THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH

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The logical aspect of knowledge is now commonly discussed with exclusive reference to the nature of ultimate truth. There is no doubt that this is the question with which epistemology is finally concerned, but it may be asked whether we cannot advantageously begin by having before us a less ambitious aim. Irrespective of the final solution we may arrive at about the nature of truth, there is knowledge which is distinguished as either true or false from the common-sense point of view; and we may start by asking what this distinction means. Our answer to this question may not satisfy the ultimate epistemological test, but we need not occupy ourselves with that consideration from the beginning. "Confusion often results," it has been said, "from proceeding at once to large and complex cases." If we thus restrict the scope of the enquiry, we shall be simplifying the problem to be solved; and its solution, though it may not furnish the complete explanation of the nature of ultimate truth, may be expected to throw considerable light upon it. We propose to adopt this plan of treatment in the sequel.

Let us begin by analysing an act of perception. When a person opens his eyes (say) and sees a table before him, there are, as ordinarily supposed, three elements that can be distinguished in the situation: First, the percipient who sees; secondly the object, viz. the table; and lastly the sense-data or sensa, as they are described—a certain shape, colour, etc., which he associates with the table and regards as its actual characteristics. These sensa he takes as revealing the nature of the table but partly, for, while he may be seeing only its shape and colour, he believes that it has also other qualities like hardness and weight. It may appear that the common man does not distinguish between the last two of the three elements just referred to; the fact, however, is that he only does not attend to the distinction between them particularly but passes over swiftly from the sensa to the object which is what practically interests him. The process has been compared to our overlooking the peculiarities of the print in reading, because it is the meaning of what is printed that interests us.\(^1\) This is the

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\(^1\) Mind. (1921), p. 389.
popular notion of the perceptual situation; and it implies belief in (1) the presence of the self (2) the givenness and the direct apprehension of the object and (3) the partial revelation of its character by the sensa, which are likewise given and directly known. Of these, the ultimate nature of the self or the knowing subject is not relevant to our present purpose. It is a problem for metaphysics. All that we have to remember is that it is a factor which enters into the cognitive situation. The same observation holds true in the case of the final nature of the object also. The points that chiefly matter for us now are the nature of sense-data, their relation to the object and the manner in which they both, viz. the sense-data and the object, come to be known.

I

According to the above analysis, the sensa are actual features or "literal aspects" of objects; and they both are directly apprehended by the self. We should now ask to what extent this analysis stands the test of reflection. It it be correct, it should apply to all perceptual knowledge; but it seems that, though it may be right as an analysis of perception that is true, it does not apply to illusion and error\(^1\) where we apprehend an object or some aspect of it which is not there. Without prejudging the question, however, we shall try to find out whether errors can be at all explained by assuming that even they do not involve a reference to anything that is not actually given. Such a view was maintained not only in respect of perception but also all knowledge (excepting only memory) by certain thinkers in ancient India,\(^2\) and it will serve as a convenient starting-point for our enquiry. The illustrations usually given in explaining their theory are those of a white crystal which is mistaken for red when placed by the side of a red flower, and of a conch which is seen yellow by a jaundiced person. We shall select the latter for consideration, but with a slight alteration. We shall suppose that the conch is seen through a sheet of yellow glass instead of by the jaundiced eye, and that

\(^1\) We shall, in what follows, overlook the distinction between errors of perception and illusions, as the only difference between them is that while the judgment is explicit in the former, it is implicit in the latter. Illusions have been described as "errors in the germ."

