Some Main Problems of Philosophy

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Foreword

WHEN I URGED PROFESSOR MOORE to publish these lectures which he gave some forty years ago he said to me "But surely they are out of date." Certainly they are out of date. Moore's own work in philosophy over these forty years is by itself enough to render them out of date. Anyone hearing these lectures at the time they were given might have guessed that they would soon be out of date. For in these lectures philosophy is done with a directness and honesty and incisiveness which at once gives hope that we may, working with Moore, soon cut a way out of the jungle into the light. It is the same hope we felt when we read what we still read—Moore's *Principia Ethica* and his *Philosophical Studies*. That hope was justified.

Amongst the problems which agitate philosophers there are two which, I think, strike the non-philosopher as especially remote, as typically frivolous. They are the problem of the external world and the problem of general ideas.

When the philosopher asks "Do we really know what things are good and what are bad?", when he asks "What is goodness?" the plain man sympathizes. When the philosopher asks "Do we really know of the existence of mind?" "How do we know the past?" "What do we mean when we speak of consciousness or of what no longer exists?" the plain man may still manage to sympathize. But when the philosopher asks "Do we really know that there is bread here and now in our mouths?" "What do we mean when we speak of chairs and tables?" then the whole thing is apt to seem ridiculous to the plain man.

And when the philosopher then asks "What is it to mean anything?" "What is it to have a general idea of anything?" "What is it to have a universal before the mind, to notice its presence in something before one?" "What is it for a quality to be present in this and also in that?" then to the plain man it seems that the philosopher is getting himself into a difficulty by asking for the reduction to something more simple of what couldn't be simpler.

Moore manages to present these central, limiting, typical problems in such a way that the reader in spite of himself begins to feel them. And without this feeling of the difficulty

being now hearing the noise of a brass-band—has no being; and surely we do know quite well, though we may not be able to define, the exact relation between the belief and the fact, which we thus express by saying that this particular fact is *the* fact to which that particular belief *refers*?

Chapter 15

True and False Beliefs

DISCUSSION OF CHAPTER 14 shewed that it was not quite clear to everyone in exactly what sense I was using the word "belief." So I should like first of all to try to make this clear. A difficulty seemed to be felt because I implied that we might and did commonly *believe* things, even when we were not quite certain or sure about them; and it was suggested that some people, at all events, would never say that they believed a thing, unless they meant that they were quite certain of it. Now it seems to me that in ordinary life we all do constantly make a distinction between merely believing a thing and being quite sure of it; and I will give an instance of the sort of occasion on which we do make this distinction. Suppose two friends of mine are talking about me, at the time of year when people go away for their holidays, and one of them asks: "Is Moore still in London, or has he gone away for his holidays?" Surely the other might quite naturally reply, "I *believe* he is still in London, but I am not quite sure." Surely such language is one of the commonest possible occurrences; and everybody would understand what was meant by it. That is to say, we constantly have cases, where a man quite definitely says: I *do believe* a thing, but I am *not* quite sure of it; and we all of us, I think, understand quite well the distinction between the two states of mind referred to, the one called *merely* "believing" and the other called "being sure," and we know that the first may and does constantly occur, where the second is absent. It is easy to multiply similar instances quite indefinitely. For instance, you may ask a member of your family: Has the postman come yet this morning? and get the

answer: I believe he has, but I'm not quite sure. And you would never suspect that the person who gave this answer was using words out of their proper senses, or was not stating truly what was the state of his own mind. He *does* really "believe," in a quite ordinary sense of the word, that the postman has come; and yet it is equally true, that though he does believe it, he is *not* quite sure of it. Or you may go into a shop and ask: Has the parcel I ordered this morning been sent off yet? and the shopman may reply: "I believe it has, sir, but I am not quite sure. Shall I enquire?" Have you not constantly heard people say things like this; and don't you constantly say them yourselves? I don't know how to convince you how excessively common this distinction between "believing" and "being certain" is, if these instances are not sufficient.

