to describe random behaviour in *probabilistic* terms – by describing how often the one or the other behaviour tends to occur.

Primary relating

Tertiary relating has brought us an immense amount of knowledge, and it is extremely useful – but it breaks down when we try to apply it to ourselves. We may watch other people, and maybe look into their brains, and see how brain cells cause him to say "ouch!" when stubbing his toe – but *I* feel pain when stubbing my toe. By observing them I might predict what choices others will make – but we can never predict our own choices that way. (If we could we could also decide to do just the opposite.)

When we look at ourselves "from the outside", as just another object, we see a being that may or may not behave a certain way. But when we look at ourselves "from the inside" we see something completely different. Someone else may see brain cells firing – I feel the weight of an important decision, with moral and aesthetic implications. I know I have a certain obligation, and a certain feeling about the outcome. Tertiary observation is fundamentally unable ever to discover such things.

In myself I also experience *freedom*, the ability to choose either one way or the other. This freedom is what prevents scientists from fully predicting my behaviour – the source of *libertarian randomness*. (Unpredictability because the laws are unknown is called *epistemic randomness*.)

Secondary relating

And once I have “discovered myself” that way, I can go further and discover other persons, who then become “you” to me, and cease being objects. In fact, it is in the relationship with the other that I truly become myself: in a world with only objects I cannot fully be a person.

And I am built in such a way that I want to give myself to the other – to *trust* that other. This relationship is called ***intimacy***. But given the evil in this world and in each of us, I cannot really trust anyone. Only the transcendent mind is fully reliable, and I find that only in him I can truly become myself and reach my potential as a person. With immanent beings I always hold back, and give only part of myself to be known – but the transcendent mind knows *everything* about me.

Moral obligations exist because of the other. I should not kick someone because that other person is not just a thing, but has an inner side and can feel pain. If I should not break a vase, it is because there is a *person* (maybe its owner) who will be hurt. Ethics is much richer than just avoiding hurt, but that is an important part of it.

Mixing levels

A scientist who only relates in a tertiary way could argue that, since among all the particles and forces that make up the universe there is no such thing as an obligation, or a moral requirement, everything is permitted. It would of course be stupid to steal and be caught, but if one can steal without being caught (either because one is not detected or because one has the power to protect oneself) one would be stupid to do so. And in fact, many materialists think that way, and act on it once they are high enough in power[12].

Freedom

Freedom gives another good example.

We saw there was freedom, as required by love. Our thoughts are free, and it is that freedom which allows us to choose to love (or to reject love). (Since our thoughts are thoughts of the transcendent mind, he is free too: our free thoughts are his free thoughts.)

Without freedom there would be no responsibility. The thief would have no choice but to steal, and the judge would have no choice but to convict or release – not because convicting or releasing is just, but because the particles in the judge's brain happen to make him take that decision.

Scientists sometimes dismiss freedom as an illusion, because all that exists is determinism and randomness. We already saw the error of turning randomness into a “force”, but let’s say the world were fully deterministic. Would that preclude true freedom? No way: I can dream a deterministic world in which nevertheless things happen the way I want them to happen – all I have to do is to dream the causes for those events too. So I am free to dream the story of my fantasy world however I want it to be, even while dreaming that that world is utterly deterministic.

12 Most professing materialists don’t, but that is because they know deep down that there *is* more than just matter.

As my thoughts are thoughts of the transcendent mind, he can dream our world to be deterministic too, while still respecting our choices – though given our evil, he might strictly limit our freedom to act (while leaving us the freedom to think): he may allow me to walk, but not to fly.

Immanent and transcendent solutions

On the level of our world, there are already several ways in which this can happen. Our life-harbouring planet is immersed in a huge universe, almost each part of which is utterly hostile to life. It just might be that the transcendent mind thinks this lifeless cacophony of particles in interaction in such a way that particles reach earth and interact with our brains exactly in such a way that our resulting actions are the ones we freely chose. In this scenario, the particles in the lifeless part of the universe "encode" all free decisions taken at all times and places by all free agents.

