SYMPOSIUM: ARE THERE *A PRIORI* CONCEPTS?

By MR. D. M. MACKINNON, MR. W. G. MACLAGAN AND MR. J. L. AUSTIN.

I.—*By* D. M. MACKINNON.

THE precise significance of the question under discussion is one which its form does not at first sight disclose. We are asked—Are there any *a priori* concepts?—and the form of the question suggests at first sight that the question of discussion is one of fact, and not one of analysis, and therefore not a properly philosophic question. For philosophy, we are told *ad nauseam*, is concerned not with the establishment of matters of fact, but with the clarification of meanings. The question—Are there any *a priori* concepts?—seems formally at least at first sight to resemble such questions as—Are there any mastodons? and to demand solution by comparable methods. None the less it is a philosophic problem, and one that seems to me of considerable importance, and I propose to begin our discussion by pointing out precisely why it seems to me of such considerable importance, as I think that by so doing I can best direct the attention of my fellow-symposiasts to those aspects of the question which seem to me most to require discussion.

We are all agreed, I suppose, that part of the very considerable achievement of Bishop Berkeley in regard to the solution of the philosophic problems connected with the nature of the material world is the recognition of the great importance of the part played in our consciousness of that world by our having sensations. In fact one might argue that for him the problem—What is matter?—formulated itself rather as—What is the differentia of material-object-consciousness? He sought to resolve the problem of the nature of the material world by exhibiting the peculiarities

of the particular form of cognition, which we call perception. In his thought the analysis of perception *was* the analysis of matter.

Now we need not agree with him in this reduction of the problem to terms of the analysis of a particular class of cognitive acts. But we must admit the truth of his recognition of the close connexion between the reception of sense-contents, and the notion which we have of a material world. There is a very close dependence indeed of our formation of the concept of materiality or material existence upon our reception of these data, even though the precise nature of that dependence is extremely obscure.

When we say, as I think we must say with truth, that unless we received sense-contents, we would not form the concept of materiality, what kind of a proposition are we asserting? It might be said, and I think it has been said by certain philosophers, that we are asserting some kind of an empirical psychological proposition. When we assert a connexion between our sense-awareness and our formation of this concept, the statement is historical in character. We are referring to a state of affairs that we have observed to obtain in a great number of cases, namely, the *de facto* dependence of the formation of such a concept upon our receipt of sense-impressions. The content of the concept is at present opaque to our understanding.

Our employment of it in thought is perhaps accompanied by our having a rather complicated mental image, but we must be careful not to confuse the content of this image with the content of the concept. When I say complicated image I am referring to what I think I experience myself on occasion, when I make such judgment as—A pencil is a material object. When I make that judgment, I am sometimes aware of a very blurred series of images in which I represent to myself in a highly schematic manner possible experiences of a sensuous character that I regard as obtainable. I am not saying that I always have these images when making such judgments, certainly not that I am always conscious of having them. I merely suggest that on certain occasions the complex mental event which is my judgment

includes the representation by way of image of certain obtainable experiences. I think I may go further, and suggest that if I attend carefully to my mental processes, I find it hard to discover a judgment in which I am concerned to assert that such and such is a material object in which I do not, however briefly, thus image to myself some further obtainable sense-contents. In fact one might say that part of the differentiation of such a judgment regarded as a mental event is the occurrence of just such a process of imaginative representation.

None the less those philosophers, who contend that the dependence of our formation of a concept of materiality upon our receipt of sense-contents is *de facto*, contend that, though the employment of the concept in thought is accompanied by such schematic representation, its content is not adequately accounted in terms of the possibility of such imaginative activity. They argue, it seems to me, with great plausibility, that the content of the concept of materiality, as that notion is understood by the plain man, includes far more than a mere possibility of sensuous experience. For when a plain man judges that such and such is a material object, he believes that he is asserting not merely that certain further sensuous experiences are obtainable, which stand in certain relations to those which he is at present enjoying, but that these experiences are disclosing to him a continuant that exists simultaneously as a whole, albeit *ex parte* unperceived, and that continues to exist, apart altogether from the presence of a percipient. He may admit that his own employment of this notion in thought is accompanied by acts of imaginative representation, but he declines to admit that any series of such acts exhausts the content of the concept. For by no act of such a kind can he represent to himself the unperceived persistence, or substantial unity, of that which he judges to be a material object.

Thus, it seems to me that the plain man regards the *esse est precipi* as a synthetic proposition, referring to the limits of his own representative mechanism. He can only represent to himself the notion of materiality by the help of a series of

sensuous images. But to suggest that the sentence expresses a rule for the understanding of material object sentences is to suggest something which he is very unwilling to accept.

I said above that Berkeley, and this is, I think, true of the majority of phenomenalists, sought to resolve the problem of the nature of matter by reducing it to terms of the nature of perception. Its *Esse* is *percipi*. In the useful language of Prof. Bridgman, phenomenalists are concerned to contend that matter can only be defined operationally or by reference to those cognitive acts which we employ to determine whether or not the concept is exemplified in a given situation. This is the crudest form of verification principle, in which we suggest that a concept is determined by the method we employ to decide whether or not it is exemplified.

Now the plain man is very loath to admit that in the case of matter the content of the concept is exhausted by the specification of the operations determining the conditions of its legitimate employment. On this view of the *Esse est percipi* as a rule of procedure rather than as an empirically verifiable psychological proposition, the hypothetical proposition quoted above is seen to assert not a *de facto* connexion, but rather to exhibit the content of the concept formed. Our formation of the concept is necessarily conditional on our having enjoyed certain experiences, if its content is exponible in terms of a determinate set of such experiences.

Now I have selected this example, for I think that most philosophers are agreed that materiality is in some sense an *a priori* concept, and that Berkeley is concerned very forcibly to contend that it is not. Berkeley would, I imagine, if he had our advantage of a concise verbalist language, suggest that "matter was a convenient, notational device," or somewhat. He might even have said that it was a "logical construction," being careful to avoid the metaphysical atomist pitfalls into which the uses of this notation may draw the unwary. Certainly it is obvious that the sense in which *a priori* concepts are called concepts differs from that in which empirical concepts are called concepts. Even those who believe that *a priori* concepts are genuine and not pseudo-concepts must admit this, remembering the non-perceptual

intuition which is the means of our awareness of their concrete exemplifications. But for the philosopher, who is concerned to deny that they are properly called concepts, the difference is still more important. For unless he wishes to commit himself to a self-refuting nominalism, he must concede that such notions as causality, materiality and the like are not of universals at all. He must at least as an illuminative comment allow us to say that "there is no such thing as causality," provided that the context of the comment makes clear that it is made to call attention to the difference in significance between such terms as redness and such terms as causality.

It seems to me that the problem of *a priori* concepts is the problem of the relation of the rules governing the use of such terms as redness, and those governing the use of such terms as causality. At our unsophisticated level we are inclined to believe that the use of such terms is governed by precisely similar rules, or, if you like, that causality is a universal. It was just this that Hume denied, even as Berkeley before him had denied that materiality could thus be called a universal. There were universals*—yes, but such terms as causality, materiality did not denote such. For the rules whereby we might be acquainted with their instances were impatient of formulation. No one knew what it was like to be acquainted with a cause, but the rules governing the employment of causal language could be formulated. To some the asking of such questions as—When do we use the word cause?—might suggest an historical enquiry, but for Hume at least in no other way could its sense be specified. If we can recognize that the causal language is one particular notation that has certain practical advantages, all our puzzles will disappear. We will see the origin of Stout's mythology in the elementary syntactical structure of the language. The subject—verb active—object order of so many sentences is seen to beget an anticipation of conformity in the data we employ the language to describe. With Carnap the causal problem disappears, if we reformulate the question—Are there causes?—as Are there transitive, active verbs?

* I am not sure if Berkeley would have said this.

None the less the plain man is bewildered. The admission of phenomenalism and the relegation of the whole framework of existents to the status of a notational device, albeit one practically very convenient, offends his native realism. He is ready to admit with the phenomenalist that our knowledge of a material world is dependent on our receipt of sense-impressions. But, as Berkeley saw, before he resolved the antinomy by way of his theology, he is at the same time convinced that his conceptual picture does represent the structure of that world. He is loath to relegate it to the status of notational convention as the consistent phenomenalist must. He is concerned to defend the treatment of causality and materiality as universals, and to exhibit their instances as objects of some non-sensuous intuition. His conviction is deep-rooted, and his formulation of the epistemological problem of our passage from sense-awareness to knowledge of a world of causally interacting substances is throughout conditioned by this assumption. The discipline necessary to convince him that his problem is a pseudo-problem generated by the failure to recognize that causality is not a universal is likely to be painful.

I want to ask my fellow-symposiasts to regard the question as one of the conformity of our commonsense conceptual picture of the world with the facts, and I suggest that they reflect on the dilemma : either some form of non-sensuous intuition must be admitted, or else the commonsense conceptual picture of the world must be relegated to the status of a notational device.

II.—*By* W. G. MacLagan.

I.

We are asked to consider whether there are any *a priori* concepts, not which concepts, if any, are *a priori*. The terms of our enquiry do not commit us to a sort of identification parade of concepts, which might continue indefinitely. The particular question put to us is answered if we find that in our thinking we make use of even one concept that is not empirical. Mr. Mackinnon is therefore proceeding on a perfectly fair principle when he isolates for special consideration such concepts (or pseudo-concepts) as those of materiality and causality, on the ground that if there are any non-empirical concepts at all, these are ; and he may also conceivably be right in fact in picking out just these two.

None the less, I have two complaints to bring against him. The first derives from the fact that he has not himself given a definite answer to the question whether there are genuine *a priori* concepts of materiality and causality, nor, therefore, to the more general question that is our subject. My objection is not to the absence of a decision itself : I do not expect my own contribution to provide an assured one. But unless the question can be answered in the affirmative in a particular case we ought not to limit the discussion to that case. We ought to include in our review other alleged instances of *a priori* concepts. Though a parade of concepts is not in principle required something like it seems to be in fact desirable.

My first complaint is based, then, on the fact that Mr. Mackinnon did not answer the question he raised : my second concerns his manner of raising it. Certainly he does much more than tell us that " most philosophers are agreed " as to the *a priori* nature of the concepts of materiality and causality and invite us to make up our own minds on the point. In various ways he develops the description of the problem. But even with this development the description remains elliptical and unprecise. In discussing materiality he speaks

as though the denial that we have an *a priori* concept of materiality were tantamount to an acceptance of the phenomenalist analysis of what is said in material-object-language. For anyone not a phenomenalist the concept of materiality must be *a priori*. How are we to show that there is such a concept? Apparently by maintaining that materiality is a universal whose instances are "objects of some non-sensuous intuition." But this, I think, implies the unquestioned acceptance of certain debatable points. It implies, apparently, that experience can be defined as sensing: not otherwise is it obvious that the concept of what is non-sensuously given is a non-empirical concept. It appears to imply, further, that we cannot be possessed of concepts at all unless they are concepts of universals whose instances are *somehow* given: and that is to exclude without consideration not only the hypothesis of innate ideas but also the view (which some philosophers seem to accept) that there can be knowledge of a universal in some way independently of its instances. It is not even clear to me that Mr. Mackinnon's "non-sensuous intuition" theory of the nature of the *a priori* is compatible with his own final statement of our question as being a question of "the conformity of our commonsense conceptual pictures of the world with the facts." For this suggests that we have concepts about whose validity (that is, applicability to fact) we can enquire: and no enquiry would be needed if the fact answering to the concept were intuited. It is true that whether in Mr. Mackinnon's opinion we really have such concepts is rendered doubtful again by the concluding remark that the "commonsense conceptual picture" might have to be "relegated to the status of a notational device." But I am not sure how to understand this, unless as an expression of the view—to my mind mistaken—that what we mean by certain words is never more or other than what, on reflection, we regard the facts as justifying us in saying. To me it seems clear that if we really have the "conceptual picture" it cannot be relegated to the status of a notational device. It can, of course, properly be asked whether when we use language of a certain sort we really

are giving expression to such and such a "conceptual picture." But the question whether we possess a certain concept must be quite clearly distinguished from the question whether, supposing we do, it is an empirical or an *a priori* one.