But I should be exceedingly surprised if there is a single one of you, who does not, in fact, constantly use language in this way—constantly say and say quite truly, that he does "believe" a thing, of which he is *not* quite sure. I think, therefore, that so far as I applied the name "belief" to a state of mind *different* from that of absolute certainty, I was using the word perfectly correctly and in one of its very commonest senses. But then it was suggested that, if "belief" is thus to be used as a name for something short of absolute certainty, there is no difference between such belief and mere imagination. And here again it is, I think, easy to show that, as a mere question of *language* there is a distinction; that we do, in fact, often distinguish between the two. And this may be shown in the following way. Consider again the first instance I gave; where one friend of mine asks another, "Is Moore still in London, or has he gone away for his holidays?" In such a case as this, it is, I think, quite plain that the person asked does, in a sense, imagine *both* alternative—*both* my being in London, and my being gone away—he conceives them both, has them both before his mind; and yet in spite of this, he certainly may "believe" the one and *not* believe the other. Instead of saying, as I first supposed: "I believe he is still in London, but I'm not quite sure," he might answer equally naturally, "I *don't* believe he has gone away, but I'm not quite sure." That is to say, we certainly do say, and say quite truly that we *don't* believe things which nevertheless we are imagining or conceiving, even when we are using "belief" as a name for something short of absolute certainty. This shews quite

clearly that we do, in common life, very often use the name "belief" as a name for something *intermediate,* in a sense between mere imagination on the one side and certainty on the other. Just as we often "believe," when we are not quite sure; so we often imagine, when we neither believe in this sense, *nor* are quite sure. It is, therefore, absolutely certain that there are common senses of the words "belief" and "imagination," in which you may imagine a thing, which nevertheless you *don't* believe. But this, of course, does not settle *what* the difference is; it does not settle whether the difference between belief and imagination is a difference of *kind* or merely a difference of *degree.* And I think some people would be inclined to say that the difference is merely one of *degree*: that, when for instance my friend says he believes I am still in London, and *doesn't* believe that I have gone away, and is certainly imagining both alternatives, the only real difference between his attitude to the alternative which he says he believes and his attitude to the one he says he does not believe, consists in the fact that he imagines the former more strongly or more vividly. It might be suggested, that is to say, that, when in common language we make a distinction between belief which falls short of certainty and imagination, that is only because we restrict the word "belief" to imagination which reaches a certain degree of vividness. Thus Hume suggested that the only distinction between belief and imagination lay merely in the degree of vividness; and I think a good many people would still be inclined to agree with him. And against *this* view I think it is not quite easy to find absolutely conclusive arguments. The best I can find are as follows. Take again the case where my friend believes that I am still in London, and doesn't believe that I have gone away for my holidays. So far as I can see, he might quite well be imagining both alternatives *equally* vividly, in spite of the fact that he believes the one and *dis*believes the other. Can anyone profess to be at all certain that this mightn't be the case? Indeed, so far as I can see, he might imagine the alternative which he doesn't believe *more* vividly than the one which he does. The hypothesis that I had gone away for my holidays might be the more interesting one, and he might, therefore, imagine it more vividly, in spite of the fact that he believed the other. And similarly when we imagine two alternative events, which may possibly happen to us in the future, we may desire very strongly that

the one should happen rather than the other, and may imagine the one which we desire very much more vividly, and yet all the time we may not believe that it will happen, and may believe that the other one, which we don't desire and don't imagine nearly as vividly, *will* happen instead. It may be said that when we desire a thing very strongly, we can hardly help having *some* degree of belief that it will happen, and that therefore in this case it isn't true to say that we absolutely *don't* believe that it will happen. But even if this be so, it is, I think, certainly the case that we often have less belief—believe less strongly in the thing which we imagine the more vividly; so that the degree of belief *doesn't* coincide with the degree of vividness of imagination; whence it would follow that belief can't differ from *imagination merely* in degree.

It seems to me that if anyone denies this—if anyone maintains that where we have two alternatives both before the mind, and believe one and don't believe the other, or believe one more strongly than the other, the one which we believe or believe most strongly is *always* the one which we imagine the more vividly, the burden of proof rests upon him. It is by no means obvious that it is *always* so. And the case seems to me to be stronger still, if instead of comparing two alternatives, both of which are before the mind on the same occasion, we compare a case of disbelief which occurs at one time, with a case of belief which occurs at another. When I am reading a novel, I often imagine much more vividly the events which the author suggests to me, than I do imagine *now* this historical proposition that William the Conqueror came to England in 1066. Yet even when I am reading the novel, I very often don't believe in the events which I imagine so vividly, whereas I do now believe that William the Conqueror came to England in 1066. For these reasons I think it is pretty certain that the difference between belief and mere imagination is *not* merely one of degree.