Another option is quantum mechanics. It becomes more and more clear that what seemed an incomprehensibly strange world of quantum matter is actually a very comprehensible conceptual world. When I dream a tree, I do not necessarily dream every leaf on that tree – and such vagueness allows me to steer my dream. I might decide that there was actually a cat under the sofa, and have it show up and interact with the world, which corresponds exactly to the "collapse of the wave function" that has baffled physicists for so long. Up till then there was "maybe a cat", and now there is (or, if I want the dream to go in a different way, there isn't).

Those are options that science shows us – immanent options. There is, however, a much more fundamental option, ***transcendent compatibilism***: the possibility that the freedom of the transcendent mind allows him to dream the world such that its deterministic rules result exactly in the situation he intends. Understanding this requires the introduction of the distinction between *ontics* and *economics*, which brings us to our next chapter.

Freedom from the transcendent mind

Now there is another issue to be explained: how can we be free from the will of the transcendent mind if he is thinking all of our thoughts. This is answered by his secondary relating: he respects us, and allows us to steer his thoughts – even when our thoughts go against his will, as our evil shows. This is like a parent giving freedom to his child reaching adulthood, allowing him to do even the things the parent is opposed to, because he believes allowing the child to be autonomous and responsible is the more important thing. Of course the parent will still *want* the child to do the right thing, but refrains from imposing it.

Chapter 6

Ontology[13]

(This chapter can be skipped if it is too difficult.)

Ontology is the philosophy of what exists and the relations between existing things. As such it is closely related to metaphysics, but where metaphysics limits itself to the primary beings, ontology goes further and looks also at derived beings. So the transcendent mind is of metaphysical concern, but our minds are of ontological concern only.

The transcendent mind

Up till now we have reasoned about the transcendent mind as if it were subject to the same rules as we are – but we have also seen it was not subject to anything. So there seems to be a contradiction, and in fact, there is, if we do not carefully distinguish between the levels.

We cannot know anything about how the transcendent mind is on his own level, because there simply is no structure through which to describe him. We cannot say he is one or many, true or false, good or evil – all those notions are structures that the transcendent mind has laid on our world, but that may have no meaning on his level.

So ontically we cannot say anything positive about the transcendent mind. This is recognised in what has traditionally been called the “via negativa”.

There is however another way in which we can talk about the transcendent mind, namely *as he is to us*. He stands in a relationship with our world, and therefore can be considered “from below”, as it were. It is in that sense that we saw that he must be unbounded and only have primary properties. These properties will necessarily be approximations of the reality, and this has traditionally been recognised in the “via analogica”.

This second way is called the “economical”, as it deals with the transcendent mind's management of the world, and it is this transcendent economy which is important for us: we want to know what the transcendent mind is like in relation to us. Without saying so explicitly, in all of our previous reasoning up to transcendent compatibilism we have dealt economically with the transcendent mind.

Freedom

And now it should be clear that the very dreaming of the transcendent mind is an ontic event, not an economical one: the dreaming is prior to the dreamed world. But that means it is not bound by the rules of our level of existence, and the transcendent mind is free to create a world both deterministic and running according to his intentions.

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13 The thoughts in this section are described in more detail here: https://philpapers.org/rec/DURHTS.

Our world

Another problem solved by this distinction is that of the one and the many: if my brain is only the mereological sum of my connected brain cells, and some cells see the sunset and others feel the beauty, where is the “me” that enjoys the beautiful sunset? It cannot be one of the cells – or rather one particle in the cell, because the cell is still complex in itself – but must be something non-material distinct from the brain. So the mind is where the one and the many come together.

This universe (the one in the actual world) is a complex compound too, so what makes the particles know each other, what enables them to influence one another? There must be a point where all these come together. This cannot be immanent, because an immanent entity would simply be one more item to integrate with the others. It also cannot be matter, because any complex form of matter is a compound itself. Without a transcendent mind, this question is unsolvable.