What emerges from such considerations is this. We are, of course, agreed that "*a priori*" is used as the antithesis to "empirical." But there is no use asking whether a certain concept is *a priori* or empirical unless we have first allowed that there is such a concept (any more than it is reasonable to ask whether there are *a priori* concepts if we intend to mean by *a priori* concept any concept that we only *think* we have). There is also no hope of answering the question unless we are clear, as I am not yet, as to what is meant by "experience." Further, since the *a priori* and the empirical are undoubtedly regarded as constituting an exhaustive disjunction, the question what we mean by experience cannot well be discussed in abstraction from the question, "What are all the possible ways by which we might be supposed to be possessed of our concepts?" there being, as I have already indicated, more than two possibilities. And for this reason, no less than because of uncertainty what to say about the particular cases of materiality and causality, a wider survey is required than was suggested in Mr. Mackinnon's paper.

II.

We must begin then at the beginning. To say that a concept is *a priori* is to say that it is not empirical. But what is a concept and what would be meant by saying that it was empirical? The word "concept" may, of course, be used to name the universal element in the *objects* of our consciousness, but it seems to me that those who like, more than I do, to speak of concepts mean, rather, something subjective in the sense that it is constitutive of our thought itself and not of the world on which our thought is directed. Certainly it is only in this latter sense that a concept could be an innate idea. I shall therefore understand by "concept"

an element in our knowing or thinking whose discrimination within it corresponds to the distinction of terms or, some would prefer to say, names (but not words) within the statement that expresses our thought. Now our knowing or thinking is of or about something other than itself: and we naturally suppose that as a condition of its occurrence this other, or each of its elements severally, is or has been "given," *i.e.*, present to consciousness as its object (I do not think we are entitled to read more into the word "given" than this). Looking at the matter from the side of our consciousness, we may speak of being "acquainted" with objects. Acquaintance is not itself to be called knowledge,* though apart from it there can be no knowing or thinking; and in saying this we are, of course, not even committed to holding that it can itself occur unaccompanied by the knowing or thinking that presupposes it. It seems reasonable to equate experiencing with this being acquainted: but anyhow if experience be extended to include the thinking which acquaintance conditions it is obvious that all concepts must be empirical in the sense of being constitutive of experience. If experience be limited to acquaintance, then no concept is empirical in the sense of being constitutive of experience, but we may speak of concepts as empirical in another sense—in the sense, namely, that they are concepts of that with which or with instances of which we are acquainted: and this is what I shall mean by an empirical concept. If we wished to avoid speaking of concepts we could speak instead of terms, or names, that denote objects with which we are acquainted; and we could restate our question as the question whether there are any terms that do not denote such objects.

To define the range of empirical concepts, then, is to define the scope of acquaintance. The philosophers most usually called empiricists treat acquaintance as co-extensive with sensing, where "sensing" is to be understood as covering Hume's "impressions of reflection" as well as

* On one theory of our knowledge of relations, shortly to be mentioned, it might be more proper to say "Not *all* acquaintance is itself knowledge."

the " impressions of sensation " properly so called. If we accept this view of experience are there any concepts that must be called non-empirical? I think that there are, and that they include concepts whose existence and validity even the extreme empiricist would be unwilling to deny. But the point is rendered obscure by uncertainty as to what may fairly be said to be given in sensation.

Let us consider, for example, the case of resemblance between colours. I should be inclined to say that we sense the colours but do not sense the resemblance. What we see is always a colour or colours, and resemblance between colours is not itself a colour but, as it has been called, an " object of higher order." This will seem to some so obvious as to be trivial, but I find that to others it appears manifestly false. Now it is of course perfectly natural to talk of seeing or hearing the resemblances between colours or sounds, and to speak of two sensations as being sensibly alike or sensibly different. If this were not so no one would maintain the view that these relations are sensed. It is even possible to support the view by argument. What is needed to verify the statement that one colour is like another? Just looking at them. Does it not follow that the state of affairs asserted is just seen? The answer is, however, that it does not follow. Suppose a situation such that if A then B, and if B then C. To the question " What is required if we are to have C? " it would be equally natural, even if not equally precise, to reply that we require B, or A plus B, or even just A.

It may thus be perfectly natural to say that to see two colours is all that is necessary in order to give us the knowledge that they resemble without it being on that account true that a non-sensuous acquaintance with the relation itself is not also involved. Of course, this is not actually a proof that there is such a non-sensuous acquaintance; it is purely a defensive argument. To the question whether a non-sensuous acquaintance does in fact occur I am not quite certain what to reply. I feel sure, as I do not in the case of sensing, that it does not occur independently of knowing: what is obscure is whether it can be even dis-

tinguished from the knowing, and whether, if it cannot, the knowing should itself be spoken of as acquaintance. But if, as I think, the relation is a particular and the object of conception is universal, then I suppose acquaintance with this relation ought to be distinguished from the knowledge of it, just as much as sensuous acquaintance with a particular colour ought to be distinguished from knowledge. Even if this were not the case, however, I should still deny that the relation is sensed : so that, one way or the other, the concept of the relation would have to rank as a non-empirical concept.

It may perhaps be argued from another direction that the distinction drawn between sensuous and non-sensuous acquaintance is an unreal one. It may be said that the colours themselves are not sense-given in my narrow use of the term. What underlies this objection is, I imagine, the view that an activity of thought, a comparison, is required even for the naming of a colour. The assertion " this is red," is based on a non-sensuous acquaintance just as much or as little as the assertion " this colour is like that " : in fact, the two assertions are not really of different types at all. But this is not to the point. The fact that an awareness that is not sensing is involved in naming what is sensed and is therefore a condition of any statement about it does not abolish the fact that there is also an, in itself inexpressible, sensuous awareness of what is named.

Though I have confined my discussion to the relation of resemblance between sensibles that is, of course, only one among other cases in which a word used in the expression of even our most elementary knowledge of sensible fact does not itself denote anything sense-given. But it is not necessary to collect further examples. This is ground enough for insisting on the distinction between what is sensuously given and what, if it is given at all, must be given non-sensuously, and as warning against the mistake of " transferring to the data of sense all that is implied in the language necessarily used in describing them "*. It is

* Ward *Psychological Principles*, p. 321.

a distinction of which Locke, Berkeley and Hume all seem to have been aware, even if their successors have not always been. The doubtful language they use about relations bears witness to their non-sensuous nature*, while the admission of "relations of ideas" in contrast with "matters of fact" is equally good evidence that they, no less than their terms, must be allowed to be somehow "given."

It is a matter of the usage of words whether we should continue to limit experience to sensing and the title of "empirical concept" to concepts whose objects are sensed. If we do, resemblance, as I have said, must rank as an *a priori* concept, but to myself it seems more natural so to extend the application of "empirical" as to include resemblance under that head. If, however, the application of "empirical" be extended in the manner suggested then we must conclude that a concept cannot be called *a priori*, as Mr. Mackinnon seems to hold it should be, simply on the ground that its object is "non-sensuously intuited." This is not a sufficient condition of its being *a priori* any more than (as was pointed out earlier) it can be assumed to be a necessary one. In fact, if a concept is to be called empirical so long as its object is apprehended, whether it be sensed or not, Mr. Mackinnon's description of an *a priori* concept will be not merely inadequate but positively incorrect; the only possible *a priori* concepts will be innate ideas.

But, it may be argued, we must put a qualification on the proposed extension of the meaning of "empirical" in order to keep in touch with ordinary usage, according to which sensation is undoubtedly constitutive of experience in some pre-eminent manner. Perhaps we should say that a concept is empirical only if it is a concept whose object is either given in sensation or at least one the knowledge of which has sensation as its condition. This qualification seems to me reasonable enough, but I question whether it carries any real limitation with it. Is anyone prepared to

* Gibson, however (*Locke's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 193), argues that in Locke's case it is ontological and not epistemological presuppositions that constitute the difficulty.

name an object our awareness of which is in no way conditioned by sensation? It may well be that there is more than one way in which sensation conditions the apprehension of what is not sensed, and such differences may be relevant to the meaning of the antithesis of empirical and *a priori*. But beyond this point it seems impossible to advance except by letting that antithesis fall for the time being into the background, and concentrating instead on the consideration of certain concepts frequently said to be *a priori*, with a view to discovering just how, supposing we do really possess them, we can account for that fact.

It is unfortunate that though the question set for discussion can only receive a clear answer in this way the way itself is a μακροτέρα ὁδός quite beyond my present scope. For every reason thoroughness is not to be looked for, and my answer will perforce be a combination of dogmatism and hesitation. I shall assist myself—I hope not unfairly—by taking my programme from Prof. Broad's discussion in Chapter 3 of his *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*. His classification of claimants to the status of *a priori* concepts, whether or not exhaustive, is sufficient for our purpose, and the statement of his view except in regard to Ideal Limits is so brief and in regard to Ideal Limits so provocative that I shall be able to avoid the charge of mere repetition.

As to what an *a priori* concept is I may as well say at once that I do not find Prof. Broad more helpful than Mr. Mackinnon. It is true that he expressly allows that it might be an innate idea (which could be so, he thinks, only in what he calls the " dispositional " and not the " occurrent " sense of innate and in future my use of the expression will assume this): but he allows also that it might be the content of a non-perceptual intuition. The difficulties I feel about this are as follows. First, to be an innate idea and to be the content of a non-perceptual intuition seem to me sufficiently different for it to be questionable whether such concepts can be treated as constituting a single class under whatever label. Certainly they do not have that identity of type which would render it safe to ask, as Prof. Broad

does, about particular concepts whether they are *a priori before* we have made it plain that the term is to cover this dual possibility. Second, for reasons I have already given, unless the expression " non-perceptual intuition " is more carefully explained than it is by Prof. Broad, it might be used to cover concepts which I am sure Prof. Broad does not intend it to cover. And, finally, it is not certain that Prof. Broad is consistent with himself. He, in one place*, seems to suggest that a concept would be empirical although it (that is, I suppose, its object) is non-sensuous : and if a distinction is intended between non-sensuous and non-perceptual it is not expounded. And I also do not know what is supposed to be the difference between the perception of a causal relation which would leave the concept of causality an empirical concept†, and the non-perceptual intuition of one which would involve its being *a priori*‡.

III.

Prof. Broad considers in turn Ideal Limits, Categories and Ethical Characteristics. I shall leave Categories to the end. In the discussion of Ideal Limits the case of straightness is examined in some detail. Prof. Broad argues that the concept of straightness will be *a priori* if, but only if, two propositions are true ; first that there is a simple positive characteristic of which " straightness " is the name, and second that we cannot say that any object actually has this characteristic. ("A priori" here appears to mean the same as " innate."). Both these contentions he denies. In regard to the former he suggests that to say " x is straight " is to affirm that x is linear and deny that it is jagged or curved. Now linearity, jaggedness and curvature are all positive perceptible characteristics. Thus the idea of straightness is empirical in that it is really a compound idea all the components of which are empirical. What is Prof. Broad's

* *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*,' Vol. I, p. 44 (on our ideas of modality).