\(^2\) Prābhākaras.
the fact of the existence of the glass is for some reason or other lost sight of. Here we have, according to this theory, the perception of the conch minus its true colour, viz. white, and the sensation of the yellowness alone of the glass. They are two acts of knowing, but they quickly succeed each other; and we therefore miss the fact that they are two. Each of them is valid so far as it goes, for neither the yellowness nor the conch as such is negated afterwards when we discover the error. But we overlook at first that they stand apart; and it is only this deficiency in our knowledge that is made good later when we find out our mistake. Thus discovery of error only means a further step in advancing knowledge. It confirms the previous knowledge and does not cancel any part of it as false, so that to talk of "rectification" with reference to error is a misnomer. In admitting that error is incomplete knowledge which needs to be supplemented, the theory grants that ignorance is involved in it; but the ignorance, it maintains, is purely of a negative character and does not import into erroneous knowledge any element which is positively wrong. In other words, it holds that the mind may fail to apprehend one or more aspects of what is presented, but that it never mis-apprehends it and that all errors are therefore only errors of omission.

There is no need, on this view, to verify any knowledge. All knowledge is true in the sense that no portion of what it reveals is contradicted afterwards; and to question whether it agrees with reality in any particular instance is therefore to question its very nature. But truth being commonly distinguished from error, it is necessary to give some explanation of the distinction. The so-called error may be partial knowledge; but we cannot characterise it as such, for human knowledge is always partial in one sense or another. So another explanation is given, and it is indirect. Though all knowledge is alike incomplete, error is more so than truth. It is relatively incomplete, and its relative incompleteness is determined by reference to an extrinsic standard, viz. a pragmatic one. All knowledge, according to this school, leads to action; and the success or failure of the activity prompted by any particular knowledge is regarded as constituting its truth or error. In other words, that knowledge is true which works; and that which does not, is erroneous. Though this school
upholds a pragmatic view of truth, it should be noticed that it is essentially unlike modern Pragmatism. Epistemologically speaking, the latter amounts to a sceptical attitude, for it teaches that absolute truth in any matter is unattainable because it does not exist. Every truth is provisional—true only so long as it furthers human purposes. But here knowledge is admitted to have a logical, apart from a practical or guiding, value. Though it may be false on its purposive side, it is theoretically quite true and never fails to agree with the outside reality which it reveals. If we still speak of knowledge as sometimes false, we mean that it is not useful—thus transferring to it a feature which is significant only in reference to the practical consequences that follow from it. All knowledge in itself being thus regarded here as true, we may say that while current Pragmatism denies truth in the sense in which it is ordinarily understood, the present theory denies error.

This theory merits commendation for its simplicity as well as for its complete consistency in explaining the logical character of knowledge. It may be said to represent the extreme form of realism, for it not only upholds that external objects are independent of the knowing mind and are directly apprehended; it even denies error. But it is far from convincing. The indirect manner, for instance, in which it explains the familiar terms "true" and "false" is hardly satisfactory. But even waiving this consideration, it must be said that a purely negative explanation cannot account for error which, as a judgment, presents the two elements in it as synthesised though they may be actually unrelated. Its distinction from "doubt," which lacks such synthesis as shown by its alternative suppositions, and is not a judgment but a suspension of it, points to the same fact. In our illustration, the knowledge of the conch cannot accordingly be assumed to arise separately from that of yellowness; there is only a single psychical process, and the resulting knowledge includes a reference to a positive element which is false. Error is therefore misapprehension and not mere lack of apprehension. Such a view, we may add, is implied even in the explanation given by the school of thinkers mentioned above. It will be remembered that, according to that explanation, discovery of error means only an advance from less complete to more complete knowledge.
But there may be incomplete knowledge which we do or do not know to be so at the time; and it is only the latter that can be regarded as an error, for surely nobody that knows that his knowledge is incomplete can be said to make a mistake when that knowledge, so far as it goes, is admitted to be right. It will be wrong only when there is an implicit, if not an explicit, identification of it with truth or adequate knowledge. That is, if our knowledge is to be viewed as erroneous, it is not enough for us to be merely unaware of one or more aspects of the presented object; we should also take the knowledge as complete or adequate. And in so far as what is incomplete is taken for the complete or the less adequate for the more adequate, there is misapprehension. Thus the mind may not only misapprehend presented objects, but it invariably does so in error; and all errors are, therefore, errors of commission. Errors of mere omission in the sphere of knowledge are strictly not errors at all. There is, however, this much of truth in the previous view when it insists on the validity of all knowledge, that, so far as its perceptual form at least is concerned (to which we are now confining our attention), it always points to some reality or other, and that there can, therefore, be no complete error. That is, though a part of the content of knowledge may be false, the whole of it can never be so.

