

PHILOSOPHIA CHRISTI

"... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" Col 2.3

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*How Concepts Relate
the Mind to Its Objects*
The "God's Eye View" Vindicated?

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I

What is it for an object to be "before" the mind in thought, or in consciousness generally? And how, exactly, are "concepts" necessarily involved in such a case? Everyone seems to agree that they are involved. There must in any case be *something* which is or accounts for the fact that a given thought has as its object what it in fact does have as its object. And that "something" is generally said to be a concept.

Thus John McDowell opens his recent book, *Mind and World*, with the statement: "The overall topic I am going to consider in these lectures is the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world."¹ He quickly proceeds, however, to "focus the discussion in terms of a familiar philosophical outlook." This turns out to be that of the "dualism of scheme and content" which Donald Davidson put forward in his paper, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." This route, McDowell continues, "will quickly get us to Kant," with the idea he, McDowell, cherishes, "that Kant should still have a central place in our discussion of *the way thought bears on reality*."²

At these words those who have been over the Kantian road several times might not be thought too uncharitable if they threw up their hands in despair. The move to Kant/Davidson might serve to focus the *discussion*, but it is sure to blur the subject under discussion. You have already given away a great deal in your analysis of world, thought and concept if you agree with Kant and Davidson on what is at issue in the Mind/world nexus. For Kant—and Davidson in his own peculiar way, which in fact is by no means that of

¹ John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3.

² *Ibid.*, my italics.

Kant (How anyone could even think it is a topic worth pondering)—understands a “concept” to be an *activity* of mind (Davidson would say “language”), brought to bear (?) on sense contents (?) to produce (?) a representation (act? or object?) of a world (?) which has the character it has only because of what the mind is ‘doing to’ the sense contents.

In his remarkably penetrating paper, “Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition: Comments on John McDowell’s *Mind and World*,” Michael Friedman deftly shows how McDowell’s version of the coming together of sense experience (content) and understanding (conceptual scheme) fails. His result is:

“Relation to an independent objective world is thus not secured by the idea of receptivity [as McDowell presents it], but rather by the spontaneous conceptual activities of the understanding as it rationally evolves an integrated picture of this world. Hence, given McDowell’s own conception of what impressions of outer sense amount to, I do not see, in the end, how he has fully rebutted the charge of idealism. I do not see why his conception itself is not finally a version of Coherentism.” (443-4)

The difficulty with the Kantian route, in its original as well as in its linguistic (*sic*) forms (Davidson, etc.), is that it always turns the “mediation” of the relation between mind and world into a form of *making*: the object which comes to stand before the mind is in some essential way *made* by a ‘grasping’ of something other than it (*sensa?*)—and then the object before the mind too is ‘grasped’. I have elsewhere called this “Midas touch epistemology,” to provide a vivid image of what always turns out to be an indispellably murky action or process.⁴

When concepts are treated in this way—as an activity of mind (language) brought to bear upon something to produce something—it is inevitable that those who do not agree with that treatment should be admonished for falling into the “Myth of the Given,” in the phraseology made popular by Wilfrid Sellars some decades ago.⁵ But they are in a good position to reply by suggesting that there is also a “Myth of the Taking” (and of course of “the Taken”). All in good sport, perhaps, but with serious intent nonetheless. For if because of the mind’s action the given is never to be actually

³ Michael Friedman, “Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition: Comments on John McDowell’s *Mind and World*,” *Philosophical Review* 105 (October 1996), 427-67.

⁴ See my “Predication as Originary Violence: A Phenomenological Critique of Derrida’s View of Intentionality,” in *Working Through Derrida*, Gary B. Madison, ed. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 120-36.

⁵ Wilfrid Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” in his *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1963), 127-96.

found in experience, as Sellars and most others assume, the same is equally true of the taking (and of the taken *as such*).

Kant, of course, offered transcendental arguments that the taking must be going on, but, for reasons inherent in his views, insisted that the taking could never be brought before the mind except through an inference which still never reveals *what*, exactly, it is. This “taking” remains to this day every bit as much a myth as the given, and its inherent obscurity (if not unintelligibility) has driven many, from Kant on, to reject both the given and the taking, and simply to accept the *flow* of experience (language, society). Coherentism (including what today is often called “internal” realism) tries to reconstruct objectivity from within the flow. The various idealisms, phenomenisms, historicisms, *Lebensphilosophie* (of which Heidegger and the second Wittgenstein offer varieties), and agnosticisms are so many versions of Coherentism.⁶

Indeed, the primary question in all this concerns the exact *nature* of concepts. What their role in consciousness and knowledge is can only be answered in the light of their nature. What they are makes their role possible. The basic mistake is, on my view, to think that we can understand the role of concepts without first understanding what they are.