This insight leads to the *ontological proof of the existence of a transcendent mind*: without a transcendent mind, the many of this universe could not be one universe[14].

Abstract things

The existence of the transcendent mind also solves another famous philosophical problem: that of abstract notions – do they exist or not? Does “two” exist? If so, what is it? If not, what does a pair of shoes have in common with a pair of parents?

Universalists maintain that redness, visibility, joy, beauty, truth, and all such concepts do exist, whereas nominalists claim they are just names that don't refer to anything existing. Both positions are problematic, but looking at the transcendent mind we find a new answer. Everything in our world is a thought in the dream of the transcendent mind – and “existence” means “being thought of by the transcendent mind”. And that means that as soon as *we* think of, say, the notion “unicorn”, so does the transcendent mind, because our thoughts are his thoughts (he has no doubt many more thoughts than we do, though), and because he thinks the notion, the notion exists.

This answers the question: all such notions exist, and their content is the thought of commonality that exists in the transcendent mind.

14 There are many so-called “ontological proofs” – this chapter is not about those.

Chapter 7

Ethics

Ethics is the part of philosophy that thinks about moral issues: what is good and evil, and how should one behave. Fundamental ethics is about the first question, and morality about the second.

Goodness[15]

What is goodness, or obligation? There is the famous philosophical problem of "the is and the ought". All our senses only observe the world as it is (if we are not deceived), not as it ought to be. So how can there be an "ought", an obligation, and even if there were, how could we know it?

The **naturalistic fallacy** is the mistake of trying to derive moral imperatives from the world we live in – including maybe a God who prescribes. The fact that anyone, even a god or God, prescribes something does not in itself make it good, and even if it were good, that in itself would not obligate me to do it. This argument is called "Hume's guillotine".

However, the transcendent mind is thinking this world, and his thoughts necessarily *are* truth – we already saw that he was omniscient and infallible regarding our world. But that also means that if he thinks something is good, or that we ought to do it, it *is* good, and we indeed ought to do it.

So, in short, some things are good, and we ought to do them, because the transcendent mind is thinking a world in which these things really are good and ought to be done, and being good himself he prescribes just those things. So that meshes beautifully with our earlier discovery that the transcendent mind is fully good, again strengthening the confidence in our conclusions.

This also answers Euthyphro's dilemma: "Is something good because the gods approve of it (which would mean goodness is arbitrary and subjective), or do the gods approve of it it because it is good (which would mean they are subject to an external standard)?" The answer is: "It is good because the transcendent mind thinks a world in which it is objectively good, and then commands it *because* it is objectively good." The Greek immanent gods would indeed be unable to create objective goodness, but the transcendent mind is able to.

Other objective standards, such as logic and truth, are built into this world in the same way.

Goodness and freedom

But how can the transcendent mind be both totally good and totally free? If he is free, then he cannot give us knowledge, because at any point he might decide to lie, isn't it?

The answer to that is simple: part of true goodness is freely choosing always to be good. Someone who holds open the option to do evil someday is not really good. So, in his freedom, the transcendent mind has chosen to restrict himself to what is completely good – and because our

15 This is worked out in more detail here: https://philpapers.org/rec/DURFIT-3.

thoughts are his thoughts, we can immediately know that choice, and know his reliability, if we don’t close ourselves up to that knowledge.

Quarantine

How can an evil world exist as the thought of an absolutely good transcendent mind? Here the answer is love. Can a loving mother still feed her child, even if he has turned bad? Yes, of course! If her care would be conditional on his goodness, it wouldn't be real love. She can allow things to become difficult for him, in the hope to call him back, but she won't let him starve completely.

And the quarantine, the barrier between us and the transcendent mind, is not of his making: we have moved our orientation, and because of that we are no longer aligned. If I drive away my car while filling up the tank, the process will be interrupted, but not through any fault of the filling station.

Respecting our freedom, the transcendent mind necessarily gave up control over his dream – comparable to our nightmares.

Morality

So far we have done some abstract thinking about what we can know, and about what is. Now we'll start thinking about what ought to be – about what we ought to do. So the results of this chapter will put a moral obligation on us. Many people are afraid of that, and stop their thinking here.