The outcome of the above reasoning is that there is always in error some element which needs to be recanted later, although it may be only the element of relation as in the above example; and, so far, the contention that no portion of what knowledge reveals is ever negated afterwards has to be given up. Before we enquire into the precise status of this element, it will be desirable to consider another type of error. We have hitherto spoken of errors in which, even after they are detected, the two elements involved, taken separately—or, to state the same in a different manner, the subject and the predicate of the propositions expressing the corresponding judgments—continue to be presented as before. Even the false localisation of the predicate ("yellow") persists, though it no longer misleads the person who has seen through the error. But there are other instances in which the predicate is contradicted—and necessarily the relation also along with it—the moment the error is discovered. This happens, for example, when we find out that we mistook a block
of crystal for ice on seeing at some distance a certain shape and colour which are common to both.\textsuperscript{1} The difference between the two cases is that in the one the predicative element ("yellow") is actually within the field of visual sensation, while in the other it ("ice") is not so. What we come to know as false in the latter case, when we fail to find that the given object is neither cool nor moist (say) as we expected, is not, therefore, merely the element of relation but also the predicate. Our perception of "ice" here, as if it were bodily present, when it does not form part of the given situation needs a satisfactory explanation. All that we know for certain is that there is something given, and that the sensa actually apprehended—a certain shape and colour as we have assumed—are of that something,\textsuperscript{2} and not of the object to which they seem to pertain. Two explanations of this "presence in absence" are possible:

(i) It may be argued that the object in question, though not present in the given situation, is still to be reckoned as a physical existent because it is found elsewhere and should have been actually experienced at some other time. While the force of this argument may be admitted so far as it means that only things resembling those experienced before can be seen in such errors, it has to be observed that the question here is not merely about the being of the object but also about its presence at a particular place and at a particular time. In error, it is experienced as here and now; and the experience in this determinate form is contradicted later. The reality of the object in itself may be conceded, but it has no bearing upon this fact, and the contradiction, therefore, remains wholly unexplained by it. It may be said that what is meant by the above contention is not that the object is merely external and real but also that it somehow comes to be actually presented, though remote in time and place.\textsuperscript{3} That would be to credit physical objects with what has been described

\textsuperscript{1} The Prābhākara school, mentioned above, explained this class of errors also on the same principle, the two consecutive mental acts here being the perception of the subject and the recollection of the predicate.

\textsuperscript{2} This statement requires modification as, for example, in the case of the moon which looks vastly smaller than it actually is. But it will be better to postpone the consideration of this point for the present.

\textsuperscript{3} As is maintained, for example, in the Indian Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system and, in a somewhat different form, by Professor Alexander (see Space, Time and Deity, vol. ii, p. 254.)
as "a somewhat surprising mobility." But even granting the supposition, there is the difficulty of explaining how, if the object be given, its givenness comes to be negated later. The other element, for instance, in the error, viz. the one represented by the subject ("this") in the judgment—"This is ice"—is also given; but it is not contradicted later. Its presence, on the other hand, at the place where it appears is reaffirmed when we replace the wrong judgment by the correct one—"This is a crystal." The distinction in the way in which the correcting judgment affects the two elements indicates that, although what is predicated may be taken as out there, it cannot be regarded as real in the same sense in which the subject is. The fact is that those who give such explanations confound likeness with identity. They forget that, while the erroneous object may be similar to what has once been experienced, it need not be the same. They are right in urging that knowledge is self-transcendent and always implies a content that is known—something beyond or other than itself, and that error forms no exception to this rule. But if the reasoning should be free from all prepossession, the only conclusion we can draw from it is that content here is a mere presentation, and not that it is also physically real.