The “way thought bears on reality” will obviously be, to some important extent, a matter of concepts, *if*, as McDowell says, “concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world.” But *how* they mediate, serve as “go betweens,” in the interrelationship between the mind and the world cannot be understood without clarity on what they are. Given that concepts do so mediate, do we know anything about them other than that they are *whatever* does that? If we don’t, the claim that *they* (whatever mediates the connection) mediate the connection becomes non-informative and trivially true—and baffling.

Kant, in a famous letter to Marcus Herz of Feb. 21, 1772, described the problem of how anything in the mind can be a representation of anything outside the mind as the most difficult riddle in philosophy. Hilary Putnam, citing that letter, remarks that “Since the so-called linguistic turn in philosophy earlier in this century, that question [of Kant’s] has been replaced by the question ‘How does language hook onto the world?’ but the replacement has not made finding an answer any easier.”⁷ Thus, as Putnam famously holds, there can be no “God’s Eye View” on the world: no view of reality as it is independently of how we have shaped it, no possibility of knowing it as it is when it is not being ‘shaped’ by our consciousness of it. But this entire outcome—Kant’s riddle and Putnam’s—is due to an implicit *theory* of the

⁶ G. E. Moore, “The Refutation of Idealism,” in his *Philosophical Studies* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1922), 5.

⁷ Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 21.

act of thought (of language) and its concepts, according to which what comes before the mind as its objects—trees, cats, atoms, quarks, numbers—are products of *the action of the mind upon something other than those objects, action by means of concepts*—which objects then again, curiously, fall under the very concepts which ‘made’ them.

Historically, Locke, Kant, Nietzsche, Brand Blanshard and Nelson Goodman, among multitudes of others past and present, can plausibly be superimposed on this diagram, though with some significant differences. It is now simply the reigning dogma not only within philosophy, but far out into academic culture and culture generally, that no one can “step outside” their thought or language to find how things are “apart” from it and then compare them to it. And this is entirely due to the idea that the *primary* contact of mind with world is one of modifying or making.

II

Is Coherentism and its inevitable twin, agnosticism (for that is what “no God’s eye view” *really* amounts to), then to be our fate? Is there any way of thinking about “concepts”—the “mediators” of mind and world—that does not leave us in this position? I must say that I think there is, and one not entirely unheard of in the history of philosophical thought. But it is hard to get a hearing for it in the face of “the reigning dogma,” and beyond that this option is not easy to make intelligible or plausible in its own right. This is in part because it depends upon explaining and defending positions on profound issues in *general ontology*, having to do with individuals, qualities and relations. “Midas touch” epistemologies depend upon failures in general ontology, and overcoming those epistemologies depends upon placing ‘concepts’ convincingly in a framework of individuals, qualities and relations. Needless to say, that is *hard*. And, as Aristotle remarks when setting out to see if there are “besides sense perceptible substances any which is immovable and eternal,” “one must be content to state some points better than one’s predecessors, and others no worse.”⁸ Perhaps, even, some not as well!

We might begin by allowing that ‘concepts’—whatever they are—do mediate the relation between mind and the world, but refrain from entering the Kantian pathway of making, forming, etc. My dog and my thought of my dog obviously are different. (They have different properties. The latter has no fleas, though the former does, and is *about* or *of* the former, though the former is not about or of it.) Moreover they are obviously related. We have two things and a certain specific *together* with reference to them. So there

must be something that mediates or is the condition of that relation, as is true of *every* relation. There must be something about *each* of the terms (my thought of my dog, my dog) that accounts for the fact that my thought of my dog is “together with” or pairs up with my dog in that peculiar manner we express by saying that the thought in question is of or about my dog.

In fact that thought *could not be* of anything other than that dog. The ‘relation’ is in this respect a very tight one. The thought is, in some manner hard to spell out, individuated by the dog. It could not be the thought it is and be about anything else, though, of course, the dog could be the dog it is if that thought had never occurred. As the schoolmen formulated it: OMNIS ACTUS SPECIFICATUR AB OBJECTO. (Every act is specified from its object.)