† *loc. cit.*, p. 46.

‡ *loc. cit.*, pp. 52–3.

reason for saying that when we speak of something being straight part of our meaning is in this way negative? It ought not to be (though I suspect that in fact it is) simply that, since we are never acquainted with the perfectly straight, this is what we *must* mean. For not merely does Prof. Broad only *subsequently* discuss the question whether we have such acquaintance but he inclines to the view that we do have it. But even if he had taken the view that we do not, that would not prove that straightness is not the name of a simple positive characteristic, except in conjunction with the further premiss that there cannot be innate ideas. But Prof. Broad is not using this premiss, and if he were how could he be at the same time asking, as in effect he is, whether the idea of straightness is to be regarded as an innate idea? But if these considerations are excluded, then I can find nothing but dogmatism in the assertion that jaggedness is a positive characteristic while straightness is not. To me it seems just as plausible to maintain that by jagged I mean neither straight nor curved as to maintain that by straight I mean neither curved nor jagged, the fact being that in neither case is this what I mean though in each case it follows from what I assert.

Prof. Broad allows that the analysis just criticised might be rejected, and indeed he himself holds that it does not state what we mean on *all* occasions on which we assert that x is straight. He therefore offers a second analysis as a complement, though I must consider it as a substitute. According to this second analysis we have an empirical concept of certain relations called "comparatives,"—"hotter than," "straighter than" and the like. We also have, as a piece of *a priori* knowledge, the knowledge that "straighter than," unlike "hotter than," is a comparative that has a superlative. A concept of modality is involved in this *a priori* knowledge; but while the knowledge is *a priori* the concept involved in it is "empirical though non-sensuous." Now if this is meant, as it clearly is, to obviate the need for a simple positive concept of perfect straightness, it seems to me ineffective. Even if we possess the piece of *a priori* knowledge alleged, I do not see how we could use it to

justify our predication of the characteristic of straightness in one case rather than another. It is barely conceivable that, lacking a "direct" idea of the superlative, we still might go about saying "I know there might be an instance of the superlative, though I've never come across one." But how could we ever in a particular case say "Ah, here it is!" (even though mistakenly) unless we had such a positive idea of it, *i.e.*, knew what we were looking for? But, anyhow, the *a priori* knowledge postulated seems very odd. I think that what Prof. Broad has given is a perverse account of a fact that admits of a simpler description.

The truth is that there are some words which, whether we use the positive or comparative forms of them, we know to be essentially comparative in meaning. Thus, whether we say "x is loud" or "x is louder than y" we know on reflection that we are in each case making a comparison with a standard. This is, of course, quite different from saying that x is a noise, which is only saying that x is a thing of the sort to which the comparative "louder" is applicable, and we must not be misled even where language does not clearly mark the difference: "heat," for instance, may refer either to a certain type of sensation or to a certain range of intensity in sensations of that type. Now to say that we know that a certain comparative has no superlative is really only to say that when we use a certain word, whether or not in its comparative form, we know that we are making a statement of comparison, that we are in all cases asserting a relation, never a quality. But there are other cases in which it is the comparative and not the positive form of the word that is improper: we are not dealing with degrees of anything. When we say "loud," we refer to the degree of intensity that a certain sensation possesses: but of what does "straight" indicate a degree? When we say "this is louder than that" we say what we mean; it is not improved by translation into "this is more nearly just loud." When we say "this is straighter than that" we do not say what we mean, and it is better said in the form "this is more nearly just straight." We are here

dealing not with degrees but with approximations.* Instead of suggesting that "louder than" and "straighter than" are both genuine comparatives about which we have a mysterious piece of *a priori* knowledge we should say that "straighter" is not a comparative at all and "loud" is not a positive. "Louder" has neither positive nor superlative and "straight" has no comparative. What "straight" refers to is a positive characteristic which at the same time *is* the "superlative" of a fictitious comparative. And tiresome though all this may seem it brings out the fact that Prof. Broad's second analysis of the meaning of "straight," which is meant to dispense with a positive concept of an Ideal Limit, is unintelligible except in terms that show that we have a positive concept of that limit.

Either then we are acquainted with instances of a simple positive characteristic straightness, or straightness is an innate idea. I think we must choose the former alternative. It is logically possible that a concept of which we made use in our thinking should be merely innate, so long as no proposition in which the concept-term functioned expressed knowledge. But we could not know that the characteristic named by a term was present in a particular situation unless we were somehow acquainted with that characteristic as an objective fact; and I do not see how we could know that it was absent unless we knew from other occasions what it was like for it to be present. Now, though it has been questioned whether we ever know that a line *is* straight, we certainly do sometimes know that a line is *not* straight. If the negative analysis of "straight" as meaning "neither jagged nor curved" were correct this would be easy to understand, for we certainly are acquainted with jags and curves. But I do not see how we could have even this negative knowledge if "straight" is the name of a simple positive characteristic unless we were on occasion acquainted with this characteristic as an element in particular situations.

What then is the difficulty about allowing such acquain-

* Approximations to straightness involve, I suppose, degrees of crookedness, but the two are not the same. There is no "least crooked" line, and if there were it would not be straight.

tance? Of course, we must all be doubtful whether what we say *looks* straight is straight, when what looks straight is supposed to be the edge of a physical object (it makes no difference to this whether we are phenomenalists or not). But this is not the melancholy prerogative of straightness; it is equally possible to suppose that conditions are such that what is, in fact, straight is appearing as bent or crooked. If on the other hand we are not talking about the shapes of physical objects, but about the shape of a colour on the strength of seeing which we say that there is a physical object that looks so and so, it seems absurd to maintain that this colour can look other than it is. What can be meant by saying that the edge of the colour looks straight but may not be? Must we not say that if it looks straight it is so? And then all those, including Prof. Broad, who allow that the boundary of a colour can seem straight should allow also that the concept of straightness is beyond question empirical.

But Prof. Broad in fact holds that a sensible may be other than it appears to inspection to be. I am not sure what he intends by this. I do not see what it could mean unless that, since seeing is not knowing, the edge of a colour, whose determinate linear character (which might be straightness) is of course *seen*, may yet not be *known* to be as it is. Is it the case that in all our knowledge about our sensations there is a certain crudeness, that the conceptual net is too coarse in the mesh to catch the absolutely determinate and rapidly, even if not continuously, changing; and that, correspondingly, all our words for sensible qualities refer to any member of an unspecifiable range of such qualities? This may be so, and if so then any word of absolutely determinate significance, such as "straight" is, and "jagged" and "curved" (or, for that matter, "green" and "acrid") are not, even if it names a character predicable of what is sensuously given, is not intelligible to us simply because what it names is itself sensed. Thus, if we hold to the view earlier asserted, that we must somehow be acquainted with instances of straightness, we must go on to assert an intuition of them that is not sensing, such an intuition as Plato believed in. The existence of this intuition is, of course,

also involved in our geometrical reasoning if that reasoning essentially requires a reference to what is ordinarily meant by " space." But most mathematicians deny this and I am not mathematician enough to justify my being dogmatic either way. It should, perhaps, be observed that on the view here taken it is not strictly true that sensible figure is always only an approximation to geometrical figure. That in any case would be odd : the imperfectly circular, *e.g.*, must be perfectly something else, and why then may nothing of the sort be perfectly circular ? It is our *knowledge* in the one case that only approximates in precision to our *knowledge* in the other.

If this intuition of particular objects that is not a sensing takes place should the concepts of those objects be called empirical or not ? They are not empirical if only concepts of what is sensuously given are empirical. On the other hand nobody denies that the intuition is conditioned by sensing. Our sensations, as Plato held, " put us in mind of " these unsensed objects. Still, the relation between the sensing and the intuition is not so close as in the case of the concept of resemblance. In that case the object of the concept is inseparable from what is sensed, so that it is logically impossible to have the intuition without the sensation : but in the present instance the sensing, or imagining, is only psychologically relevant to the intuition. It is Hume's error, here as elsewhere, to have offered this psychological accompaniment as a substitute for the intuition itself.*

As regards Ideal Limits other than these geometrical ones I need not say much. The cases that appear difficult are those where a normative concept is involved, *e.g.*, when we speak of someone as perfectly good. Now I am not certain that goodness any more than straightness admits of degrees in the way in which loudness does. If it does, then I doubt

* In the foregoing I have made the usual simplification of considering only the sense of sight. I am assuming that the same sort of account could be given in the case of touch. But that the " suggestive " power of sight is higher, so that it is more plausible to hold that the characteristics in question are seen than that they are touched, is shown by the preference we certainly have for visible over tangible εἰκόνες as aids to our geometrical thinking.

whether anything could be perfectly good; but it will not follow that we must have an *a priori* concept when we speak of things as though they were. For we might derive the meaning of "good" from observation of actual cases in which one thing is better than another and the meaning of "perfection" from approximation—series of the "crooked-straight" type. If, on the other hand, goodness does not admit of degrees a thing may yet properly be said to be perfectly good, in a sense more significant than that in which a line can be called perfectly straight, for the following reason. That on which judgment is being passed may be very complex, as a line is not, and it may consequently be good in one respect without being good in other respects. "Perfectly good" will mean only "good in all respects." If the content of this concept is obscure that will reflect either our uncertainty as to what is meant by the simple term "good" or our inability to provide an exhaustive list of the aspects which are the subject of our valuation, or both. The obscurity, so far as it is due to the latter cause, does not show that the idea is some mysterious *a priori* one, but only that it is what Prof. Broad terms a descriptive idea. And unless the concept of goodness itself is *a priori* all the elements constituting this descriptive idea will be empirical.

IV.

This brings us to the consideration of the status of normative concepts—a more satisfactory because more inclusive term than ethical. What is denoted by such words as "good," "beautiful," "right," "obligatory"? One answer is, of course, that nothing is denoted; our use of the words is purely exclamatory. Another consists in giving as the meaning of the words certain characteristics that are not normative at all. In the first case, there is obviously no *a priori* concept of goodness, because there is no concept of it whatsoever: in the second case, what concepts there are must be dubbed empirical or *a priori* as is preferred (and would normally be dubbed empirical) for

reasons that apply equally to concepts earlier discussed. A new problem is raised only if we insist that some terms are irreducibly normative in meaning. I propose to assume that this is so.* To the arguments already generally familiar I could add nothing important and there are other points to consider. What needs more consideration than it usually gets is the question of how those who suppose that we really have normative concepts think that we can have them.

They can hardly be just innate ideas or derived from inspection of a universal not recognised in its instances. For in neither of these cases could we have any gound for ascribing the characteristic in question to one thing rather than another. The position is not of the same type as that which would result if we had a purely universal intuition of causal necessity. There we could claim that constancy of conjunction could be seen to be involved in necessity, and we might hope to probabilify particular assertions of causal connection by observation of conjunction. No such inductive procedure is possible to justify our use of normative terms. It must then be based on intuition of the character as it is present in particular cases. But there is no denying the oddity of the intuition. The character is not, of course, sensed, but neither is it intuited as just coexisting with what is sensed. An act could not just be one of repayment of debt, for instance, *and* right: if we judged it right it would be *because* it was one of repayment of debt. The character is a " resultant " character. What it characterises are states of affairs, the description of which is in terms of of non-normative characters, and the ascription of the normative character logically presupposes the awareness of those other characters (as the assertion of resemblance between colours presupposes the colour-sensations) and is not, as in the case of straightness, simply psychologically conditioned by that awareness. The differences between the present case and that of resemblance are that the conditioning awareness is nothing so primitive as sensing, it is a complex state

* I do not deny, of course, that on many occasions on which an apparently normative term is used our meaning is capable of a purely naturalistic analysis. This may even be true of all uses of " beautiful."

of believing or knowing; and that what is asserted is, apparently, a quality and not a relation. Perhaps this difference should just be noted and accepted: it is impossible to assert *a priori* that nothing of the sort could occur.