(2) If the erroneous content is merely a presentation and not a physical reality, it may be thought that it is either a memory-image or an ideal construction. But this conclusion again clashes with experience. If it were a memory-image, it would involve a reference to past time and to a distant place, and would not, therefore, be apprehended as immediately given. In other words, if the presentation were an ideal revival, one would realise it as such at the time. There being no such realisation here, it cannot be explained as a memory-image. It is not denied, we should add, that the false "ice" would not have been presented at all, had not real ice been experienced before. The mental disposition left behind by past experience is, indeed, an indispensable condition of the occurrence of such errors; but it only helps to determine the nature of the presentation, and does not, for the reason just stated, make it a memory-image. A similar kind of reasoning

1 As we have already seen, the "this" in such cases signifies not merely present time and proximate place, but also some sensa like shape and colour.
applies to the second alternative of an ideal construction. The "ice" in that case would be experienced as related to the future, or it would appear without any special reference to time at all. In either case, the apprehension of it as a present existence would be inexplicable. The mental attitude, besides, would then be one of supposal and not of belief, as it is here.

The considerations which singly or in combination prevent us from accepting the above explanations in regard to the status of the object in error are its felt immediacy, its determinate position in the objective sphere, and its later sublation. Both the explanations possible being thus ruled out, we are obliged to regard it as a presentation which is quite unique. Its uniqueness consists in this, viz. that its nature cannot be fully expressed in terms known to logic or to psychology. A necessary condition of its emergence is that a real object should be apprehended, but only in its general aspects, and that the percipient, while being ignorant of its specific features, should be unaware of his ignorance. A sense of ignorance would perforce prevent the occurrence of error. In the case of "doubt," for instance, only the general features of the object presented are grasped; and yet there is no error, for one is conscious at the time that one does not know its distinctive features, as is clear from the wavering of the mind between two alternative possibilities. It is this dependence of the wrong object for its appearance upon a defect characterising an individual percipient that explains why it is private to him and is not public or open to the view of others. Similarly, it is the position in the outside world of the thing mistaken, or the source from which the sensory stimulus comes, that determines the position of the wrong presentation there. The "ice" appears where the crystal is; and a change in the location of the thing mistaken would, other conditions remaining the same, result in a corresponding change in the external location of the wrong object. Ignorance, however, is not by itself sufficient to account for error; and it is always found associated in producing it with some fortuitous circumstance or other like the flash of similarity between the given thing and another.

1 Ignorance also might be general or common to all; but the resulting misapprehension would not, in that case, be ordinarily recognised as an error by any one.
But it is difficult to detail these circumstances, for they vary so much from one instance to another. We can only characterise them generally by saying that, in the matter of giving rise to error, they are altogether subsidiary to ignorance and that their nature is such that the removal of the latter simultaneously renders them inoperative. Thus in the present case, the resemblance between the crystal and the ice is a necessary factor in producing the error; but the removal of ignorance, which means a knowledge of the specific features of the crystal, at once makes it ineffective. The resemblance, of course, continues thereafter, and may remind one of real ice; but it cannot aid the false presentation of it as before. It means that ignorance, as characterised above, is what sustains error; and we shall refer to it alone hereafter, disregarding additional causes like the one just mentioned.

Thus in all errors of the kind we are now considering, the subject ("this") and some of the sensa that characterise it are actually given; but the predicate ("ice") and the relation between it and the subject are unique presentations. The content of erroneous knowledge is, therefore, a medley of the true and the false. According to the principle on which we have explained the wrong presentation here, the element of relation in the case of the "yellow conch" also should be reckoned as unique. It is experienced immediately and as actually obtaining between two external objects; it is also later discovered to be false. Thus in both classes of error there is complete correspondence between knowledge and content. This does not imply the acceptance of the view that knowing involves a psychic medium which is like its object. Knowledge, on the other hand, reveals reality directly; and by its correspondence with content, we here mean that no part of what it reveals is ever sheer non-being. There may be disparity in the nature of the elements included within its content, for, while some of them are real, others may be unique in the sense explained above. But the latter, though not physically real, are felt as confronting the mind and cannot therefore be absolute nothing. There is resemblance between the two kinds of error⁴ in other respects also. Both are forms of misapprehension