So there surely is *something* about the act, some aspect of the act, that makes it of the particular object which it is “of” or “about.” This, I take it, is a truth of general ontology applied to the case of the “together” of the thought and its object. That “something” is what “mediates” its relation to its object. In traditional language, it *grounds* or *founds* the ‘relation’. Let us call that “something” a concept, but leave the word “concept” innocent, so far as possible, of further interpretation, for the time being—and, especially, innocent of the Kant/Davidson interpretation.

Are there any other things that we might agree to about concepts? There are, I believe, and ones which can provide us with a framework for further discussion; but they fall beyond the range of general ontology strictly speaking. Whatever we are to make of concepts ultimately, they are widely agreed to have the following five features:

- (i) They are in the normal case things which persons may acquire, and therefore may lack or have. (Possibly they can also be lost, but that would not be the same as a simple failure of memory.) This fact alone of course implies nothing concerning whether or not a concept exists when it is not “had” by someone, nor concerning what such mind-independent existence might be like. That is something eventually to be dealt with, but not here, within the framework of general ontology.
- (ii) A concept is something which “applies to” or is a concept of something other than itself, its “cases.” This is the *extension* of the concept. Concepts have actual or possible extensions. The “ofness” of the concept extends to the members of its extension.
- (iii) If a concept *C* applies to (or is the concept of) *x*, that essentially depends upon what characteristics, what properties or relations, *x* has. These make up the *intension* of the concept: the properties a thing must have in order to fall under it. The intension of the concept is non-identical with but necessarily connected with the concept itself. Leaving aside for the moment the problematic case of

⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book M (XII), chapter 1, (1076a, 15).

"individual" concepts, it is always wrong to say of two things precisely similar in all intrinsic and extrinsic respects, that a certain concept applies to one but not the other. To explain or "analyze" a concept therefore will normally require reference to properties or relations which belong to whatever "falls under" the concepts.

- (iv) Many people may have one and the same concept. A concept is something transpersonal, and hence "objective" in the sense that many people may have one and the same concept. It is shareable by many persons, and repeatable within the experience of a single person. It may be that in fact only one person has a given concept, and we may for example speak with contempt or hilarity or gratitude of "Jones' concept of fairness," as of something which he has quite to himself. But if a concept does belong to one person alone, that would only be a fact and due to contingent circumstances, not a necessity. And even if we are dealing with a biological necessity of some sort—let us suppose an absolutely unique mutant of the human species, with a mind of special conceptual abilities—the uniqueness of a given concept to such an individual who actually has it is not derived from the mere fact that the concept in question is a concept.

- (v) Concepts are necessary (but not the sole and sufficient) constituents of human thought and knowledge. The full explication of thought, and of knowledge as well, must invoke concepts along with other factors that make up individual acts (as well as dispositions) of thought.

{Possibly a sixth point of general agreement would be that whatever there is to logical constraint and logical law is entirely grounded in concepts and their interrelationships. But to assert this is perhaps more adventuresome than we should be at present.}

These five points constitute a part of what in some philosophical quarters might be called a 'grammar' of the term "concept," within which elucidations of particular concepts, as well as elucidations of the concept of concept itself, must stand. To use a different philosophical language, they state certain necessary elements in the essence or nature of concepts as such. Many of the major epistemological perspectives can be specified in terms of how one or another of these points is interpreted by them; and hence, of course, when one goes beyond the bare statement here given one steps into heated controversy.⁹

⁹For further development see the discussion of concepts and analysis in my *Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1984), Chapter 2.

Nonetheless, these fixed points may serve as a basis for cross-perspective understanding of why a given thinker adopts the detailed view of concepts, and hence of the analysis of concepts, that he does. And they may also serve as a statement of minimal conditions which any satisfactory analysis of (the concept of) concept must meet. Any satisfactory account of concept will be one which happily explains how our five guideposts are to be understood, especially how they are to be rendered consistent with each other.

Let us try to go further.

III

With all this in mind I will now try to say, as fully and clearly as I can, what I take concepts to be and how, precisely, they "mediate" the relationship between minds and the objects corresponding to particular acts of cognition that occur as parts of the course of mental life.