There may, of course, be a similar doubt as to whether belief differs in degree only or also *in kind* from *being sure.* And here, we have, I think, to make a distinction. It is quite certain that even where we *feel* quite sure of a thing, we are sometimes mistaken; and hence I should say that mere *feeling sure* does only differ in degree from mere belief: that it is merely a name for a high degree of belief. And if therefore "being sure" or "being certain" is used merely as equivalent

to *feeling sure,* as it sometimes is; then in that case being sure would also differ from belief only in degree. But the words *being* sure or *being* certain are sometimes used as equivalent to *knowing,* and here, it seems to me, we have not only a difference of degree but also of kind. The obvious difference between mere believing and knowing, is that you can't properly be said to *know* that a thing is so, if in fact it is not so—if you are mistaken about it. So long as you merely believe a thing, however certain of it you may feel, it is always possible you may be mistaken, whereas so soon as you *know* a thing, if you ever do, it is *never* possible you may be mistaken: and this is not a mere difference of degree but also of kind. It seems to me, however, that even where we do *know* that a thing is so, if we ever do, we always do have towards it a high degree of the very same attitude of mind, which constitutes mere belief: so that where we know we always *are* believing, though not *merely* believing; something else is happening as well which constitutes the difference in kind between belief and knowledge. We might, therefore, say that when we *know* that a thing is so (if we ever do) our knowledge consists in feeling sure that it is so, *together with* something else as well. And hence I am going to use the word "belief" as a name for an attitude of mind, which is present even in knowledge, but is also present, where we don't know but may be mistaken, in all sorts of different degrees down from *feeling sure* to merely imagining. Perhaps this attitude is always present in *some* degree even in mere imagination; only, if it is, then we should have to say that we are believing a thing to some extent, even when we most strongly disbelieve it; since however strongly we may disbelieve it, we certainly are imagining or conceiving it. I am inclined, therefore, to think that it is *not* present always in mere imagination. But it seems to me it *is* present in some cases, where the degree of it is so slight, that we should hardly say we believed. Where a man says "I am inclined to believe," and implies therefore that he *doesn't* actually believe, I think he really has towards the thing he says he is inclined to believe, exactly the same attitude of mind *in a very slight degree,* which, if it were a little stronger, he would express by saying that he "believed." I am, therefore, going to depart from common usage so far as to call such cases, cases of a very slight degree or belief; and also so far as to say that we *do* believe, though we don't *only* believe,

but something else as well, even when we know. But those are, I think, the only departures from common usage in my use of the term.

So much, then, as to what I mean by "belief." And now I want to return to the question as to the difference between true and false belief; it being understood that false belief is a thing which can only occur in cases of *mere* belief, as distinguished from knowledge.

And as to the distinction between true and false belief, I can, I think, to begin with, state more clearly now the main points which I wanted to make last time.

Suppose that (to take the instance I gave just now) my friend believes that I *have* gone away for my holidays. There is, I think, no doubt whatever that there is a least *one* ordinary sense of the words "true" and "false," such that the following statements hold. We should, I think, certainly say, in the first place, that if this belief of his is *true* then I *must* have gone away for my holidays; his belief that I have gone away can't be true unless I actually have gone away: and, conversely, we should also say that *if* I *have* gone away, then this belief of his certainly *is* true; *if* I have gone away, and he believes that I have, then his belief can't be other than true. In other words, my having actually gone away for my holidays is both a *necessary* and a *sufficient* condition for the truth of this belief: the belief can't be true unless this condition is fulfilled, and it *must* be true, *if* this condition is fulfilled. Surely it is quite plain that at least one sense, in which we commonly use the word "truth," is of such a nature that these statements are correct. And similarly we may, I think, make the following statements as to the conditions which are necessary and sufficient, if this belief is to be false. We can say: That if this belief is *false,* then I *can't* have gone away for my holidays; the belief that I have gone away can't possibly be false, *if* I *have* gone away: and, conversely, *if* I have not gone away, then the belief that I *have* gone away certainly *must* be false; if I have *not* gone away, and he believes that I *have,* his belief certainly is false. In other words, my *not* having actually gone away is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the falsehood of this belief. The belief can't be false, unless this condition is fulfilled, and it *must* be false, *if* this condition is fulfilled. It is surely quite plain that one sense at least, in which we use the word "false," is, of such a nature,

that these statements are correct. I don't know that anyone would dispute this much, and I don't well see how it can be disputed.