⁴ Other forms of error, like dreams and hallucinations, fall under one or other of these two; or they partake of the character of both.
traceable to ignorance of the actual character of the given objects, and both are private to the erring observer. To an important difference which they exhibit, we have already had occasion to allude. In the case of the crystal mistaken for "ice," the discovery of error or the knowledge that the given reality it not ice, means the total disappearance of the wrong presentation. The presentation is due to ignorance and the removal of the cause removes the effect. But in the other case, the knowledge that the conch is not yellow has no such effect, and the relation appears to persist even after it is contradicted. This appearance should consequently be traced to a circumstance other than ignorance which is the source of the error, viz. a particular disposition of the conch and the yellow glass relative to the point of space occupied by the observer. It is a conclusion which is corroborated by the fact that the apparent relation vanishes as soon as the disposition of the objects in question is changed.

II

True knowledge, by contrast, is that whose content is free from such unique presentations. Here also we may, and ordinarily do, go beyond the given as in error; but, on account of the apprehension of the sensa constituting the specific features of the object presented and not its general ones only, our knowledge does not become erroneous. Since sensa, according to what we have stated, are the very basis of our knowledge of the external world, they should be regarded as directly known; and it seems to follow from this that the object, of which they are the actual aspects, is also known directly. But this latter point cannot be properly argued without reference to the question of the ultimate nature of objects, which we are not considering here.

According to the description just given, knowledge is true when no part of its content has to be discarded as false. That is, it does not come in conflict with the rest of our experience, but harmonises with it. This signifies that it is coherence with other experience, and not correspondence with reality, that

1 The "ice" may appear there again, but it only shows that a man may fall twice into the same error.
2 Old truths may need to be modified in the light of new experience, but we are not taking such details into consideration here.
makes it true. The rejection of the correspondence hypothesis does not mean the denial of the self-transcendent character of knowledge. It only means that since all knowledge, as we have pointed out, equally satisfies the condition of agreement with an objective counterpart, correspondence cannot be regarded as a distinguishing feature of truth. The conclusion that truth is coherence may be reached somewhat differently by considering the manner in which error comes to be known. Error, as we have seen, is a judgment that is self-discrepant; but its self-discrepancy remains unknown until it is revealed by another judgment which contradicts it. Now while one judgment may confirm or supplement another, it is difficult to see how it can correct or annul it, for there is no reason to prefer either of them to the other. The only circumstance in which it may do so is when it forms part of a body of knowledge which, as a whole, is, for some reason or other, regarded as well established. That is, a judgment can correct another or claim to be true, not by itself, but as belonging to, or as implicated in, a system of judgments. Since without the evidence of such a system, no one can know reality from unique presentations, we may say that error also, like a judgment which is true, becomes intelligible only in connection with a body of coherent knowledge which is taken as the standard of reference. The standard is ordinarily furnished in the case of each individual by the totality of his experience. When, however, any doubt arises and the individual’s experience, even at its widest, is inadequate for settling it, an appeal to the experience of others becomes necessary. It is this collective experience or the common sense of mankind that, in the end, serves as the standard. That knowledge is true which fits into it perfectly; and that which does not, is false. Herein consists the social or general character of truth, as distinguished from error. We share truth with others; and it is therefore public, while error is private. The elements constituting the content of a true judgment are mutually compatible, since all of them are alike public. Error differs from truth in this respect, for it involves a reference not only to an object of common experience but also to unique presentations which are private and are not therefore endorsed by that experience.