First, as the foregoing strongly suggests, the concept is a property.¹⁰ They are respects in which entities—in this case acts of thought—may resemble or differ, be identical or different. The concept is not an act or event. It is not a *doing* or kind of doing, much less a doing *to* anything. This places it ontologically or categorially. By a property I understand a respect in which things or events may resemble (be the same as) or differ from other things or events. A property is an entity in its own right. It is an "abstract entity," and hence, as Christopher Peacocke rightly says in opening his chapter on "The Metaphysics of Concepts," "Concepts are abstract objects," though one must be careful about 'objects' here.¹¹

Like every entity, the concept also has a nature—properties and relations of the types peculiar to it. And it has its place in the overall scheme of things. I take any property (as distinct from a part) to be a universal and, as such, capable of existing at many places distant from one another in space, or at many points in time more or less separated, identically the same in many instances. Exemplifications of universals (including concepts) are events or states that uniquely occur at a time and at a place. But universals, exemplified or not, do not uniquely occur at a time or place. They do not occur, though they are. Of course this is what one would expect of a concept,

¹⁰I cannot here discuss Fregean and Fregean types of objections to saying that a concept is a property. On Frege's views relevant to this point, see my paper, "The Integrity of the Mental Act: Husserlian Reflections on a Fregean Problem," in *Mind, Meaning and Mathematics*, Leila Haaparanta, ed., The Synthesis Library, (Dordrecht/Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 235-62.

¹¹Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 99.

if it is to link up thoughts and objects in the manner suggested by our five guideposts already laid out.

Second, the concept is a kind of property that is exemplified in nothing other than events or acts of cognition (perception, memory, imagination, mere thought, daydreaming, abstract logical thinking, etc.) Like all properties (again, a matter of general ontology) it is not indifferent to the type of entity that instances it. Only certain kinds of things can instance it and fall under the laws associated with it.

By a certain extension, the concept may be involved in bodily behaviors of various types, including speaking and other linguistic activities. But they are not properties of bodily movements—even of the linguistic ones, which, unlike thoughts, are not inherently *of* or *about* anything. Acts of thought, which *are* qualified by (indeed, individuated by) conceptual properties (concepts) may be *parts* of more inclusive behaviors requiring bodily movements, but they need not be. Thinking can occur without any kind of behavior, including the linguistic, and it often does. Behavior, including the linguistic, also occurs without incorporating acts of thought as parts. The possibility of behavior without thought is one thing that has allowed numerous modern thinkers to try to drop thought altogether, as something distinct from behavior.

One cannot, as we have already noted, identify an act of thought or perception, etc., without mentioning what it is of or about. On the other hand, we do readily identify our cognitive acts, of the various types, and it is rarely ever in any terms other than what they are of—though there clearly must be more to them than their precise ‘ofness’ or ‘aboutness’, e.g. clarity, consistency. A general term for this ofness or aboutness is “intentionality,” which has thrust its way into current Anglo-American philosophy, where intentionality is frequently confused—at least terminologically—with *reference*, as a presumed feature of words or linguistic behavior.

Third, these intentional properties which are identical with concepts (and which also, when appropriately combined, constitute *propositions*) are for the most part identifiable by direct, reflective awareness on the part of the one in whom the acts of thought instancing them occur. The thinker is, generally speaking, able to *pay attention* to their thoughts in much the same way as they do (or fail to do) with other types of objects, and, within limits, able to discern—reliably if not always infallibly—the more obvious features of those thoughts. And conspicuous among such features of our thoughts (or cognitive acts generally) are, precisely, their intentional bearings, what they are of or about. Descartes was rightly every bit as sure what his thoughts were *of* as that he was thinking at all.¹² And these “intentional bearings” or

¹²Descartes, *Meditations*, Second Meditation.

concepts turn out to be astonishingly complex when subjected to logical analysis and epistemic development. Traditional theories of “representations” (actually, for the most part those “representations” were concepts, and were treated as concepts), such as one finds in philosophers in the 18th and 19th Centuries, capitalize on the initially implicit riches of the spontaneous ofnesses and aboutnesses to be found in ordinary human thought in a logically uncultivated condition.

So William Lyons is much too hopeful for his own position on the nature of mind and knowledge of mind when he entitles one of his books *The Disappearance of Introspection*.¹³ Introspection (reflective cognition) of one's own mental states and acts will have disappeared when persons no longer have the ability to direct their attention to their own thoughts or other mental conditions and to accurately recognize the existence, nature and interconnections of those thoughts and conditions. One recalls Mark Twain's letter—from Europe, I believe—pointing out that reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated. Something similar must be said of introspection—though no doubt claims for it as a method of psychological research were at one time also exaggerated.