But there are other difficulties. There is nothing surprising about our misascribing a character to particular situations, but we should not know what our normative terms meant unless in some cases we knew that the character it named was present. Do we ever have this knowledge? Many appear to take for granted that we have, but the answer is not so clear as one could wish. According to some moral theories, after all, we never really know that any particular act is right or that it is our duty to perform it; and though it may be claimed that we have knowledge of certain *prima facie* duties, or responsibilities, our knowing of the meaning of these terms seems to be parasitic on our knowing what we mean by "duty-strictly-so-called." It may be said that this criticism rests on a misunderstanding of the relation intended between *prima facie* duty and duty proper. Knowledge of a *prima facie* duty should perhaps be described as knowledge that an act *tends to be* a duty proper; and this may be paralleled by the knowledge, claimed by some, that one state of affairs *tends to necessitate* another. Such knowledge of tendency is, some might hold, both possible and a sufficient basis for the understanding of our terms. But even if I were clear about there being such a knowledge of tendencies the two cases are not really parallel. For in the one case the tendency *is* the causal tendency, it is itself that to which the debated term refers; and in the other case our term refers to that which the tendency is *towards*, and so long as we have mere tendencies before us we still lack an actual instance of what that term means. As regards value, Prof. Campbell has argued forcibly that "a subjectivist definition of value is valid *save only* in the single case of the value which inheres in moral virtue";* and doubtful though I am about his general thesis I also shrink from specifying an instance that would refute it. But moral virtue has to be understood as dutifulness, so

* *Mind*, July, 1935.

that we come back to the problem of our knowledge of duties. The particular difficulty already indicated in the way of admitting that we know that this or that act is our duty might, of course, be obviated by holding a subjective theory of duty *i.e.*, the view that it is our duty to do what we think right. But even if "thinking right" presents no problem I should still not be satisfied. For I do not see how any duties are possible in a deterministic universe ; and, although it may not be clear that every event is necessitated, I am certainly unable (unlike Prof. Campbell) to claim that I am directly aware of myself as acting freely in the sense of freedom that morality requires. How then can I claim to intuit the goodness of dutifulness in any particular case ? I do not think the position is hopeless ; and (since Kant may have talked sense) it is possible that a clue to the solution lies in a distinction between practical and theoretical reason, between the consciousness that is operative in conduct and the consciousness that has our conduct, as well as other things, before it as an object. The former may be so related to the latter as to legitimise assertions that are not guaranteed by anything that could properly be called *inspection* of our moral agency. I cannot develop this here.

But suppose we allowed a knowledge of the goodness of dutifulness, would that be enough ? Not unless we were prepared to concede, as (I have indicated) I am not, that nothing but dutifulness is good and nothing but undutifulness bad. For though we should have explained how we know what "good" means we should still have to explain how we come to predicate it, with whatever uncertainty, as widely as we do. Can any reason be offered for this extended application except that we dimly and, so to say, out of focus, recognise normative characters even elsewhere ? The uncertainty of our discernment will be not only an uncertainty as to whether the characters are, in fact, present, but also an uncertainty as to what precisely they themselves are. If knowledge must be clear and distinct we shall not, on this view, know the meaning of our terms. Of their meaning, no less than of their correct application, we shall have an inkling only.

But such as it is we shall have it, as in more favoured cases we have knowledge, only by attention to the particular situations that, we think, possess these characters. The recognition of the goodness of dutifulness will not stand utterly alone: it will be at most the clearest case of a type of discernment of which there are other examples. That there is nothing shadowy about our non-inferential awareness, that between sheer blindness and what Descartes would have admitted to be knowledge there is no *via media* possible, I certainly do not believe. But, of course, to speak so may be only a disguise for one's own mental laziness and confusion of thought, and to those who think that is the case I have no answer.

V.

Finally, we have to deal with concepts of categories—a vague class when one does not know the definition of "category." Not everything that has been called a category provides difficulty. Take, for example, quality: since qualities are sensed the concept of quality seems empirical enough on any view of experience. (This is, of course, quite consistent with there being a categorial *principle* that is *a priori*, to the effect that whatever exists must exist with some determinate quality). It may be said that the term "quality" can mean nothing except as the correlate of "substance"; but this is true only in the sense of "substance" according to which our particular sensations are themselves all substances; and if it is improper to say that this formal character of being a "this-such" is sensed, at the worst we must recognise it in the way in which, we have suggested, resemblance is recognised.

The case is very different when we are concerned with substance in the sense of continuant, or of causality. Though philosophers tend to speak of these as two among other instances of a class, there is every reason for regarding them as constituting a class by themselves. Here, at least, it would be widely held, we have notions whose content cannot possibly be derived from experience.

Of course, if the phenomenalists are right, this is not so ; but I am going to work with the hypothesis that they are wrong. I know no way of settling the question other than that of asking oneself in regard to any proffered analysis, " Is this all that I mean ? " and I can only record that up to the present I have had to say " No." I do not regard a " thing " as a logical construction out of sense-contents, nor a causal succession as differing from a non-causal one simply in terms of regularity. And perhaps it is worth remarking here that Hume himself was not the phenomenalist he has been claimed as being. His position as regards causality is rather clearer than his views on substance (*i.e.*, what he calls identity) and it is certain that he is not laboriously enquiring what " causality " means, if by that is intended the enquiry whether necessity is part of the meaning. That it is included in the meaning he never denies ; what he is concerned about is the nature of the belief, which neither inspection of the events called causes and effects, nor reasoning, can *justify*, that there is such a thing. It is true that, by his own principle, we cannot have an idea not derived from a corresponding impression, and it is true that the impression offered us as the archetype of the idea of necessity is not really an impression of necessity. It can be argued that in that case necessitation *cannot* be part of our meaning when we say that A causes B, but it is not a conclusion that Hume himself drew. It could also be argued that he is committed to holding that our idea of causality is an innate, though obscure, idea, the psychological conditions of our reflective consciousness of which he thought he could detect, or even that he thought it was derived from inspection of actual instances of it in one special field. There is evidence for all these interpretations ; and, even if there is no intelligible alternative, only partiality could isolate one of them as being Hume's position. Some confusions are perhaps more creditable than some sorts of clarity, but, however that may be, unambiguous authority of Hume is certainly not to be claimed for contemporary phenomenalism, much though it may have learned from him.

But to return to the main issue, what do I positively mean by "causality" and "substance" if I reject phenomenalist analyses as inadequate? To begin with, I do not think of events as causes; events happen but do not do anything (despite the suggestion of some of our language) and I think of causing as a doing of something, an agency that implies an agent. If there is a necessary connexion between events that connexion is not itself causal, but the shadow of, or, more precisely, an abstraction from causal action. Thus the notion of substance in a sense of "substance" that means more than the mere thisness of *any* "this-such," the notion in fact of what is now commonly called the continuant, is involved in the notion of causality. And the notion of causality is, reciprocally, involved in this notion of substance: for were it not that we need substance as that of which the causal properties determining the manifestation of characters are the properties, we might, I think, be content to be phenomenalists.

So we do not really have two categories, substance and cause, but a single complex category of the causal continuant; and it is just our concept of this that is the problem. The causal properties themselves, doubtless, can be supposed to belong to the continuant only in virtue of some intrinsic characters it possesses; but, unless these characters are the very qualities (or some of them) that sensation itself reveals, we know nothing of their nature. One *kind* of substance, again, can be distinguished from another only in terms of its properties, and one property from another only in terms of the manifested characters. Thus it is true that the content of the assertion "x is a rope" differs from that of the assertion "x is a snake" only in respect of characters that are either sensed or could (it is supposed) be sensed; and each assertion admits of falsification or (never complete) verification only in virtue of the predictive element in it. But the general notion of causal continuant is being used in both alike and irrespective of their truth or falsity, and *its* validity cannot be guaranteed by the specific nature of any sensation; it is either completely verifiable by an inspection that is not sensing or it is not verifiable at all.

How then do we have this notion of a causal continuant? There is not the same obvious objection in this case as in that of normative characteristics to supposing that the idea is either innate or derived from apprehension of a universal divorced from any apprehension of its instances as instances.* For, so long as the notion includes (though it is not reducible to) that of necessary connexion between events, we can account for our particular applications of the category in terms of induction based on observation of conjunctions. (That these applications would have very different justification according to which view we took does not here concern us.†) Still, both hypotheses strike me as extremely odd, if not actually unintelligible. I should certainly prefer to suppose that we acquired the notion by being aware of actual instances of the causal continuant as such; and at the present time there is quite a lot of support for the view that we have this knowledge in the special case of our own conscious behaviour. Though I think with Dr. Ewing‡ that those who hold this view ought to stress voluntary control of mental rather than of bodily processes, and though I deprecate also their emphasis on the causality aspect to the exclusion of the substance aspect of the situation, I think that there is a sense in which they are right. But the sense in which I think they are right is not, I confess, likely to satisfy them; it leaves one much nearer Hume (as I understand Hume) than they would wish to be. I believe that from the consciousness of our own agency operative in a continuum of mental process we derive a notion of substance and of its successive states as being not sheerly contingent in their succession, not a series of merely temporally or spatio-temporally related events. But the derivation is obscure, because it is in no ordinary or easy sense that we are objects to ourselves. And I do not think, in any case,

* An expression of the latter view may be quoted from Cook Wilson, *Statement and Inference*, p. 517. "We apprehend a necessity in general, *i.e.*, that the event must have some cause or other."

† In the former case they can either not be justified at all or only by a "transcendental deduction" of the category.

‡ *Idealism*, pp. 176–8.

that this consciousness reveals a *necessary* connexion of events; the consciousness in question is simply, to borrow Prof. Stout's phrase, a "felt tendency*" which constitutes *some* kind of unity of the process as being all *ours*. When, in reflection, we view the process simply as a succession of events, standing, as it were, outside it so as to contemplate it, we can then think of these events as non-contingently related, I am inclined to suppose, only by borrowing the notion of necessity from logical entailments, from the distinction between logical necessitation and mere conjunction, which we certainly do apprehend, and by asserting connexions of that sort but somehow (who knows how?) different, as holding between events. But I do not think that we ever apprehend connexions of this curious nature, and indeed I think that the two elements involved in the "concept" of them — the entailment elements and the succession element—never combine into a single concept at all. Our experience itself, anyhow, as it is lived through is not conscious of itself in these terms, any more than (as I have said earlier) it is conscious of itself as free from such a necessity. The process of our consciousness does not offer itself as object for an inspection that guarantees either of these competing interpretations of it, though in a way which I readily admit is baffling, it is the source of both. We conclude then that the notion of causal continuant may be derived from the awareness of a particular case of it as such, viz., our own selves, with the important qualifications:

(1) that it is an over-simplification to speak of this awareness as though it were the apprehension of an object in the same manner in which the knowledge of, say, relations between colours is an apprehension; and

(2) that into the nature of the real connexion in the succession, which we speak of as a necessity,

* *Studies in Philosophy and Psychology*, iv.