We have, therefore, found a condition which is both necessary and sufficient for the truth of this belief, in at least one sense of the word "truth," and also a condition which is both necessary and sufficient for its falsehood, in at least one sense of the word "false." If, therefore, we are to find a correct definition of these senses of the words "true" and "false" it must be a definition which does not conflict with the statement that these conditions are necessary and sufficient conditions. But the statement that these conditions are necessary and sufficient does not in itself *constitute* a definition. And I think that part of the trouble about the definition of truth and falsehood arises from the fact that people are apt to suppose that they do. We may be easily tempted to make the following assertion. We may assert: "To say that the belief that I have gone away is *true,* is *the same thing* as to say that I have gone away: this is the very definition of what we *mean* by saying that the belief is true." We should, in fact, in ordinary language, say that the two statements do *come to the same thing;* that the one amounts to exactly the same thing as the other. And what we *mean* by this is, of course true. The two statements do really come to the same thing, in the sense we mean. That is to say, they are strictly equivalent: provided that my friend's belief exists at all, neither can be true, unless the other is true too; neither of the facts expressed, can be a fact, unless the other is a fact also. But nevertheless it is, I think, quite plain that the two facts in question are not strictly speaking the same fact; and that to assert the one is not, strictly speaking, the same thing as to assert the other. When we assert: "The belief that I have gone away is true," we mean to assert that this belief has some property, which it shares with other true beliefs: the possession by it of this property is the fact asserted. But in merely asserting "I have gone away," we are not attributing any property at all to this belief—far less a property which it shares with other true beliefs. We are merely asserting a fact, which might quite well be a fact, even if no one believed it at all. Plainly I might have gone away, without my friend believing that I had; and if so, his belief would not be true, simply because it would not exist. In asserting, then, that his belief is true, I am asserting a different fact from that which I assert when I merely say that I have gone away. To say that his belief is true is *not,* therefore, strictly speaking, the same thing as to say that I have gone away.

What property is there, then, which this belief, if true, really does share with other true beliefs? Well, it seems to me we can see quite plainly that this belief, if true, has to the fact that I have gone away a certain relation, which that particular belief has to no other fact. This relation, as I admitted and tried to shew last time, is difficult to define, in the sense of analysing it: I didn't profess to be able to analyse it. But we do, I think, see this relation; we are all perfectly familiar with it; and we can, therefore, define it in the sense of pointing out what relation it is, by simply pointing out that it is *the* relation which does hold between this belief, if true, and this fact, and does not hold between this belief and any other fact. Surely you are aware of a relation which would hold between the belief that I had gone away, if true, and the fact that I had gone away—a relation which would hold, between that belief, if true, and that particular fact, and would not hold between that belief and any other fact—a relation which is expressed as I pointed out last time by the partial identity of name between the belief and the fact in question. *The* relation I mean is the relation which the belief "*that I have gone away,*" if true, has to the fact "*that I have gone away,*" and to no other fact; and which is expresed by the circumstance that the name of the belief is "The belief that I have gone away" while the name of the fact is "That I have gone away." We may take different views as to what the exact nature of this relation is—as to how it is to be analysed, and as to how it resembles or differs from other relations; but in merely attempting to answer these questions, we do, I think, presuppose that we are already acquainted with it—that we have it before our minds; for you cannot try to determine the nature of, or to compare with other things, a thing which you have not got before your mind. Well, it seems to me that the difficulty of *defining* truth and falsehood arises chiefly from the fact that this relation, though we are all acquainted with it, has no unambiguous name; it has no *name* which is just appropriated to it alone, and which may not also be used for other relations, which are perhaps quite different from it. The moment we do give it a name, it becomes, I think, quite easy to define truth and