So when I recognize what is “before my mind” in thought (perception, etc.) I am realizing, and possibly reporting, the intentional properties—the specific ofnesses and aboutnesses—of my cognitive states. I do not suggest that I can do this for all my mental aspects, or that I thereby give an “ultimate analysis” of thought or the mind. But these intentional properties which I thus apprehend *are* concepts—usually in a highly unrefined logical and epistemic state, for which we can be thankful as we try to get on with our lives. *They* are, precisely, what “mediates between mind and world.” They form the ‘bridge’ that connects a thought and its object. I am not thinking of them as they are in play, but of what is before my mind *through* them. It is not they, but their “objective correlates” that are “before my mind.” I am perhaps marginally aware of them as I employ them or as they occur in my thinking and awareness. But they stand before my mind as my objects only in logical or semantic reflection.

It is, I think, very dangerous to speak of thinking *with* concepts, as is often done, though when carefully guarded there is an important and even indispensable sense in which we do ‘use’ them and think ‘with’ them—and even with language associated with them—as our abilities to think grow and we become seriously logical thinkers. This use is not, however, essential to concepts (intentional properties) as such, even though it is essential to all logical thinking. Logically thorough, rational inquiry always involves bring-

¹³William Lyons, *The Disappearance of Introspection* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

ing the concepts and propositions in which we primarily live and think "before the mind," and therefore involves living in concepts and propositions about (directed upon) other concepts and propositions—possibly about the very ones which are instanced in relatively proximate acts of thought. We have concepts of concepts and propositions, and propositions about propositions (and concepts).

Fourth, the nature of the intentional bridge between the mind and the world resides *in the way the mental properties that are concepts relate to, or have affinity for, other qualities*—specifically, those that essentially qualify the objects which fall within the real or possible extension of the concept in question. Their are two major points to make here, one relatively easy, the other as difficult as they get in philosophical work. First the easy one.

A. Concepts, the intentional properties of acts of thought, are, as we have noted, not identical with the properties which things must have to fall under the concept. I.e. concepts are not identical with their intensions. For example, the properties which Fido and Fifi must have to fall under the concept *dog* (and by extension for the term or word "dog" to apply to them) are not the concept which a thought must exemplify as a property in order for that thought to be of a dog—and then of Fido and Fifi in particular. The properties that make up the intension of the concept are *before* the mind in thought (of dogs etc.) along with the real or possible extension of the concept. They are not *exemplified* in thoughts or the mind. If they were, the mind would have a dog in it and not a thought of a dog (of Fifi).

B. There is, for want of better language, a "natural affinity" between intentional properties (concepts) that qualify cognitive acts and the properties (the intension of the concept) which things must have to fall under the concept. This is the single most important and also most difficult point to make about concepts. With it certainly the account of concepts I am trying to give stands or falls.

A primary manifestation of the affinity between thought and object is the fact that no one ever has to be taught what their thought (or perception) is a thought (or perception) *of*, nor could they be, though of course they have to learn language for talking about their thought and its objects, and they also have much to learn about thoughts and their objects. But the child knows what its thoughts (perceptions, etc.) are of as soon as it becomes aware that it is having experiences; and that is one foundation of most other learning that transpires.

Of course I do not mean that further learning is an explicitly logical process, but it is by and large dependent upon the child being able to identify experiences, and thereby what they are of. The child (or adult) has to be able to identify when it is experiencing the same thing or something different. And we do not, for the most part, even know what it would be like to have to identify the child's—or any one else's—experiences *for* them, or

teach them how to do it if they did not already know. There is an infinitely rich field of "natural signs," as Thomas Reid called them,¹⁴ entities which immediately carry the mind which exemplifies them to something else because in their nature they inherently involve something else (their specific objects). These are the mental qualities that are concepts.

Earlier we placed concepts ontologically as properties. Now it is time to notice—quite without any specific reference to concepts—that properties, generally, never *come* as undetached atoms. They come in ordered groups. They come, of course, with natures of their own that place them into relationships within the range of properties of their own type (say colors, shapes or numbers), and also in relationships to some properties and relations of other types. Sounds, colors and shapes illustrate this in the visible (sense perceptible) world, and numbers, mental properties, character traits—and of course concepts and propositions themselves—do so in the invisible.

The affinities (and exclusions) between properties (qualities and relations) have been long recognized and made much of at least since Plato, though with the ever increasing Empiricism, Atomism and Nominalism of the Modern period of thought that recognition finds hard going, where it remains at all (in Whitehead, for example, in Peirce, in Russell at some of his stages, in Husserl and the Phenomenological tendency of Continental thought insofar as it retains its initial inspiration—i.e. *not* that of the Post-Structuralists).