We have so far assumed that all sensa correctly reveal the
character of the object given, if only partially, and are never false. But it does not seem to be always so, for we know from experience that the precise form in which they appear depends, for instance, upon the point of space occupied by the percipient with reference to the object in question. It shows that sensa are not only partial in their bearing upon the nature of the object given, but that they may also vary though the object remains the same. A coin, for example, presents a round or an oval shape according to the position from which it is viewed. Similarly, a change in the position of an object may affect the sensa. A ship, which is seen as but a speck on the horizon, seems to increase in size as it approaches the shore, although there may be no change in the standpoint of the observer or in the objective situation as a whole. It may therefore appear that sensa also, like objects and relations, may be false. These altered sensa, it should be admitted, are not verifiable. A coin, to take one of our examples, cannot be both oval and round. But yet such appearances are not to be regarded as false; for, unlike erroneous presentations, they can be deduced from the actual sensa according to well-known physical laws. These secondary or derivative phenomena, as we may call them, may not literally qualify the object; but, owing to the fact that their altered form is determined by strict laws, they indicate correctly, though only indirectly, the nature of the object to which they refer. It is in this indirect, and not in a literal, sense that we characterise the data in such cases as true. The fact is that they are the result solely of the physical conditions under which normal human perception takes place, and do not in any manner depend upon the idiosyncrasies of the percipient mind to make them erroneous. Hence we should place these presentations on a footing which is quite different from those in error. Seeing a tree stump, which is at a distance, to be smaller than it actually is, is very much different from taking it to be something else (say), a human being. Besides, these phenomena do not commonly deceive us like erroneous presentations. A ship is not understood to undergo actual increase of bulk as it approaches the shore from a point on the horizon. All of them, no doubt, contain the seeds of error, and may therefore prove deceptive. A child may believe that the moon is really only as small as it appears, or that railway tracks actually
converge towards a point in the distance. But then the essential condition of error, viz. ignorance of the true character of the objects in question, is also present; and its removal, though it shows the beliefs to be erroneous, does not lead to the removal of the presentations. In other words, they disappear as errors but persist as appearances of the real. These appearances may not, in themselves, be real; yet they are not false in the sense in which erroneous presentations, like the "ice" in our former example, are. For the same reason, the apparent relation also, noticed before in connection with errors of the first type like the "yellow conch," is not to be regarded as false.

We may designate these secondary phenomena as "perspectives of the real" or, briefly, "perspectives." The distinction between them and erroneous presentations, as already indicated, is that the latter are rooted in ignorance which is a defect of the knowing subject, while the former are purely the result of certain physical conditions under which an object happens to be apprehended. The term "perspective," no doubt, implies relation to the standpoint of a particular observer; and, so far, the presentations are personal. The point here, however, is not that the phenomena in question are unrelated to the individual, but that they are in no way due to his oddities. In this latter respect, they are like sensa proper; but, unlike them, they do not directly belong to the objects to which they seem to belong. Hence in determining the true character of any perceived object or objects from such phenomena, we should apply a suitable correction taking into account the nature of the physical context in which they appear. In simple cases we make such corrections ourselves, as, for instance, when we see a coin as oval but interpret it as circular; in more intricate ones, however, the aid of science is necessary as in ascertaining the true magnitude of the moon from its apparent size. The truths so determined are impersonal because they reveal objects as they are in themselves, not as they appear, and are therefore independent of the point of view of the person or persons asserting them. While a part of empirical knowledge may

1 This term, which is used by more than one modern philosopher (e.g. Professor Alexander), is intended here to stand, though not in every detail, for the phenomena underlying what is described as sopādhikābhrama in the philosophy of Śaṅkara.
be impersonal, the whole of science is so, for the one aim of the scientist is to find out the actual features or normal aspects of things. The extent to which this difference affects the correctness of common knowledge, where the phenomena concerned are of a complicated nature, may be very great; and what are only "perspectives" and, as such, are not literally true, may often be mistaken by us for sensa or actual features of the external world. Hence empirical knowledge, as a whole, stands far lower, in point of accuracy, than the scientific. Its primary function is to subserve the purposes of everyday life, and it does not therefore ordinarily aim at greater accuracy than is needed for their fulfilment. Its value lies in its practical utility, not in its theoretical certainty; and the saying that "thought is the slave of life" is therefore essentially true here.