falsehood. Let us give it a name and see how the definition turns out. I propose to call it the relation of "correspondence." Only, in giving it this name it must be remembered that I mean by "correspondence" merely this particular relation which does hold between this particular belief, if true, and the fact that I have gone away, and which does not hold between that precise belief and any other fact. The name "correspondence" is perhaps used also on other occasions for other relations quite different from this; and I don't mean for a moment to suggest that this relation for which I am using it now either resembles or is different from these other relations in any respect whatever. It must be clearly understood that I mean to use the name "correspondence" *merely* as a name for *this* particular relation. Well then, using the name "correspondence" *merely* as a name for this relation, we can at once assert "To say that this belief is true is to say that there is in the Universe *a* fact to which it corresponds; and that to say that it is false is to say that there is *not* in the Universe any fact to which it corresponds." And this statement I think, fulfils all the requirements of a definition—a definition of what we actually mean by saying that the belief is true or false. For the properties which we have now identified with truth and "falsehood" respectively *are* properties which this belief may *share* with other true and false beliefs. We have said that to say it is true is merely to say that it does correspond to a fact; and obviously this *is* a property which may be common to it and other beliefs. The shopman's belief, for instance, that the parcel we ordered this morning has been sent off, may have the property of corresponding to a fact, just as well as this belief that I have gone away may have it. And the same is true of the property which we have now identified with the falsehood of the belief. The property which we have identified with its falsehood is merely that of not corresponding to any fact; and obviously this is a property which may belong to any number of other beliefs just as well as to this one. Moroever it follows from these definitions that the conditions which we saw to be necessary and sufficient for the truth or falsehood of this belief *are* necessary and sufficient for it: there is not only no conflict between these definitions and the statement that these conditions are necessary and sufficient, but it actually follows from the definitions that they are so. For as we have seen the relation which we are calling

"correspondence," is a relation which *does* hold between the belief "that I have gone away," if true, and the fact that I have gone away, and which does not hold between this belief and any other fact whatever. And hence it follows that if this belief does correspond to a fact at all, then it must *be a fact* that I have gone away: that is to say, if the belief does correspond to a fact, then I *must* have gone away; the belief can't correspond to a fact, unless I have. And conversely it also follows, that *if* I have gone away, then the belief does correspond to a fact: if I have gone away, the belief *must correspond* to a fact; it can't be the case that I have gone away, and that yet the belief corresponds to no fact. It follows actually therefore, from this definition of truth, that the condition which we saw to be both necessary and sufficient for the truth of this belief is necessary and sufficient for it. And in the same way it follows from our definition of falsehood that the condition which we saw to be necessary and sufficient for its falsehood *is* necessary and sufficient for it. The only point as to which I can see any room for doubt whether these definitions do fulfill all the requirements of a definition of the words "true" and "false" as we should apply them to this particular belief, is that it may be doubted whether when we say that the belief is "true" or "false," these properties of "corresponding to a fact" and "not corresponding to a fact" are the properties which we actually *have before our minds* and express by those words. This is a question which can only be settled by actual inspection; and I admit that it is difficult to be quite sure what result the inspection yields. But I see no reason for answering it in the negative. I see no reason why when we say: The belief that I have gone away is true, the thought which we actually have before our minds and express by these words should *not* be the thought that: The belief in question does correspond to a fact—similary I see no reason why when we say "The belief that I have gone away is false" the thought which we actually have before our minds and express by these words should *not* be the thought that the belief in question does *not* correspond to any fact. However, whether *this* is so or not—whether to say that this belief is true is or is not quite strictly the *same* thing as to say that it does correspond to a fact; it is, I think, quite certain that the two expressions are strictly equivalent. When the belief is true, it certainly does correspond to a fact; and when it corresponds to a fact it cer-

tainly is true. And similarly when it is false, it certainly does not correspond to any fact; and when it does not correspond to any fact, then certainly it is false.