The state of the world

So far we have seen that the transcendent mind is good, and that we freely chose evil, causing our alienation from the transcendent mind. This world no longer corresponds to the moral rules that form part of its basis, and therefore it contains evil of all kinds. In other words, there is damage done, and we are responsible for it.

(Intuitively we know this: if we introspect honestly, we see that we are rotten within. Of course we try to find all kinds of reasons to deny this: blaming others, or comparing ourselves to others instead of to the standard of goodness, filling our life with other things to avoid having to think about it..)

We also have seen that goodness includes respecting our freedom, so the transcendent mind cannot simply take the easy way out (discarding this dream and starting a new one). So, being good, he is committed to repairing this world while respecting both its moral rules and our freedom.

The moral imperative calls us to be good, without forcing us to. It is, in the most literal sense, the "love call" of the transcendent mind, who calls us back to himself, because that is the best for us (good being better than evil).

Incarnation

The fact that the transcendent mind will respect the moral rules of our world makes it easier to reason about his approach. Within those rules, justice requires reparation of wrongs. Now if you break my window, I have only four options (plus mixes of those four):

1. The window stays broken. This is not good, as the wrong would not be repaired. It would be loving towards you, but not just.

2. I require you to pay. This would be just, because you broke it, but it would not be loving of me – especially if the price of the window is much higher than you could ever hope to pay.
3. A third person pays. That would be neither just nor loving, as it would mean treating that person both unjustly and unlovingly. If that person would pay freely, *he* would be loving, but I would not be in letting him.
4. I myself pay. That would be both just and loving of me.

The transcendent mind, being fully good – and therefore both fully just *and* fully loving – only has the fourth option. And he is able to exercise it, because as we have seen he is omnipotent. In order to repair this world "from the inside", he has to enter it, and that is called ***incarnation***. We all have many dreams in which we appear ourselves, dreams in which we incarnate, so if we can already do that, the transcendent mind certainly can.

He must necessarily dream himself as a human being, and one able to pay the full price of repairing this world, i.e. taking the full punishment for all the evil human beings have done – from mass murders to the smallest selfish thought, because even the least bit of wrong is already a complete rejection of absolute goodness. It is a choice for partial, relative goodness, which is a complete rejection of the absolute standards of the transcendent mind.

This person will then invite us to accept his payment, his punishment, as a substitute for the payment we are due – but leave us free to accept or reject it.

Solidarity

But is it just if one person pays for another person's debts, if one person takes the punishment for another person's transgression? Well, is it just if I-today am punished for what I-yesterday did? If my skin is beaten for what my brain did? Or should only the one brain cell that took the final decision to act be punished? This is the problems of the one and the many, and of identity, at play. In a general partnership, if one partner makes debts, all can be persecuted, because they have declared solidarity. Parents can – and should – pay for the damage caused by their children. Members of the same sports club, or even of the same country, can say: "We won!", even if they didn't play, because they identify with the club or country.

It is this solidarity, this mutual identification, which creates the unit that bears responsibility. The transcendent mind declared his solidarity with us by incarnating; it is up to us now to declare solidarity with the transcendent mind in order to be able to accept his offer. We must, in a very literal (though not physical) sense become parts of the same body.

Our choice.

So now it is up to us, to find this offer, and to accept it. If we do, we can be assured that the transcendent mind, who already did not destroy us after we had rejected his standards of goodness, will certainly never destroy us after returning to him. If we reject the offer, we reject him, and permit him (or even ask him by our rejection) to retract fully from us.

The consequences.

So everyone must make that choice. At some point all those choices are clear, and the transcendent mind will retract from those who did not accept him. As he is absolute goodness himself, this means absolutely no good will remain with those people. On the other hand, he will fully be with those who accepted him, repair their beings, and allow them to make the choice he himself made: to be absolutely good. These persons will forever be in an absolutely good environment, and be absolutely good themselves. This certainty of future goodness is called ***hope***.