> we have no insight, though we know well enough what is meant by "necessity" (of a non-causal type) and by "succession "separately.

Here again, however, as in the case of normative characters, I am not convinced that we derive our concept solely from one part of our experience and then extend its application to the whole. That we do apply it to the whole I do not question, but I question whether it can be a purely analogical application. We are not conscious of ourselves before we are conscious of things, and in our consciousness of things the application of the categorial concept is already involved. And if a "mere projection" of the self on to the not-self appears obstinately as an objective fact what is the evidence that it is a "mere projection"? If then we are not to allow that the categorial concept is an innate idea in terms of which we, appropriately or otherwise, "think" the facts (whatever that may mean) and at the same time are not to allow that we have knowledge of the category as constitutive of the world about which we are thinking, in detachment from recognition of its instances as such, it looks as though we must once again fall back on the claim to a dim discernment in particular cases of that for which our words stand, dim as regards its presence and its nature alike. As with normative characters, so here, the experience that might at first seem to be the sole source of our concept will really only be the palmary instance in which its content comes nearest to being clear. To hold this it is not necessary to deny that we *also* eke out our meaning by using the notion of the self analogically. On the other hand, this view does seem to overlook the fundamental difference between the "enjoyment" of our own experience and the "contemplation" of objects. Further, there is the question of its compatibility with the inductive methods that we actually employ to determine causal laws; though I am not persuaded that this difficulty is insuperable.* But I must honestly confess that I am not happy about any of these alternatives.

* cf. Broad *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp. 241–5.

If, however, we elect to hold that we derive our notions of substance and agency from our consciousness of ourselves and from that alone, and that we interpret other phenomena by analogy with this, the special difficulty this would raise is not part of the problem we have been asked to consider. It would not be a question of the *a priori* or empirical nature of our *concepts* but the question of the explanation and justification (if either is possible) of a conviction that would be expressed in an *a priori* synthetic *statement.* Just as little is it relevant to our problem whether there is only one causal continuant or many or an infinite number. But a word or two is needed on the question whether we have to admit that minds and bodies are different kinds of substance, in a sense in which difference of kind means something more than it means when trees and stones are spoken of as different kinds.

A distinction between different kinds of substance can only be drawn in terms of the different nature of the qualities manifested; and to say that there are different kinds of substance in the peculiarly radical sense suggested can only mean, I think, that certain sorts of quality are incapable of characterising the same substance. I certainly do not know this to be the case. Extension is, of course, irreducibly different from consciousness, but I cannot see that the same thing might not both think and be extended. I should, however, still object to people talking of bodies thinking or minds being extended (neither of these expressions is preferable to the other) since this disguises the fact that, *e.g.*, what is extended would only be called a mind in virtue of its having the quite different characteristic of being conscious. What I have said does not show that there is *not* a substantial difference between minds and bodies; it means simply that I do not think we have any insight into such a difference, if it exists.

Because of this, I think it is a pity that Mr. Mackinnon stated his problem in terms of the concept of materiality. Of course, there is a problem of materiality, but it is in part just the problem of substance in general, and only in part the problem of whether any substance possesses the charac-

ters in terms of which matter is defined. This latter problem, of course, does not exist at all if perception is a knowing of substances so characterised. For though we still should not know whether anything exists with these characters when we are not perceiving it, yet, if perceiving is itself knowing, it and they are independent of our perception and it would surely be odd to insist that nothing is a physical object unless it exists and has the characters that belong to such an object for more than an (unspecifiable) period. But even if perceiving is a knowing of sense-data simply, or not a knowing at all, it remains true that all the characters in terms of which we should define a substance as material are sensible qualities; and though the question whether there are any bodies in a non-phenomenalistic sense (*i.e.*, whether the qualities sensed or qualities which they resemble are actually qualities of any causal continuant) could now only be settled by argument, the concept of body involved in this argument is only the general categorial concept of causal continuant together with certain concepts whose content is given in sensation. The specific problem of materiality, then, is either no problem at all or it is a problem not about the origin of a concept but about the cogency of an argument, and that is not our present concern.*

VI.

The position we have reached may now be summarily described. We may begin by recalling the statement of our programme made earlier in this paper. The description of any concept as *a priori* is made difficult by our vagueness as to what may properly be said to be given in experience. This vagueness is inseparable from the fact that, while

* No argument could as a matter of fact conclusively establish the existence of bodies. The best we could say would be that it was a hypothesis that no experience refuted and that had pragmatic value, while no other hypothesis had any pragmatic value. Of course we could conclusively *refute* the assertion that there were bodies if it were self-evident that the characters defining body were such as could not exist unperceived.

"*a priori*" and "empirical" are supposed to constitute an exhaustive disjunction, there are actually more than two ways by which we might be supposed to be possessed of concepts. What is required is that we should set out these various ways and then decide which of them are most reasonably to be called empirical, and (if we can) by which of them we actually do acquire concepts.

The possible orders of concepts that we have mentioned in the course of this paper are as follows :

(1) Concepts of the objects of sensation, such as redness or resonance.

(2) Concepts of objects not themselves sensed but intuited as particulars on the occasion of sensing, the intuition being logically inseparable from the sensation. This class admits of subdivision into—

(*a*) Cases where the intuition is dependent on sensation simply : *e.g.*, the intuition of resemblance.

(*b*) Cases where the intuition presupposes not simply sensation but an apprehension of fact that involves concepts of the resemblance order : *e.g.*, the intuition of normative characters, if it occurs at all.

If an intuition of particular instances of categorial characters takes place at all it must be of type (*a*) rather than of type (*b*) ; but, if the view of this paper is correct, it must in other respects differ importantly from an intuition of resemblance.

(3) Concepts of objects not themselves sensed but intuited as particulars on the occasion of sensing, the intuition being logically separable from but psychologically conditioned by the sensation : *e.g.*, on the view suggested in this paper, the concept of straightness.

(4) Concepts of universals intuited barely as universals and not as instantiated, although here again

sensation is the psychological condition of the intuition.

(5) Concepts whose objects are in no way intuited, but which belong to the mind's intrinsic nature, that is to say, which are, in the " dispositional " sense, innate ideas. Here, too, sensation must be the psychological condition of the transformation of the " dispositional " idea into an " occurrent " one : *i.e.*, of the realisation of the capacity to form the idea.

In all cases in which sensation has been assigned the part merely of psychological condition of our having the concept, it is, of course, logically possible to claim to have the concept independently of any such condition. But it seems to me an absurd claim : and I suppose that everyone agrees with Kant on this point at least.

Now, which of these orders of concepts should be called empirical and which *a priori*? If we attempt to conform to ordinary usage we seem forced to include in the class of the empirical more than (1) and yet not all of (2), and certainly not (3), (4) or (5). That there are concepts non-empirical in this sense of the term seems to me clear. If we are indifferent to usage, then I think it is questionable whether *any* application of the antithesis is not more misleading than helpful : it might be a good thing to drop it. But if I may be allowed to call (1) " empirical in the strict sense " and group (4) and (5) together as " *a priori* in the strict sense " on the strength of the common characteristic that in neither case is the concept derived from intuition of any particular to which it applies, then I should like to invite my successor in this discussion to show either that there are concepts *a priori* in the strict sense, which I much doubt, or that there are none not empirical in the strict sense, which I am perfectly certain is not the case. In any event, whether he accepts this invitation or not, I hope that, by indulging myself in such a roving and inconclusive survey, I have provided him with a more precise issue for his investigation. Unless this is so, I am afraid I should have to agree that we have not advanced very far.

III.—*By* J. L. Austin.

Mr. Maclagan seems to have ransacked every available cupboard for skeletons to grace our feast: I hope I shall not be thought ungrateful for his assiduity, if I decline to pick with him the particular bones which he proffers to me. My excuse is that he, like Mr. Mackinnon, has touched only perfunctorily, if at all, on certain preliminary matters which deserve discussion. Frankly, I still do not understand what the question before us *means*: and since I hold, nevertheless, no strong views as to how it should be answered, it seems best to occupy myself primarily in discussing its meaning. I only wish I could do this more helpfully. I shall, therefore, first write something about *concepts*, and then something about their *existence* and *origin*: finally, because it seems an interesting case, I shall choose to argue with Mr. Maclagan about *resemblance*.

I.

Neither Mr. Mackinnon nor Mr. Maclagan would claim, I think, to have told us carefully what they are talking about when they talk about "concepts". Both seem, however, to imply that the word "concept" could not be explained without using the word "universal" *: and this seems also the common view, though how the two are related is no doubt obscure and controversial. I propose, therefore, to make some remarks about "universals": because I do not understand what they are, so that it is most unlikely I shall understand what concepts are.

* Mr. Maclagan perhaps denies this, in order to allow for the possibility of "innate ideas": but he does not believe in these. Nor does he explain about them: his brief account of a "concept" as an "element in our knowing or thinking" will scarcely suffice for that.

People (philosophers) speak of " universals " as though these were entities which they often stumbled across, in some familiar way which needs no explanation. But they are not so. On the contrary, it is not so very long since these alleged entities were calculated into existence by a transcendental argument : and in those days, anyone bold enough to say there " were " universals kept the argument always ready, to produce if challenged. I do not know if it is upon this argument that Mr. Mackinnon and Mr. Maclagan are relying. It may be that they do claim to stumble across " universals " in some easy manner : or it may be that they rely upon some other argument which is admittedly transcendental.* But I propose to consider, not very fully, that celebrated argument which, above all, seems suited to prove the existence of " universals " in the most ordinary sense of that word : it runs as follows :

It is assumed that we do " sense " things, which are many or different.† Whether these things are " material objects " or what are commonly called " sense-data ", is not here relevant : in fact, the argument can be made to apply to the objects of any kind of " acquaintance ", even non-sensuous,—although such applications were not originally envisaged. It is assumed, further, that we make a practice of calling many different sensa by the same single name : we say " *This* is grey ", and " *That* is grey ", when the sensa denoted by " this " and by " that " are not identical. And finally it is assumed that this practice is " justifiable " or indispensable. Then we proceed to ask : How is such a practice possible ? And answer :—

(*a*) Since we use the same single *name* in each case, there must surely be some single identical thing " there " in each case : something of

* For there are in fact several : see below.

† There is a constant and harmful ambiguity here : the sensa are commonly different *both* " numerically " *and* " qualitatively " (the former, of course, always). The " universal " is alleged to be single and identical in *both* ways. Hence, from the start, that fatal confusion of the problem of " genus and species " with the problem of " universal and particular ".

which the name is the name: something, therefore, which is "common" to all sensa called by that name. Let this entity, whatever it may be, be called a "universal".

(*b*) Since it was admitted that the things we sense are many or different, it follows that this "universal", which is single and identical, is *not sensed*.

Let us consider this argument.

(1) This is a *transcendental** argument: if there were not in existence something other than sensa, we should not be able to do what we *are* able to do, (viz. name things). Let us not consider here whether, in general, such a form of argument is permissible or fruitful: but it is important to notice the following points:—

(i) The "universal" is emphatically *not* anything we stumble across. We can claim only to know *that*, not *what*, it is. "Universal" *means* that which will provide the solution to a certain problem: that x which is present, one and identical, in the different sensa which we call by the same name. Unfortunately, as so often happens, succeeding generations of philosophers fell naturally into the habit of supposing that they were perfectly well acquainted with these entities in their own right: they have any amount to tell us about them (partly this was due to a confusion of "universals" in our present sense with "universals" in other senses, as we shall see). For instance, we are told that they are "objects of thought": and myths are invented, about our "contemplation" of universals: and so on.