I want to suggest, therefore, that these definitions really are correct definitions at least of *one* common sense of the words "true" and "false": of the sense in which we use the words when we apply them to beliefs such as the one I have taken as an instance. And the only thing that is new about these definitions, so far as I know, is that they assign a perfectly strict and definite sense to the word "correspondence"; they define this word by pointing out *the* relation for which it stands; namely *the* relation which certainly does hold between the belief that "I have gone away," if that belief is true, and the *fact* that I have gone away, and which does *not* hold between that precise belief and any other fact. That there *is* such a relation, seems to me clear; and all that is new about my definitions is that they concentrate attention upon just *that* relation, and make *it* the essential point in the definitions of truth and falsehood. The use of the word "correspondence" as a name for this relation may perhaps be misleading; and so may the word I used instead last time—the word "referring to." Both these words may lead you to think that the relation in question is similar to or identical with other relations that are called by the same names on other occasions. And I am particularly anxious not to suggest either that this relation is identical with or similar to any other relation or that it is not: I don't want to pronounce upon that point at all. I don't want therefore, to insist upon the word "correspondence." The essential point is to concentrate attention upon the relation *itself*: to hold it before your mind, in the sense in which when I name the colour "vermilion," you can hold before your mind the colour that I mean. If you are not acquainted with this relation in the same sort of way as you are acquainted with the colour vermilion, no amount of words will serve to explain what it is, any more than they could explain what vermilion is like to a man born blind. But, if I am right then we are all acquainted with the relation in question; and, if so, then the important point is that it is this relation itself, and not any words by which we may try to name it or to point it out, that is essential to the definition of truth and falsehood.

But now I have only claimed so far that the definitions I have given are correct definitions, or at least equivalents, for

one of the senses in which we commonly use the words "true" and "false," when we apply them to beliefs. And I will drop the contention that they are actually definitions—that they are even what we actually *mean* when we say of a belief that it is true or that it is false. I don't profess to be sure that they are definitions in this sense, though, I think they are, and the important point seems to me to be merely that they *are* equivalents. All that I claim then so far is that, very often, when we say that a belief is true, a necessary and sufficient condition for its being so is simply this—that it should correspond to a fact: in the precise sense I have tried to explain. *If* it does correspond to a fact, then it is true in the sense we mean and if it does *not* correspond to a fact, then it is not true in the sense we mean. But, of course, it might be said, that though this is very often the case, it is not *always* so, and that for two different reasons. It might be said, in the first place, that in the case of absolutely *every* belief there is some other sense of the word "true" in which it may be true, in spite of not corresponding to any fact; and similarly, that there is some other sense of the word "true" such that a belief may fail to be "true" in the sense in question even though it *does* correspond to a fact. This is one thing which might be said; and I am willing to allow that this may be the case. Indeed, as I shall presently explain, I think it is the case: I think that some beliefs may be true, *in a sense,* without corresponding to any fact; though I am inclined to think that this is only the case with some beliefs, not with all. And though I see no reason to think that there is any sense at all, in which a belief, which does correspond to a fact, can fail to be true; I am willing to admit that this also *may* be the case. This, then is one view which might be taken, and which I am not anxious to dispute. And another view which might be taken is that in the case of some beliefs, it is absolutely impossible that they should correspond to any fact in the sense I have explained and that yet they may be true. And this also I am willing to admit may be the case, though I know of no instance where it does seem absolutely impossible that a true belief should correspond to a fact. I have only mentioned these two views because I want to make it quite plain that I am not particularly concerned to dispute them. All that I am anxious to maintain is that *very often* when we say that a belief is true, the belief in question has the property which we mean to

ascribe to it and which we express by the word "true," if and only if it corresponds to a fact. That is the whole point of my theory of truth. And the main recommendation of this theory seems to me to lie in the fact that it does take account of and does not conflict with many millions of the most obvious facts. One such obvious fact is that my friend's belief that I have gone away for the holidays certainly will be true, in one common sense of the word, *if* and only if I actually have gone away. Another such obvious fact is that the shopman's belief that the parcel I ordered this morning has been sent off, will be true, in one common sense of the word, if and only if the parcel actually has been sent off. And obviously, if you chose, you could think of many millions of other instances as obvious as these. In millions of instances then it seems quite plain that a belief is true, in one common sense of the word, *if* and only if there is in the Universe a fact having the same name as that which we use in describing the belief—a fact standing to the belief in that peculiar relation in which the facts I have named in these two instances would obviously stand to the beliefs in question, if the beliefs were true—in short the relation which I have called "correspondence." It seems to me that the great defect to some other theories of truth and falsehood is that they seem to conflict with these millions of obvious facts; and I will mention two such theories which many people seem inclined to hold just now, in order to point out exactly how and why they do seem to me to conflict with them.