Chapter 8

Teleology

Teleology is the philosophy of goals and meaning. Under materialism there are no goals – things happen because of deterministic causes in the past, not because of goals in the future.

Meaning

We see that some things, some activities are meaningful, have a goal: they are part of something bigger that gives them a reason for being. A tyre has meaning, because it helps make the car run; the car has meaning because it allows me to get to Beijing; my trip has meaning because it allows me to teach; my teaching has meaning because it allows people better to speak Chinese – all this is *relative* meaning. If it turns out to be useless that people speak better Chinese, then my teaching has no *absolute* meaning, nor has my trip to Beijing, et cetera. In the end, whether anything in this world has absolute meaning depends on whether this universe as a whole has meaning.

Science tells us that at some point in the future this universe will either collapse with a big crunch, or expand into infinity and undergo the "heat death", where all our efforts will be lost. That means that absolute meaning cannot come from the future. (Likewise it cannot come from the past because of the big bang.)

If there is no transcendent mind, there is no real meaning to anything we are or do. If, on the other hand, there is a transcendent mind, then our world finds its meaning in that mind – the way our dream can be meaningful for us. Elements of our world can be meaningful if they agree with that mind and if that mind itself is good.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic meaning

Immanent meaning is extrinsic, that is: it is put on from the outside. If I take a branch and make it a walking stick, it is not true that that branch *ought* to be a walking stick – I just impose that on it. Likewise the meaning of a slave for his master, or of a citizen for the state, is extrinsic: the master or state do not have any rights, other than what the slave or citizen may have freely given them. (They may have *power*, but there is a huge distinction between might and right.)

If I dream, it is different: the things and people in my dream only exist *because* of the goal I have with that dream – their meaning is intrinsic. If that goal is good, then I have the right to expect that they act according to that goal. And if I am good, I'll have made them such that the people in my dream will enjoy acting in that way.

Value, goodness, love, and happiness

A good knife is meaningful to us – it is valuable. So meaning and value are closely connected. Likewise, a knife is meaningful if it does what it ought to do, so meaning is closely connected with morality too. In fact, the source of its meaning is also the source of its value and the source of what

it ought to do – that source is us, and the fact that we like that knife. In the same way, the source of our meaning, our value, is the love of the transcendent mind.

As the transcendent mind is wholly good, he also connects happiness with this meaning. A bird is happy when it can fly, a fish is happy when it can swim, a dancer is happy when she can dance – we are all happy when we can do what we are meant to do, and even more happy when we understand that what we do is useful and valuable.

Belonging

Meaning is also connected with belonging, with being at home. There can be a wonderful sense of belonging together when a group works together for some good cause. Yet, as long as the meaning of that good cause is only relative, that happiness is only temporary and limited. Our parents worked hard to build up the country after the war, but we realise there is no inherent good in this country as opposed to another country, and we rightly feel unwilling to spend our lives that way.

And because we have chosen evil, we also miss out on the truly good: many of our goals are not really good – and because of that we feel guilt. We may try to hide this feeling, or silence it by being busy with entertainment, but deep inside it is there, until we accept the payment by the transcendent mind. If we look at meaning or love it is the same thing: if we limit ourselves to the actual world we'll only find relative and disappointing meaning and love.

Under materialism there is no belonging. Particles are where they are. Materialism can say that the splinter is in my foot, but not that the splinter does not belong in my foot. My body is a collection of particles, but so are all the left eyes of the inhabitants of Beijing. Who says that my body belongs together but all those left eyes don't? Only a transcendent mind can create belonging, by thinking it.

The solution

Only in our connection with the transcendent mind we can be really at home, really loved, really happy, really good and free from guilt, and really meaningful. We know that these are goals for us: we *want* to be happy, loved, et cetera – but often we don't reach those goals, because we search for them directly, instead of reaching them indirectly by doing what we were meant to do, and being what we were meant to be. And if we try to reach them directly, we'll only end up frustrated if we don't get there, or bored if we do. Only by returning to the transcendent mind we can find true meaning, true love, true happiness, true belonging, true goodness, true freedom – and many other desirable goods about which I haven't had the chance to write here. First search the transcendent mind, and those other things will be given you. But we shouldn't accept the transcendent mind on a whim, but based on well-founded faith.