(ii) On the same grounds, it must be held that to ask a whole series of questions which have

* In Kant's sense. But it is also "transcendental" in another sense, that of proving the existence of a class of entities different in kind from sensa.

constantly been asked is nonsensical. For instance: "How is the universal related to the particulars?" "Could there be universals without instances?": and many others. For a "universal" is *defined* as something which is related to certain sensa in a certain way. We might as well worry about what is the relation between a man and his aunt, and as to whether there can be aunts without nephews (or nieces).

(iii) Here, however, a point to which I have already twice referred in anticipation, must be made: this will unfortunately be a digression. There are *other* transcendental arguments for "the existence of universals". I shall mention one: A true statement is one which corresponds with reality: the statements of the scientist are true: therefore there are realities which correspond to those statements. Sensa do not correspond to the statements of the scientist (exactly *why*, is rather too obscure to discuss here): therefore there must exist other objects, real but not sensible, which do correspond to the statements of the scientist. Let these be called "universals".

That this argument begs many questions, is evident. Are all sciences alike? Is all truth correspondence? Does no science make statements about sensa? Some, for instance, would distinguish "a priori" sciences from "empirical" sciences: and hold that the "truth" of the former is *not* correspondence, while the statements of the latter *are* about sensa. Of course, too, the assumption that the sciences are true is a large one.* But all this cannot be entered into.

* Even Plato once decided that he ought not to make it. It has been suggested to me that the argument should be formulated in terms of "having meaning" rather than of "being true". I doubt if this would be any improvement.

What it is important to notice for our purposes is, that here too the argument is *transcendental*. The " universal " is an *x*, which is to solve our problem for us : we know only that it is non-sensible, and in addition must possess certain characters, the lack of which prohibits sensa from corresponding to the statements of the scientist. But we do not stumble across these " universals " : though, needless to say, philosophers soon take to talking as though they did.

Now it must be asked : What conceivable ground have we for *identifying* the " universals " of our original argument with the " universals " of this second argument? Except that both are non-sensible, nothing more is known in which they are alike. Is it not odd to suppose that *any two* distinct transcendental arguments could possibly be known each to prove the existence of the *same* kind of thing? Hence the oddity of speaking of " arguments for the existence of universals " : in the first place, no two of these arguments are known to be arguments for the existence of the same thing : and in the second place, the phrase is misleading because it suggests that we know what a " universal " is quite apart from the argument for its existence—whereas in fact " universal " *means*, in each case, simply " the entity which this argument proves to exist ".

As a matter of fact, we can, indirectly show that the objects " proved " to exist by the two arguments so far mentioned are *not* the same. For firstly, the variety of " universals " proved to exist in the case of the first argument is strangely greater than in the case of the second argument : the former proves a " universal " to exist corresponding to every general name, the latter only does so when the name is that of an object studied by the scientist.* But it might still be thought, that the " universals " proved to exist by the second argument do, nevertheless, form part of the class of " universals " proved to exist by the first argument : e.g. " circularity " or " straightness " could be proved to exist by either argument. Yet in fact, no

* It is to be remembered that, if we are to argue that " science " is not about sensa, very little can be recognised as " science ".

clearer cases could be chosen for demonstrating that the two kinds of " universals " are distinct : for, if " circularity " is to be proved to exist by the first argument, then I must be able to say truly of certain sensa " this is circular " : whereas, the " circularity " which is to be proved to exist by the second argument must be such that it cannot be truly predicated of *any* sensa.*

The purpose of this digression is to point out that, apart altogether from questions as to whether the " arguments for the existence of universals " are good and as to whether they permit us to talk further about universals, an immeasurable confusion arises from the fact that " universal " may mean at any moment any one of a number of different things. For example, if " universal " is being used in the sense of the second argument, it is good enough sense to ask " How are universals related to particulars ? " though any answer would be difficult to find. (The answer that particulars are " approximations " to universals not only implies that the two are the *same* in kind whereas they were said to be different, but also again exposes the difference between this argument and the other ; since it would be absurd to say, of some non-scientific object like a bed, that there was no sensible bed which was *really* a bed, but all sensible beds were only more or less remote " approximations ' to beds. Again, to ask " Are there universals without instances ? " is now absurd for the

* It cannot be sense to say that sensible circles are more or less " like " the universal " circularity " : a particular can be like nothing but another particular. Nor can I agree with Mr. Maclagan that, on his account, the " sensible figure " could be an approximation to the " geometrical figure " : for what is sensed can be like nothing but something else which is sensed. But I must allow that " non-sensuous perception " " intuitive acquaintance " and so on seem to me to be contradictions in terms, attempts to have things both ways. I find confirmation of this, when Mr. Maclagan says a sensible circle might be *more* than an " approximation " to a geometrical circle : i.e., as I understand him, it would *be* a geometrical circle, although we didn't know it. Thus he is making the objects of intuition the same in kind as the objects of sense—indeed interchangeable.—I wonder if Mr. Maclagan's non-sensuous intuition is such that we can say on occasion, " *This is* a (geometrical) circle " ? For whatever reason, we do not ever, I think, speak so. Yet surely, if we are " acquainted " with geometrical circles, we ought to be able to do this.

reason that a "universal", in the sense of the second argument, is not the sort of thing which "has instances" at all (indeed, someone will certainly be found to *apply* the first argument *to* the objects "proved" to exist by the second argument).

(2) So far, we have not investigated the validity of our argument.

(i) It is to be observed, that if the argument holds in its first part (*a*), it certainly also holds in its second part (*b*). If there "are universals", then they are not sensed: the whole point of the argument is, that there must exist something of a kind quite different from sensa. Nevertheless, a fatal mistake has been made by many philosophers: they accept the *first* part of the argument ("there are universals"), which as we shall shortly see is wrong, and they *reject* the second part, which is a necessary corollary of the first. Of course, the talk is at first still to the effect that universals are "thought": but theories are soon formed as to how we "abstract universals from particulars" and then "see universals in particulars".* Undoubtedly, there are "reasons" of a kind for constructing these theories and rejecting the "separation" of universals, of which the following will be the most pleasing to self-refuting nominalists: if we accept both (*a*) and (*b*), it becomes difficult to give any account of how I come to classify together the various things called "grey"; true, if and when I am correct in classifying a certain sensum as "grey", then the universal must be "in" it: but it is not *sensed* "in" it: how then am I to decide whether it is or isn't there, or even guess it?† Hence we depart from the argument

* Do we smell universals in particulars too?

† In *this* sense of "giving an explanation of naming", the theory gives none.

in its pristine form, and embark on mythologies : and by the time we have finished, we may well have reached the position of so many philosophers, and hold that what I *do* sense are " universals ", what I do *not* sense are " particulars " ;* which, considering the meanings of the words, comprises two self-contradictions.

(ii) Finally, it must be pointed out that the first part of the argument (*a*), is wrong. Indeed, it is so artless that it is difficult to state it plausibly. Clearly it depends on a suppressed premiss which there is no reason whatever to accept, namely, that words are essentially " proper names ", *unum nomen unum nominatum.* But why, if " one identical " word is used, *must* there be " one identical " object present which it denotes ? Why should it not be the whole function of a word to denote many things ?† Why should not words be by nature " general " ?—However, it is in any case simply false that we use the *same* name for different things : " grey " and " grey " are *not* the same, they are two similar symbols (tokens), just as the things denoted by " this " and by " that " are similar things. In this matter, the " words " are in a position precisely analgous to that of the objects denoted by them.‡

But, it may be objected, by the " same single " word it was never meant that it is *numerically* identical. In what sense, then, was it meant ? If it meant " qualitatively identical ", then it is clear that the sense in which there is an identical " type " of the tokens is just like the sense

* Other theories : that the particular *is* just a cluster of universals : that the universal *is* a particular of a special sort (an image).

† Many *similar* things, on a plausible view : but other views might be held.

‡ There are ways, of course, in which they are not so analogous : for instance, that one token is of the same type as another, is determined by convention as well as by similarity.

in which the sensa share in an identical common character : hence the former cannot be taken as self-explanatory while the latter is admitted obscure. If it meant that all these tokens " have the same meaning ", then we cannot *assume* that it is the business of similar tokens to " mean " something which is numerically self-identical, without begging our whole question in the manner already pointed out.

But, it will be further said, I do *sense* something identical in different sensa. How this could be I do not understand ; but if it is true, it is clear that this identical something is not an entity different in kind from sensa.

I conclude that this argument does not prove " the existence of universals " ; and that, if it did, nothing more could be said about them than is said in the course of the argument itself, except that they are certainly quite different from " universals " in other senses of that word, i.e. as " proved " to exist by other transcendental arguments.

In a certain sense, it perhaps is *sometimes* not harmful to talk about " universals " or " concepts " ; just as it is *sometimes* convenient to talk about " propositions ", and as it is very often convenient to use " material object language ". To say something about " concepts " is sometimes a convenient way of saying something complicated about sensa (or even about other objects of acquaintance, if there are any), including symbols and images, and about our use of them :* though very different methods of translation will have to be employed on different occasions. But on the whole there is remarkably little to be said in favour of " universals ", even as an admitted logical construction : the plain man did not use it, until he acquired the habit from philosophers, and the errors into which that habit leads are very common and numerous. For example, in addition to those already noted, the error of taking a single *word* or *term*, instead of a sentence, as that which " has meaning " ; hence, given some word like

* But we must " be careful ". We must not say e.g., " a universal is an image " : Berkeley probably did not make this mistake, but Hume probably did : hence Hume is led, whereas Berkeley is not, into a theory about " the origin " of our ideas.

" resemblance ", we search for what *it* denotes (cp III). Or again, we confuse the view that all sentences are about sensa, with the view that every word or term denotes a sensum. Or again, and this most concerns us, we think of the " abstracted " universal as a solid piece of property of ours, and enquire into its " origin ".

I should like, then, to learn from Mr. Mackinnon and Mr. Maclagan, " what a concept is ".

II.

In criticising Mr. Mackinnon, and elsewhere, Mr. Maclagan mentions two questions which, he says, it is important to ask and to distinguish. They are formulated in different ways, but a typical formulation is the following :

(i) *Do we* (actually) *possess* such-and-such a concept ?
(ii) *How do we come to possess* such-and-such a concept ?

I recognise that these two questions have been distinguished and asked, by philosophers of reputation : Descartes, for example, asks both questions, severally, about " the idea of God ". Nevertheless, it may be doubted whether these really are distinct and answerable types of question.

As for the first question it would have been helpful to me if Mr. Maclagan had volunteered to argue it, at least in some one case : for then I might have learned what it means, or how it may be decided.* As for the second question, it is, I think, quite clear that Mr. Maclagan, like Professor Broad, regards the distinction between " a priori " and " empirical " concepts as a matter of " the manner in which we come to acquire " them. This I notice as a preliminary, because, in the opening paragraph of his section II, he does not define " empirical " in this way. That he really does mean what I claim is shown by a

* Perhaps he does intend to argue it—though, if so, he does not clearly enough distinguish it from the second question—in the case of " the causal continuant " : but there the issue is further obscured by our " having " a concept the elements of which do not combine into a " single " concept, and the content of which is " dim ".

great many remarks throughout his paper, but more particularly by the opening paragraph of his concluding section, and by the nature of the ensuing conclusions.