The view I am trying to explain and advocate here is that there is a natural affinity between *every* property which is a concept and the properties that make up its intension (and thereby determine its extension), such that for a thought to instance the concept is for that thought to be *of* its intension (and thereby its extension). In the irreducible manner peculiar to intentional affinity the properties (concept on one side, its intension on the other) are "together" in such a way that the properties in the intension always come "to mind" upon the instancing of the property which is the concept, but *not* by being instanced in the thought along with the concept (which *is* instanced in the thought). All of the puzzles and advantages of so-called "objective" existence in the Medievals and Descartes enter here.

By contrast, *red* is never instanced in anything without color and extension (spatial magnitude), and *taller*, a relation, is never instanced without the properties of transitivity and shorter (the converse relation). The affinity

¹⁴Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry Into The Human Mind*, Chapter 4 and elsewhere. Laird Addis also tries to develop a theory of "natural signs" in his book, *Natural Signs: A Theory of Intentionality* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1989). Edmund Husserl has the most fully developed theory of natural signs known to me. See especially the 1st and 5th of his "Logical Investigations," in his *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., translated by J. N. Findlay (New York: Humanities Press, 1970).

between these properties is obvious. But there is a great difference to be noted. In these cases the other properties are *instanced in the same actually related things*, and must exist (be co-instanced) along with them, whereas the properties that “intentionally go together with” a concept are not instanced in the thought (or mind) where the concept *is* instanced, and, famously, they (and their instances) may not exist at all (the “Intentional inexistence” Brentano speaks of). We know what a winged horse is (Pegasus) and sometimes think of winged horses, possibly even imaging them and telling stories about them. But the conjunctive property *winged horse* is instanced nowhere, certainly not in the mind, and it seems rather forced to insist that the conjunctive property itself exists—though that is a long story.

Causation between events provides another illustration of qualitative affinities. Events do not collect other events as their causes and effects at random, but always in terms of the properties which the events exemplify. Even Hume recognizes this with his invocation of *repetition*, which can only be understood in terms of relations between qualities instanced.

I try to outline how concepts relate the mind to its objects in the following way:

Thought of a dog
 (exemplifies)
 Concept of dog
 (has natural affinity with)
 Properties making up caninity
 (exemplified in)
 Dogs (Fido, Fifi, etc.)

The crucial transitions from the thought to its object are the two exemplifications and, especially, the natural affinity between the properties exemplified.

IV

Now for a few hopefully illuminating skirmishes:

Does the Kant/Davidson route of *making* through concepts avoid the necessity of natural affinities between thoughts (concepts) and what they are of? It would be a considerable argument in its favor if it did, but I don't think it does. It too presupposes some kind of natural affinity or selectivity by which the ‘concept’ as action *selects* and produces the object of thought or perception. It just refuses to talk about it, or insists that it can't be talked about. But King Midas must touch the object before it turns to gold, and the mind must ‘touch’ the *sensum* (or whatever) before it ‘becomes’ the catego-

rially formed object of thought or perception that we then deal with in our usual cognitive acts.

Similarly in Locke, we must—on pain of infinite regress—have ideal awareness of his kind of ideas before his kind of ideas enable us to have non-ideas (Fido, the tree, God) before our minds. The initial selectivity presupposed for the object to be ‘produced’ by the Midas touch of the mind (language, culture) is the epistemological black hole into which any mind independent reality disappears as the unsolvable Kantian/Putnamian riddle overwhelms us. I think that some kind of natural affinity between mind (thought) and world (object) cannot be avoided except by simple refusal to talk about it, or flatly retreating into Coherentism, i.e. surrendering the mind/world nexus altogether.¹⁵

So there is no easy way out. But on the view of concepts that I am advocating the objects of thought do not take on any character by becoming objects of thought. They are not changed in their nature. The objects, if they exist, enter into a relation-like unity with the thought of them. If they do not exist, the thought of them gets no further—in terms of what is actually the case—than the properties they would have if they did exist: that is, the *intentions* of the concepts involved. Remember Russell's “theory of descriptions,” according to which descriptive phrases reach the properties that the King of France, for example, might have if he existed but do not require that mere intentionality (meaning) actually directed upon the King of France necessitate the existence of the King of France. Rather, it establishes a framework of meaning that allows us to determine, precisely, whether the King of France exists or not.