The first theory I wish to mention is a theory—or perhaps rather a whole set of different theories, which are advocated by some philosophers who call themselves "Pragmatists." The sort of thing that Pragmatists say, when they talk about truth, is that the essence of true beliefs, as distinguished from false ones, is that true beliefs "work." I say this is the *sort* of thing they say, because they don't always say exactly this, but sometimes other things different from and even incompatible with it; and that is one reason why I think we can hardly talk of any one theory of truth held by Pragmatists, but rather of a whole set of different theories. And another reason is that they leave it very vague, as to what they mean by saying that a belief "works," and when they do try to explain, they often give quite different explanations in different places: sometimes they seem to say that to "work" is the same thing as to be

"useful," sometimes that to "work" means to lead up to some kind of satisfaction, sometimes that it means to lead, in the long run, to some kind of satisfaction, and so on. However, I think we may say, roughly, that by saying that a belief "works," they do always mean that it leads up to some kind of satisfactory effect, though, of course, they might define the kind of satisfactory effect, that is necessary differently in different places. Well then, it seems to me that Pragmatists often talk as if beliefs were true, if and *only* if they lead up to the right kind of satisfactory effect (whatever that may be) and as if no other condition were necessary for a belief to be true: some of them, perhaps, would not say that they meant this: they might say that they only meant it to apply to certain kinds of beliefs, or that they only meant it to apply to one sense of the word "truth." And it seems to me there are objections to their view, even if this were all that they meant. But I am not now concerned with this particular form of Pragmatism; if anyone holds it. It seems to me they certainly often talk as if their theory applied to *truth* in general, and as if, therefore, provided only that a belief led up to the right kind of satisfactory effect, it would always be "true," in every sense of the word, no matter what kind of belief it was. But you see what this implies. It implies that my friend's belief that I had gone away for my holidays, might be true in every sense of the word, even if I had *not* gone away: that it would be thus *true,* provided only it led up to certain kinds of satisfactory results. And similarly, of course, in millions of other instances. It implies in short, that it is quite unnecessary for any belief to correspond to a fact, in the sense which I have defined, in order that it should be "true"; and that any belief may be true in every sense of the word, *without* doing this. And that they so often seem to imply this seems to me to be the most fundamental objection to what Pragmatists *say* about truth. Whether any of them would say that they actually meant this, I don't know: I am inclined to think some of them would. But whether they would or not, it is, I think, certainly a view which they often have before their minds and are actually believing whether or not they know that they are. That is to say, they do, I think, really often hold that a belief like that of my friend's that I have gone away for my holidays, might be "true," in *every* important sense of the word, even if I had *not* gone away.

But perhaps it should be said, in fairness to them, that they seem sometimes to mean something quite different from this —something which, though it is quite different, they don't seem to distinguish very clearly from it. And I want to mention this other view, because it brings out a point about which there is very liable to be confusion. I have already explained that all that I am really anxious to maintain is that in millions of instances and in one of the commonest and most important senses of the word "truth" a belief is true, always if *and only* if it corresponds to a fact. That is to say I am only maintaining that this property of correspondence to a fact is a *criterion* or test of truth; not that it is the very meaning of the word "truth"—its actual definition—though I am inclined to think that it is this, too. By a criterion or test of truth, we mean, then, a property which is always present, where truth is present, and never present where truth is not present; so that if we could discover in any particular instance whether the property in question did or did not belong to a belief, we should be able to judge from this, whether the belief was or was not true. The question as to what are the criteria or tests of truth is, of course, a question which has been much discussed by philosophers, and ever so many different criteria have been suggested. And the point I want to emphasize is that it is, of course, abstractly possible, that there may be ever so many *different* criteria, all equally good ones: that there are, in short, ever so many different properties, each of which belongs to every true belief and only to true beliefs. Well, one thing which Pragmatists seem sometimes to mean is merely that the property they talk of—the property of leading to some kind of satisfactory effect—is a *criterion* of truth. And, of course, so far as this was all they meant, their theory would not be open to the objection I just urged against it. Merely to say this would not imply that a belief might be true, even if it did not correspond to any fact. It would only imply that every belief which did lead to the right kind of satisfactory result did *also* correspond to a fact. And this, I think, is one conclusion which they actually often want to draw from their theory. They want to convince us that, wherever a belief does lead to certain kinds of satisfactory result, then it *does* correspond to a fact. And, of course, to this theory—the theory that the leading to certain kinds of satisfactory results is a *test* of truth, the objections are quite different: I shall presently have to consider them, in connection with another

subject. What I want to emphasize now is how completely different this theory is, from the other one which I also attributed to them. This one merely says: The property of leading to satisfactory results always goes with the property of corresponding to a fact: wherever you have the one property you also do in fact have the other. Whereas the former one said: wherever this property of leading to satisfactory results belongs to a belief, that belief is *true, even if it does not correspond to any fact.*