The principal objection which I have to bring against both questions is the general one; that they are examples of the nonsense into which we are led through the facile use of the word "concept". A concept is treated, by Mr. Maclagan as by Professor Broad, as an *article of property*, a pretty straightforward piece of goods, which comes into my "possession", if at all, in some definite enough manner and at some definite enough moment:* whether I do possess it or not is, apparently, ascertained simply by making an inventory of the "furniture" of my mind.

Let us consider first the first question: when we ask "Do we possess the concept?" what are we asking? If we are asking about some individual, or about some group of individuals, whether *he* or *they* "possess the concept of redness", some meanings can well be attached to this expression. It might be supposed to mean, e.g., "Does he, or do they, understand the word 'red'?" But that again needs further explanation; we shall almost certainly find that it is still ambiguous, and that, at least on many interpretations, no precise answer can be given as to whether the individual does or does not "understand" the "word". Does the word "red" matter? Would it not do if he used "rouge" and understood that? Or even "green" if he meant by that what most Englishmen mean by "red"? And so on. Perhaps we should say he "possesses the concept of redness" if he has paid attention to certain features in that with which he is acquainted, to call attention to which most Englishmen would use the words "red" "redness" etc., and has adopted some symbolism to call attention to them, and has not "forgotten" either the features or the symbolism. This is still only one of the things which might be meant, and is still not precise enough: and all the difficulties arise with which we are even more familiar in the puzzles about material objects—surely he might do all you say and yet *still not* possess the concept?

* Can I "lose" a concept, as well as acquire it?

But we do not need to pursue this question. For it appears that this is anyhow not the question being asked by Mr. Maclagan as his first question. In asking " Do *we* possess etc. ? " the " we " does not mean *us* as contrasted with others ; it means any and everybody at once. It means, as he elsewhere puts it, " *Is there* such-and-such a concept ? " And now what does *that* mean, if anything ? It looks as though it had a meaning, because it seems easy to proceed from the question " Does Socrates possess, etc. ? " to the question " Does *any* man possess etc. ? " But although verbally like the first, the second question is really very different. Similarly, although meaning may be attached to the question, " Does *he*, or do *they*, understand this word ? ", it is not obvious that the question " Does *anyone* understand this word ? " has a meaning at all. For, in the former of these questions, to " understand " means, speaking roughly, to use as we, or as most Englishmen, or as some other assignable persons use : or again, the features of *his* experience,* about which it is asked whether he has or has not paid attention to them, require to be indicated by referring to certain definite experiences of *other* persons. Clearly nothing of the kind is possible in the case of the second question. Yet it seems to me that its verbal similarity to the first has led people to pose it—together of course, with a belief in " concepts " as palpable objects : if they were such, the second question *would* be rather like the first. Whereas it isn't.

It seems clear, then, that to ask " whether we possess a certain concept ? " is the same as to ask whether a certain word—or rather, sentences in which it occurs—has any meaning. Whether *that* is a sensible question to ask, and if so how it is to be answered, I do not know : in any case, it is likely to be ambiguous.

What is here of interest to observe is, how our question (1) is liable to become confused with (2). Since it is going to be awkward, to say the least, to prove that a certain concept simply is not, it is tempting to try another way. Instead of maintaining that it *does* not exist, we

* I use this as equivalent to " that with which he is acquainted ".

maintain that it *cannot* exist. For instance, in certain cases we may hope to show that an " idea " is "self-contradictory", as Leibniz thought he could show of the " infinite number " or Berkeley* of " matter ". This particular method, however, is not suitable in some of the most crucial cases, namely those of *simple* " ideas " like that of " necessity ". So here another method is tried : we claim to show that it is *causally* impossible for anyone to possess such a concept. We construct a theory about the condition or conditions

* Since Mr. Mackinnon makes much of this, a note may be excused. Berkeley, I think, maintains exactly the same position with regard to " matter " as with regard to " universals " : these two are chosen as typical of the two most popular kinds of entities alleged to differ in kind from sensa. He expresses himself much more clearly about " matter " than about " universals", (though always suffering from a lack of technical terms). He holds (1) that the plain man's ordinary statements about " ideas " or about " material objects " are translatable into other statements which are solely about sensa (including symbols) (2) that the plain philosopher's theories about the " nature " of matter (inert, etc.) and of universals (formed by abstraction, etc.) are nonsense : partly his descriptions of these entities are self-contradictory (e.g., in the way mentioned by Mr. Maclagan at the end of his section V), partly he can be shown simply to have misunderstood the nature of a " logical construction ". In one sense " there are " both universals and material objects, in another sense there is no such thing as either : statements about each can usually be analysed, but not always, nor always without remainder.

Mr. Mackinnon seems to me to underrate the second line of attack. I do not think that Berkeley would have been by any means content simply to propound the view that matter is a " logical construction " and then to abandon the plain man still asking for more : he patiently asks " *What* more do you want ? ", and laboriously shows that either what is asked for is nonsensical or else he has granted it already. And this, if we will not be content to let plain men work out their own damnation, is perhaps all that can be done.—Nor do I think that Berkeley would say " There *are* universals " quite so handsomely as Mr. Mackinnon makes him do : he would not maintain that there *are* universals in any sense in which he would *deny* that there is matter : Berkeley says that " there are general ideas " meaning that statements like " all demonstration is about general ideas " have a meaning—but also, he says that " *abstract* general ideas " i.e., general ideas as entities of a kind different from sensa, do *not* exist. (This does not mean " general ideas are sensa "). Mr. Mackinnon gives me the impression, perhaps wrongly, that he thinks " abstract " general ideas to be a limited *class* of general ideas, which Berkeley denies to exist : but it is rather a *theory about the nature* of general ideas in general that Berkeley means to deny. (I omit the supplementary theory of " notions ").

under which alone we can " acquire " concepts : and then we claim that, in the case of certain alleged concepts, these conditions are not satisfied in the case of any man : therefore *none* possesses them, i.e. they do not exist.

Thus Hume rapidly deploys a theory that we can never come by any idea unless we have previously experienced an impression similar to it : and argues that we cannot possess an idea of power-in-objects such as we commonly think ourselves to possess, because there is no antecedent impression of it.

But this roundabout method of showing that I don't, because I can't, possess certain concepts, will not do. For how is Hume's conclusion, that we possess no ideas not derived from antecedent impressions, established? Presumably by induction. But not merely is his survey of the evidence inadequate : if he is to make an induction, he must first consider all cases where I do possess an " idea ", and discover the antecedent conditions in each case. He must, therefore, consider whether we do or do not have the idea of power-in-objects before making his induction : and he must also, and this is more important, have some means of establishing in particular cases whether we do or do not " possess " a certain idea which is quite distinct from the, as yet unformulated, theory of how we " come to " possess them. Now what is that means? In Hume's case, if the " idea " were really an *image*, then direct introspection might do, though it would then be surprising that he has to go such a roundabout way to prove we have no idea of power-in-objects : but this will scarcely do on some other theories of what concepts are. I should very much like to know what Mr. Maclagan's method is.

It is also often very hard to gather how philosophers are *claiming* to establish their theories of " how we come to acquire concepts ". Professor Broad, for instance, in the passage referred to by Mr. Maclagan, says : " It is quite certain that many, if not all, simple intuitive dispositional ideas are formed in the following way ", and then proceeds to a theory about " comparing ", " abstracting ", and so on. How is this proved? If it is known,

then I must confess myself bad at knowing. Or again, discussing the question as to whether we do or do not "have" a certain idea, in connexion with Hume's problem about the shade of blue which I have never actually sensed, Professor Broad says: "(*a*) If by an 'idea of the missing shade' you mean an image which is characterised by the missing shade, the question is purely a question for empirical psychology. (*b*) If by 'idea' you mean 'intuitive idea', the answer is in the negative". It is satisfactory to have the answer: but it would be pleasant also to learn how it is reached, and by whom.

It seems to me that it is seriously questionable whether Mr. Maclagan's second question can be kept distinct from his first question. The latter seemed to amount to the question: whether a certain word has a meaning? But now does the question about "origins" really not amount to this, that we want to know: how do words mean? Hume's theory about the "derivation of our ideas" really amounts to the theory that a word, *x*, can only have meaning provided that I can know, on at least one occasion, that "this is an *x*", where "this" denotes something *sensible*. And most other theories about this subject, are really theories of a very similar sort: Mr. Maclagan himself inclines to such a view, though he would not, of course, add that the "this" must be sensible. The "origin of a concept" is commonly admitted to be found, when an occasion is found on which I can say, with knowledge, "this is an *x*". Mr. Maclagan almost formulates the problem himself in this way in the opening of his section II. The question of "innate ideas" seems very commonly to be simply the question: whether a word can have a meaning even though I can never know "this is an *x*"?* But surely it will be very difficult

* We may distinguish several questions: Do I know the meaning of the word *x*? Do I know that there are *x*'s? Do I know that there is an *x here*? Do I know that *this* is the *x* which is here? But the theory that a word only has meaning if I can know sometimes that "this is an *x*" is so engrained in us, that we confuse these questions together: for, if it is true, I cannot answer *any* of the questions in the affirmative unless I sometimes answer the *last*, and

indeed to keep the two questions : " Has *x* a meaning ? " and " How do words mean ? " apart ? It would appear that to ask the latter is to ask " What is meant by ' having a meaning ' " ?* Now, *if* either of these questions can be treated independently of the other, it seems clear that it is this latter, (which would be contrary to Mr. Maclagan's view) ; unless the question, whether a certain word has a meaning, is to be taken as absolutely unanalysable, and to be answered by means of some sort of direct inspection.

Nevertheless, it is certain that much discussion is devoted *seriously* to the questions of " origin " and " acquisition " and " formation " of concepts. And where this is so, I suspect that we are always told either nothing or nonsense. For instance, Kant speaks with emphasis on this subject, saying that the whole point of Hume's theories, and the whole point of his own transcendental deduction, is about the *origin* of a priori concepts : it will be remembered how the wretched Beattie is slated for not understanding this. With trepidation, I confess I do not understand it either. Beyond that the " origin " of these concepts is " in the nature of the mind itself ", I cannot see that we are given any information about it. Is the Metaphysical Deduction intended to show that this " origin " lies in the forms of judgment ? A strange sense of " origin ". Yet even so, it seems to me that no account is given of the " origin " of our concept of " necessity ".

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therefore *all* of them, in the affirmative. Even Kant, it seems to me, who has every interest in distinguishing these questions with regard to such words as " duty " and " cause," since, as against Hume's verification theory, he is claiming that the first three questions can be answered in the affirmative though the last must be answered in the negative, fails to keep them always apart : just as he fails sufficiently to distinguish the question " How are synthetic a priori propositions meaningful ? " from " How are they known to be true ? " *Perhaps* they cannot be distinguished.—I should say that Mr. Maclagan, in putting to me the question he does about his classes (4) and (5), is posing the really difficult question ; can *x* have a meaning when I can never know that " this is an *x* "? I wish I could answer it.

* This, if true, explains why theories about the " origins " of our ideas are far from being as inductive as they apparently should be.

The fact is that words like "origin" or "source" and phrases like "how we acquire" are very vague, and may mean many things. Unless we carefully distinguish them we shall fall into confusions. For example, Descartes' division of "ideas" into innate, adventitious, and factitious, seems, if we attempt to eliminate the metaphor from the ways of acquiring property, to rest on no single *fundamentum divisionis*. I suppose that really these expressions are intended to embrace *all* conditions antecedent to our "possession" of a concept: but plainly these conditions are of very various kinds, e.g. we may be given :—

(*a*) Theories about the *agents* (spiritual or material) responsible for my possession of concepts, e.g., myself, God, material objects,

(*b*) Theories about the *operations*, which lead to the "formation" of concepts, e.g., the honest spadework of "abstraction".