It is precisely *because* concepts do not confer a new characteristic or nature upon the object of the thought or cognition that we are *not* locked ‘inside’ thought or language and faced with the futile task of finding something unmodified by thought or language. The “riddle” of objectivity is the result of a massive misunderstanding and misdescription of subjectivity (thought). On my view, we establish or confirm the relation between thought and its object in precisely the same general way we establish any relation between any entities. We compare them to see what relation exists between them. How do we establish that the book is on the table? By comparing the book and the table. How do we establish that 8 is greater than 3? Ditto. How that Lucas made Star Wars? Ditto.

¹⁵ Although this requires separate treatment in its own right, I must here state that linguistic versions of the mind/world connection such as Putnam's do not, so far as I can tell, really tell us how reference joins words etc. to objects and worlds, or even what it is. The one who came closest to actually doing this was, to my mind Wilfred Sellars. I have given a detailed criticism of his view in my *Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge*, Chapter 5.

Similarly we compare the thought of Fido with Fido. It is the nature of the thought and of the dog that enables us to bring them together and determine that Fido the dog is (or is not) objectively what he has subjectively been thought of as being.

If what I (and many others) have said is correct, I do *not* need to do this—compare the thought and the dog—to determine that the thought is of Fido. For it is the thought's intrinsic nature to be of-Fido. (Yes, this amounts to Putnam's scornfully named "magical theory of reference," or the "noetic ray" theory, though he is talking about words.) *Of-Fido* is a one-place predicate instanced by my thought of Fido, which thought is a part of my mental life. It is simply a predicate that cannot be explained without mentioning Fido, and cannot be exemplified in thought without Fido coming before the mind in which it is exemplified—though it can be exemplified without it coming *before* the mind.

If Fido exists and other circumstances are right I can compare him to *him-as-before-my-mind*, to my thought of him; and if he is (or is not) as represented I *can observe that*. In fact we do this sort of thing all the time, whenever we look at something to see if it is as we have thought it to be. Even those who deny that it is possible do it. They only hold in addition that they can't be doing it because in seeing or thinking of Fido he is modified, so that he can never be seen or thought of as he is when he is not being seen or thought of—usually, today, allegedly because both we and Fido are being shaped by or filtered through our history/culture/language.

Thus we are—as G. E. Moore saw a century ago, but could not in the end make anything of it—already "outside the circle of ideas" merely by having a thought or sensation. We are "outside" precisely because thought and sensation do not produce anything by being what they are. We are outside because there is no inside. The "inside" is produced by the Kant/Davidsonian (Locke, Mach, Nietzsche, Second Wittgenstein, Goodman, Kuhn, Putnam, etc., etc.) illusion that the touch of the mind (language, culture, history) produces things that form a wall over which we cannot logically or epistemically get.

Moore was also close to correct in saying that, if he was right, "not Idealists only, but all philosophers and psychologists also, have been in error, and from their erroneous view...they have inferred (validly or invalidly) their most striking and interesting conclusions.... And...it will indeed follow that all the most striking results of philosophy—Sensationalism, Agnosticism and Idealism alike—have, for all that has hitherto been urged in their favor, no more foundation than the supposition that a chimera lives in the moon."¹⁶ He hadn't heard of Coherentism by that name, of course. But

¹⁶ G.E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," in his *Philosophical Studies* (London: Regan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1922), 5.

Moore only proved that blue, for example, is *distinct* from (not identical with) the sensation (or thought) of blue, and could not intelligibly conceptualize and prove its *independence* from the sensation or thought of it. Hence he abandoned his position—without necessarily holding it to be wrong, just unproven—and in his last paper on the topic,¹⁷ many years later, wound up being defeated and baffled by the wall of "sense-data," just like Kant earlier and Putnam later. Thus "The Revolt Against Dualism" in the early part of the 20th Century failed and fell apart, as Lovejoy beautifully details in his book by that name.¹⁸ Now, at the end of the Century we are pretty much in the same position that Moore, Russell, Husserl and the American New Realists found themselves in at the outset of the century. The language and the personalities have changed, the basic issues and arguments are exactly the same.

The inside/outside riddle which lies back of all this is generated by what I believe to be mistaken assumptions about what concepts do and are as "mediators" of mind and world nexus. The view of concepts I have put forward does not generate the riddle, and that is perhaps no small reason to pursue it further, clarifying its difficulties and dealing with objections to it. But there is much more to be said for it than that it doesn't generate that riddle. Not least, the way it fits in with the five (or six) guideposts I have spelled out above—far better, I think, than does the Kant/Davidson approach. But I cannot develop that further here.