III

The conclusion thus far reached is that the common-sense analysis of knowledge, with which we started, requires to be modified in two important respects. There are some instances, viz. "perspectives" which only indirectly disclose the character of external objects; and there are others, viz. errors which, while they may reveal reality, also include presentations that are not genuine parts or aspects of it at all. Objects and relations may thus be erroneously presented, but never sensa. It may seem that, if proper allowance be made for these two kinds of discrepancies, the system of common knowledge, taken as a whole, will give us the final or absolute truth sought after in epistemology; but it does not, because it has other limitations. In the first place, it obviously refers only to a small portion of the whole of reality, and is therefore fragmentary. In the second place, it leaves out even from this portion a great deal as not relevant to the carrying out of common human purposes which is its pre-eminent function. Scientific knowledge is without this latter limitation, since it aims at expounding phenomena in terms of the non-human; but even that cannot be regarded as giving us the final epistemological solution, for it also is selective, though in a different way. No science treats of the whole of reality, each is concerned only with particular aspects of it; and,
since it studies these aspects apart from their concrete accompaniments, it may be said to deal more with abstractions than with reality. Moreover science, in spite of the indefinite expansion possible for it, will never arrive at an exhaustive knowledge of reality because its selective method will always leave for it a field which is still to be explored. Although the view of truth formulated above cannot therefore be regarded as final, it will yield the solution which epistemology seeks when its implications are fully worked out. We shall now point out how it does so; but, within the limits of this paper, we can do so only very briefly.

The possibility of its furnishing the final solution is contained in the conception of knowledge as a system, and of truth as coherence with it. A strict adherence to this view may seem to lead one to the conclusion that truth is relative. For there may be two or more coherent systems of knowledge which are at variance with one another, and what is true from one standpoint may not be so from another. All our so-called truths may thus turn out to be equally false relatively, not excluding the results of scientific investigation. We have explained the common notions of truth and error, it will be remembered, by reference to the body of knowledge that bears the stamp of social sanction. But it is really only one of the standards by which truth may be distinguished from error; and we should take into account the possibility of there being also other types or systems of knowledge, relatively to each of which a similar distinction can be made. These systems may be many; and every one of them, according to the view taken of knowledge here, corresponds to a self-consistent whole of objective existence—the sphere of reference, which is common to all the judgments making up that system. Hence it is not only the world in the ordinary sense that exists; there may be others also, so long as they are systematic or are wholes constituted of inter-related parts, making it possible to distinguish the true from the false in statements relating to them. The world of Shakespeare’s Othello, for example, is such a system, since it admits of right as well as wrong statements being made about it. It would be false, for instance to represent Desdemona in it as in love with Cassio. As a consequence of such an enlarged view of objective existence, there will be not one type of truth only, but several—each order of existence, constituting the basis
for a distinct type of it. "Our beds are not stained," it has been said, "by the wounds of dream scimitars"; but our dream beds may well be.

It may, on such considerations, be held that there is no absolute truth at all and that we may regard any truth as relatively false, if we choose to do so. But it appears that the very notion of relative truth suggests the recognition of an absolute standard by which all knowledge is judged; and we have to accept such a standard, giving up "relativist epistemology," if we are to avoid universal scepticism. Only it is necessary to further define truth, if it should be absolute. This can be done by bringing in the idea of comprehensiveness, when the systematic coherence which is our definition of truth will be perfect. The fulfilment of this new condition means the possibility of conceiving absolute truth as the expansion or development of one of the above truths such that it will, in some sense or other, include within its sphere of reference the whole of existence—not merely objective worlds but also conscious subjects. To leave out any portion of it would be to admit two or more truths, none of which, on account of their mutual exclusion, can be taken as absolute. But it may appear that there is no means of determining which of the relative truths is to be elevated to this rank. If, however, the sceptical position is to be avoided, a choice has to be made; and there is every consideration, short of logical certitude, to recommend common truth for the purpose.