(*c*) Theories about the *materials* on which those operations must be conducted, e.g., non-sensuous intuitions, sensa.

(*d*) Theories about the *sources* from which concepts are somehow drawn, e.g., the mind.

(*e*) Theories about the times or *occasions* on which concepts are acquired, e.g., at birth, before birth, on the occasion of sensing *x*.

Probably this list could be extended. I do not see that these questions are anything but confusing, if taken seriously: (*c*) and perhaps (*d*) might be interpreted to make sense. It is strange that we should continue to ask about "concepts" much the same questions about "origins" as were for so long and so fruitlessly asked about sensa.

I should like, then, to ask Mr. Mackinnon and Mr. Maclagan what they are asking when they ask about "the formation" of concepts, or about their "acquisition": and also what is meant by our "having a concept".

III.

The case of " resemblance ", which Mr. Maclagan introduces as one where we are obviously not acquainted in sensation with the object of a concept, is of course a special and difficult case in many ways. Yet it seems to me true to say that I do sense resemblance, though what that means needs explanation.

(1) Mr. Maclagan asks " What *is given in sensation* " ? —an unfortunate way of putting a very easy question, to which the answer must and can only be " Sensa ". What is unfortunate is the word " given " (cp. " *sense-data* ", " the data of sense "). For this suggests (*a*) That something is here " given " us *by* somebody (*b*) That sensa are called " given " in contrast with something which is rather " made " or " taken ", namely, my thoughts : but it is dubious whether there is any sense in which my thoughts *are* in my own control but my sensa *not* so. (*c*) That some *proposition* is " given " to us in sensation as incorrigible, as premisses are " given " in sciences or " data " to the detective : but sensa are *dumb*, and nothing is more surely fatal than to confuse sensing with thinking.

(2) Owing to his " concept " language, Mr. Maclagan seems to try, when presented with any substantive, to find some isolable part of the sensefield which is an instance of it but not of anything else. That is, I admit, vague. Given the sentence " A resembles B ", it seems that Mr. Maclagan says to himself : That means there should be three things to sense, A and B and a resemblance : now we do sense the colours, but we do not sense the resemblance. But surely, speaking carefully, we do not sense " red " and " blue " any more than " resemblance ", (or " qualities " any more than " relations ") : we sense something of which we might say, if we wished to talk about it, that " this is red " : and so we sense something of which we might say, if we wished to talk about it, that " this is similar to that " or " that this red is similar to that red ". If we insist on trying to *say* what we *sense* (which is impossible), we might try saying that " I sense A-resembling-B " : and see if that helps.

(3) There are, I willingly admit, special difficulties about resemblance: but it seems to me that they are not before us—for Mr. Maclagan would, as is shown by his commendation of Locke and others,* say about other "relations", and apparently about *all* of them, precisely what he says about resemblance. "Relations are not sensed". This dogma, held by a very great number and variety of philosophers,† seems to me so odd that, like Mr. Maclagan, I find it difficult to discover arguments. If I say "this dot is to the right of that dot", is it not quaint to say that I am sensing the two dots but not sensing the to the right of? It is true that I cannot say I *do* sense the to the right of: that is not good English—but then nor is it good English to say that I do not sense it, or that I intuite it. I sense what in English is described by means of two demonstrative pronouns and an adverbial phrase. To look for an isolable entity corresponding to the latter is a bad habit encouraged by talk about "concepts". What, I wonder, does Mr. Maclagan say about verbs? If "he is batting the cat", do I sense him and the cat, and intuite relations of batting and of being batted? But perhaps this is unfair: for verbs are only used in this way in unanalysed material-object language.

(4) There are those who hold that "relations" do not have "instances" at all: but Mr. Maclagan, like Mr. Joseph, takes the less extreme view that they do have instances, but not "sensible" ones. For this he has, as he candidly admits, no arguments whatever to adduce. But the difficulty is not so much to argue for the view as

* Does Hume really not allow that *any* "relations" are sensed: for instance, "contiguity"?

† Even by Berkeley, who jeopardised his whole theory by doing so. A pretty anthology might be compiled of the phrases found by philosophers to express their distrust and contempt for relations: "entia semi-mentalia" and what not. I suppose it goes back to Aristotle, who assumes, with the plain man, that "what is real is things", and then adds, grudgingly, "also their qualities", these being somehow inseparable from the things: but he draws the line at relations, which are really too flimsy. I doubt if there is much more behind the prejudice against relations than this: there was not in Leibniz's case, and few have hammered relations so hard as he.

to understand it at all. " The colours " I sense, I do not intuite them : I intuite " the resemblance "—or " their resemblance " ? Or " the resemblance between the two colours " ? Or what exactly ? This " intuition " is a form of acquaintance : and if we can be acquainted with relations *thus*, it seems difficult to see why we should not be acquainted with them in sensation. And there seems the absurdity that we have now separated off " the resemblance " from " the colours " : we have a sensing and simultaneously an intuiting, as we might feel a stab of jealousy while tasting porridge. Even if one is never found without the other, what has the one to do with the other ?

(5) Mr. Maclagan, recognising that there are arguments which tell against him, advances a " purely defensive " argument, based on considerations about " If A then B, if B then C ". Now in the first place there seems to be some muddle about the symbolism here. In any ordinary sense of " if . . . then ", I do not think that the premiss given above will help us at all to answer the question which is asked, viz., " What is required if we are to have C ? " For the premiss tells us about certain *sufficient* conditions for C, whereas the question is about *necessary* conditions for C. Which does Mr. Maclagan mean to talk about ?

Apparently A is to be " the sensing of the colours ", B " the intuiting of the resemblance ", and C " the knowing that the colours resemble ". Now if we interpret " if . . . then " to mean that A is a *sufficient* condition of B, and B of C, it seems impossible to suppose that the " intuiting " (alone) is a *sufficient* condition of the knowing. Surely the sensing is also necessary ? (As a matter of fact, it seems to me quite untrue that even the sensing and the intuiting would necessitate the knowing : in order to *know*, I must also *think about* the objects of acquaintance.*

* Mr. Maclagan permits himself to wonder whether the intuiting (? sensing + intuiting) can really be distinguished from the knowing. But, if it cannot, not merely does Mr. Maclagan abandon one of his original premisses, as he recognises, but also, in our present problem, " B " cannot be distinguished from " C " ; which is frustrating.

However, Mr. Maclagan is not called upon to point this out, since the plain man, against whom he is arguing, overlooks it). On the other hand, in the case of the sensing and intuiting, Mr. Maclagan must mean that the former does necessitate, i.e., is a *sufficient* condition of, the latter: for he is arguing that the plain man is able to say that "sensing is the sole necessary condition of knowing", because, though as a matter of fact the intuiting is *also* a necessary condition, the sensing does of itself necessitate the intuiting.

It seems to me, therefore, that the symbolism here is merely confusing: "if . . . then" cannot mean the same in the case of A and B as in the case of B and C. Moreover, I am very much in the dark as to what really are the relations between the sensing and the intuiting, the intuiting and the knowing. "Condition" and "necessitation" are words which may refer to entailment, or again to natural causation: is it in either of these senses that the sensing necessitates the intuiting, or that the intuiting is necessary to the knowing? I should doubt whether in either case "necessary" is being used in either of these familiar senses; and further, whether it is being used in the same sense in each case.

Clearly, what we are most concerned with is the sense in which the sensing necessitates the intuiting. Mr. Maclagan distinguishes the case of "resemblance" from that of "straightness", in that in the former the intuiting is "logically inseparable" from the sensing, whereas in the latter the intuiting is "psychologically conditioned" by the sensing. These *look*, from the words used, rather like "entailment" and "natural causation" respectively: but whatever may be true in the case of "straightness", I do not see, in the case of resemblance, how one event can *entail* another, so that "logically inseparable" entirely eludes me. If Mr. Maclagan says it is obscure, we may remember how obscure the "intuiting" itself is, and be content to note one more example of the high differential fertility of obscurities.

Further, Mr. Maclagan holds that other relations are

in the same case as " resemblance " : if so, then other relations between our two colours will also be intuited, and these intuitings will also be necessitated by the sensing of the " colours ". What I wonder about, is : do I, as soon as I " sense the colours ", eo ipso intuite *all* these relations (and know them ?) ? For example, suppose I do know that these two colours are similar : then I must have " sensed the colours ", for I have had the intuition of resemblance. Now if I have " sensed the colours ", I have presumably *already had* " intuitions " about which is the lighter, etc., those being inseparable from the sensing. Yet it seems clear to me I may very well know the two colours are similar and yet, if asked which is lighter, have to look back at them again. Why so, on Mr. Maclagan's theory ?

Mr. Maclagan notices, but does not attempt to defend himself against, other arguments drawn from the plain man, viz., that he says he " sees " or " hears " resemblances, and says things are " sensibly " alike or different. These facts seem to me important, and I think the plain man would quite rightly persevere in these assertions. I have heard it said that it is odd to talk of " *smelling* a resemblance": and certainly it is well to consider other senses than that of sight. But it is not odd to talk of smelling two similar smells, or two smells which are sensibly alike (though, the plain man might well ask, how could they be alike *except* sensibly ?). And if I were forced to say either " I smell the resemblance " or " I intuite it ", I know which I should choose. The plain dog would, I am sure, say it smelled resemblances : but no doubt your philosophical dog would persuade itself that it " inhaled " them.

Similar considerations hold also in the case of other " relations " : plain men say " this *tastes* sweeter than that " or " this *sounds* louder than that ".* In the case of such " relations " as these, indeed, I can scarcely conjecture what it is that Mr. Maclagan would try to persuade me I really mean. Later on, Mr. Maclagan comes to discuss

* Very plain men will say " I hear this louder than that ".

" louder " and says it is a " comparative word " : I wonder whether " louder than " is a " relation " which has to be intuited? Surely, in such cases as these, it is evident that sentences containing " relation " words describe what we sense in precisely the same way as sentences containing " quality " words? For it is difficult to decide which sort of word " loud " is.

(6) I agree with Mr. Maclagan that, on his view of " resemblance ", a non-sensuous acquaintance with the particular instance would occur, to which nothing similar would occur in the case of " redness ". But he seems to hold that, even if I am to say " this is red ", *some* non-sensuous acquaintance (or " awareness ") must occur : apparently because, in order to name this colour red, I must institute a certain " comparison ". I am not sure what this means. I agree that, in many cases, where I say e.g., " this is puce ", I have compared the present sensum with some " pattern ", perhaps a memory-image of the flea, but in any case an entity of the same kind as the sensum itself. Now this seems to me to require no non-sensuous acquaintance with anything : but I realise that Mr. Maclagan may think it does, because, when I compare the present image with the pattern, I must notice that they *resemble*. Is it, then, that he thinks an intuition *of resemblance* is needed even if I am to say " this is red "? At least this rather qualifies his original statement that " I sense the colours ". However, I am not sure he does mean this : he does not state *with what* I " compare " the sensum, and perhaps he is thinking that I compare the sensum *with* something which is the object of a non-sensuous awareness, e.g., the universal " redness ", (though it would be surprising to find ourselves " acquainted " with universals, Mr. Maclagan is prepared to allow the possibility for the sake of argument). I should like, then, to know what non-sensuous acquaintance Mr. Maclagan has here in mind.