I close with a remark about "the God's Eye View," a remark which also seems to me to be much in favor of the view of concepts and thought acts here advanced. The phrase "God's Eye View" is, of course, Putnam's, and it is designed to make ridiculous the idea that there could be a single description that is right of reality as it is independently of the description.¹⁹ Such a description could, supposedly, only be God's, and the human being could never reasonably profess to have achieved it. This might seem to express a becoming humility.

¹⁷ In C. A. Mace, ed., *British Philosophy at the Mid-Century* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966).

¹⁸ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Revolt Against Dualism: An Inquiry Concerning the Existence of Ideas*, 2nd ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1960).

¹⁹ The talk of how things are "independently of" description (thought, reference, etc.) makes sense at all only if talk of how things are 'dependently on' description etc., also does. The main point of this paper can be put by saying that no one has ever made any sense of the 'dependently on', and that the pursuit of the "independently of" therefore is the pursuit of nothing intelligible. That is why it can neither be fulfilled or abandoned—as long as the 'dependently on' remains vacuous, which it must of necessity do so long as the basic line of thought is a "transcendental" type of argument.

On the view I have advanced, thoughts and their concepts do not modify the objects which make up reality. They merely “match up” or fail to match up with them in a certain way. Thus there would be a “way things are,” and the “metaphysical realism,” of which Putnam also speaks, would be vindicated along with the possibility, at least, of a God’s Eye View. The vagaries, indeterminacies, differing viewpoints, and so on, that are unmistakable and irremovable characteristics of our experience of the world do not transfer to the world itself, and do not erect (produce) a wall that encloses us from the world as it is without regard to our experiences of it.

Now I suppose that if there is a God anything like what is commonly held, there certainly is, after all, a God’s Eye View in the most literal of senses. I presume that God is not faced with the alleged riddle of how to get ‘outside’ his “circle of ideas” or of his language (Hebrew, no doubt). And I take it that God gets outside not just in virtue of being “bigger” or stronger. That solution is no more satisfactory here than with the Occasionalists’ weird solution to the mind/body problem. (When the needle enters your arm God causes the feeling of pain in your mind.) The problem in either case isn’t one of power, but of ontological structure: the ontological structure of the act of thought and its object or of the mind/body nexus.

It is interesting to observe that on Kant’s view God cannot have *knowledge*, or possibly consciousness of objects. (For he does not engage in sense perception, and his “concepts without percepts” are therefore blind.) What it can mean for him to be a purely rational being with a holy will one can only wonder, from within Kant’s account of knowledge. And with reference to a Putnamian, etc., viewpoint on *reference*, does God really—if there is a God—have a language that governs his thought and the possibilities of consciousness?

Further, one might even suppose, from a commonly held theistic point of view, that if God wants to he can communicate with human beings, bring them to know, how things really are apart from their descriptions. All of this remains impossible, however, on the received view of concepts. God can’t get out and we can’t get out, and if God could get out he could never tell us how things are apart from our concepts/language. We are left to “construct” him and what he says, along with everything else, from within our “circle of ideas” or our language. Prospects for a revelation of Divine Truth are pretty gloomy, to say the least. “Construction” and “reconstruction” are the only possibilities, and even they can only be constructions if we are to be consistent. But then consistency too is only²⁰ †

²⁰This paper was read before a philosophy meeting at Biola University in February of 1998.

Mysterious Flames in Philosophy of Mind

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In *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World*, Colin McGinn¹ continues to press forward his case for a naturalist account of consciousness. His book is part of a central project in philosophy of mind. As Jaegwon Kim observes:

The shared project of the majority of those who have worked on the mind-body problem over the past few decades has been to find a way of accommodating the mental within a principled physical scheme, while at the same time preserving it as something distinctive—that is, without losing what we value, or find special, in our nature as creatures with minds.²

But what distinguishes McGinn’s work from many in the field is his straight-forward acknowledgment that consciousness is altogether puzzling given his materialist background beliefs. His new book also sets McGinn apart in that he perceives that a combination of theism and dualism amounts to a sufficiently attractive alternative that it requires sustained critical attention.

In this paper I consider McGinn’s four objections to substance dualism, and especially what he calls theistic dualism. Theistic dualism holds that God *qua* immaterial, omnipresent, omnipotent, all good, omniscient Creator has created a material world in which human beings consist of an immaterial mind and a material body. McGinn is already a property dualist, insofar as he holds that mental properties are not identical with physical properties as currently conceived in the natural sciences. He is keen not to go any further in his dualistic leanings, and he is set against theism.

¹ Colin McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

² Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World: An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 2.