We may now divide all the subsidiary truths into two groups—one consisting of those that relate to the everyday world, though they may not all refer necessarily to the same aspects of it; and the other consisting of the rest which relate to the world of fiction or even to the region of dreams and illusions, so far as they are self-consistent. Of these, the former may be viewed as lying on the way to absolute truth; and since they may approximate to it more or less, we may speak of them as representing degrees of truth, a higher degree of it meaning greater completeness in the view it gives of reality. The truth of science as well as that of empirical life is of this kind. They mark relatively higher and lower stages on the path leading to ultimate truth. All such truths are integrated in the absolute one which is self-complete. The others cannot thus be integrated, owing to the
divergence in their objective reference. But when we remember that, whether they refer to ideal constructions or to unique presentations, they are dependent for their subject-matter upon the reality which forms the content of the first group of truths, we find that they have their ultimate explanation, through them, in the absolute truth, even though they cannot be said to actually endure in it. They may be described as lower kinds of truth to distinguish them from the degrees of it already referred to. These two groups or classes of truth correspond to two orders of existence, one less real than the other. The world of morals implied by ethical truth, for example, belongs to the common order of existence, because of its direct bearing on actual life. But the world of art, though the truth at which it finally aims may be the very highest, stands lower than that. This is evident, for instance, from the fact that, as observed by A. C. Bradley,¹ "we dismiss the agony of Lear in a moment if the kitten goes and burns his nose."²

It is this absolute truth that is the goal of epistemology; and it yields a unified view of the whole of reality. All the elements of the universe—whether they be knowable objects or knowing subjects—appear in it as internally related; and each of them reveals itself there as occupying the place that rightly belongs to it within the whole. That is, the ultimate truth is entirely impersonal. Further, these elements are seen in it not merely as they are at any particular moment, but in the perspective of their entire history—as what they were in the past and as what they will be in the future. Or rather there can be no distinctions of time in it—"no future rushing to the past," but one eternal now. A temporal world when viewed in its wholeness, it has been remarked, must be an eternal one. In this concreteness and completeness it differs from scientific truth, though impersonal like it. It also differs from truth as commonly understood by us which is neither comprehensive nor wholly impersonal. There is one important point to which it is necessary to draw attention before we conclude. If the absolute truth should really comprehend

¹ The Uses of Poetry, p. 12.
² This preference, however, implies that we realise at the time the relative status of the two realities. There is such realisation generally in the case of art, but not in illusions.
all, it cannot exclude the self of the person that contemplates it. It will not therefore do if he stands apart, regarding himself as a mere knower and therefore distinct from what it points to. He should, on the other hand, view himself as inseparably one with it. The subject and the object would still be distinguished in his view, but there would not be that opposition or disaccord which we commonly feel between them. It means a profound transformation in the ordinary conception of the knowing self and of the objects known. Here naturally arises the question of the precise nature of the transformation in each case; but, as our present concern is with truth rather than with reality, we shall not attempt to discuss the possible answers to it. We shall only make one observation: though we left undetermined at the start the ultimate character of the self and of the object, we assumed that they were distinct. This initial dualism has to be abandoned now, for, according to the final conception of truth at which we have arrived, the knower and the known, though distinguishable, are not separable. Knowledge begins by assuming that they are different, but it culminates in the discovery of a latent harmony between them in which the difference is resolved. It is not merely the notions of the subject and the object that are thus transmuted; the knowledge also which relates them must be of a higher order than any we are familiar with—whether perceptual or conceptual. But this higher experience, which may be described as insight or intuition, is not altogether alien to us, for we get a glimpse of it whenever for any reason we rise above the distractions of personal living. Only it is too faint and fitful to enable us to understand what the exact character of the experience will be when the absolute truth is realised. All that we can say is that for one who attains to such experience, through a proper development of this intuitive power, there will be nothing that is not immediately known and that no part of what is so known will appear as external. What the means of developing intuition are, and whether the ideal of absolute truth can be completely realised, are questions whose consideration lies outside the scope of the present paper.
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