Chapter 9

Aesthetics

Aesthetics is the part of philosophy that deals with beauty, and more generally, with experiencing the world.

Sometimes we are deeply moved by a tender flower, a majestic sunset, by the harmony of music, or by a painting, sculpture or well-written story, and we call those things beautiful. An artist who can make beautiful, moving art is celebrated as a master.

Under materialism this makes no sense. Our brains are such that triggering a certain cell creates this feeling, and we just happen to be wired in such a way that seeing a flower triggers that cell. We could rewire our brains such that seeing a rotting corpse, or experiencing a dirty public toilet would trigger that cell: the feeling has nothing to do with the object (the flower, or the toilet), but only with the subject (me) – I am the one able to have that feeling, and it is my brain that decides what situations make me have it. If there is anything to admire or celebrate it would not be the flower or the music composer, but ourselves, for being able to have these feelings, and anything that would help us have such feelings in more banal situations (e.g. when seeing, hearing and smelling a traffic congestion) would be good, as it would allow us to experience that good feeling more often.

Without a transcendent mind no objective beauty is possible. This is *the aesthetic proof of the existence of a transcendent mind*.

Art

Beauty can not only deeply move us, but also make us sad in a melancholy way. That is because beauty points upwards, to the transcendent mind, and makes us aware of how far we are from him and his beauty (even if we don't realise that he even exists).

Good art expresses our longing for the absolute – absolute goodness, love, justice, and so on. It can do this in a positive way – by trying to show a glimpse of it – or in a negative way – by showing us the brokenness of our world. Bad art points at finite values – that is why so many groups in power have bad art created to "honour" them. In reality such art only ridicules them – every statue purporting to glorify some dictator is in reality a testimony to his being an imposter, trying to take the place of the transcendent mind to whom he is blind.

Good art tells more than the artist even knew, precisely because it points beyond what we can understand. So it speaks to us even on the highest level we can grasp, and since there are so many dimensions of goodness, if we surpass the artist on even one of them, his art will tell us things he didn't even know. And nature may tell us even more, not being limited by the artist's capabilities. That is why something as simple as looking at a flower, or the night sky, or through a microscope at a snowflake, can help bring us closer to the transcendent mind – if we haven't lost our sense of wonder, that is.

Let us give an example – Shelley's poem *Ozymandias*:

> "I met a traveller from an antique land,
> Who said—'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
> Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
> Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
> And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
> Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
> Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
> The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
> And on the pedestal, these words appear:
> My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
> Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.'"

The statue was to honour a king, who no doubt perished way before the statue itself did. The king was in all senses smaller than the art pointing to him. The poem, however, points to an eternal truth – the fact that we are all finite, and art pointing to us is ridiculous. And beyond that negative truth, it points to the positive truth of the power that *is* infinite and everlasting[16] – but Shelley himself didn't see that, and didn't believe in a transcendent mind. His art tells more than he himself knew.

Qualia

A *quale* (plural *qualia*) is something one can experience, such as a specific pain, or the colour blue, or a sense of longing. All knowledge *a posteriori* of the external world is derived from our qualia that we take to be impressions from that world.

The thought "if I doubt that my qualia are truly of an external world I no longer can know anything about the external world, so they certainly must be" commits the fallacy of wishful thinking; in Chapter 3, Epistemology, we developed a solid argument that avoids that and other fallacies. And this outside world has given us even more need for the argument, because psychology and psychiatry have shown to what extent human beings confabulate to create a model of an external world out of insufficient data. People with no long-term memory don't know their lack, but keep inventing stories about a past that they fully believe themselves – and which include the belief that they *have* a long-term memory.

16 One way to see this is by realising that change is a posterior notion, and points to the unchanging entity that is prior to it.

Index