So much for the Pragmatists' theory of truth. And the second theory about truth which I wish to mention because it seems to me to conflict with millions of obvious facts, is a theory which is, I think, held by Mr. Bradley among others. The theory I mean is merely a theory *about* truth and falsehood. It does not profess to give a *definition* of them, nor even a *criterion* of them. It merely lays down a universal proposition about true and false beliefs; and the proposition it lays down is this. It says: "Absoutely every belief, without exception, is *both* partially true, and *also* partially false; no belief is *wholly* true, and none is *wholly* false; but absolutely all are *partially* both."

Now this statement is, I think, for some reason or other, fearfully difficult to discuss. It seems to be extremely difficult to state the objections to it quite cleary and conclusively; and I am sure there must be some better way of doing it than any that I have found. The difficulty is, I think, first that it doesn't seem quite obviously, as it stands, to contradict any clear facts; and it is also very difficult to find any argument to shew quite clearly that it does. You might, indeed, take a partciular instance of a belief such as I have taken: Suppose that I have gone away for my holidays, and that my friend believes that I have. It is quite plain, as we have seen, that this belief would, in such a case, be true in one common sense of the words: and I will call this the ordinary sense. Well, then, taking this as a belief which is true in the ordinary sense: we might ask: Is this belief really only partially true? Is is really partially false? And you might be disposed to say that, quite obviously the belief in question is not partially false, that it is *wholly* true. And I must admit this does seem to me fairly obvious. If I have gone away for my holidays, and what my friend believes is just that I have gone away—that and nothing more, it does seem fairly obvious that his belief is *wholly* true. And it also seems obvious that such a case might occur.

It *might* be a fact that I had gone away for my holidays; surely this is a thing which might be in the Universe: and it might also be a fact that my friend believed it. You might, therefore, say: "Here we have a case of a belief or a sort which certainly does constantly occur which is *not* partially false. And this alone is sufficient to refute the statement that *all* beliefs are partially false."

And of course millions of other instances could be found which are *as* evident as this one. But I'm afraid this argument, as it stands, certainly wouldn't be convincing to any one who is inclined to hold Mr. Bradley's doctrine: and, I think, we must own that it isn't perfectly satisfactory: it doesn't put the matter in the clearest light. I want, therefore, to try to give another argument. And what I want to try to shew is this. It is plain that anybody who says these things: who says: Every belief is partially false must mean *something* by the word "false." And what I want to shew is that, *if* he is using the word "false" in what I have called the *ordinary* sense, then, if *his* view that every belief is partially false were true, it would follow that absolutely every belief is wholly false in the same sense. If *all* beliefs were partially false, it does, I think, follow that all are *wholly* false. And hence it follows that there can never be any such fact as my having gone away for my holidays, or even as my being in London now. If any one believes that I am not in London now his belief must be *wholly* false because it can't be a fact that I am not in London. This, I think, is the conclusion which really follows from Mr. Bradley's doctrine. And I am not sure that he himself would not accept this conclusion. But to talk, as he does, as if this belief were *partially* true certainly serves to conceal the fact that this conclusion does follow. It serves to conceal the fact that in reality his doctrine is that *every* belief is, in the ordinary sense of the word, *wholly* false. And, I think, the doctrine owes its plausibility partly to the fact that this is concealed. What therefore, I want to try to bring out is that this conclusion does follow.

But, in order to do this, we must consider what he can mean by the phrase "partially false," supposing that the word "false" is used in its ordinary sense.

This phase has, I think, undoubtedly one clear meaning; and I think it is clear that some beliefs really *are* partially but not wholly false. The fact is that when we talk of a belief, even when we can express it all in one sentence, the belief

certainly often includes several different beliefs: when we are entertaining the belief, we are believing several different things at the same time, and some of these things may be true. For instance, you may believe that the colour of a dress which you saw in a picture this afternoon was maroon. And when you believe this you may be believing two different things at the same time. You will be believing, in the first place that the colour you saw was identical with the one you are now thinking of, whatever that may be: and of course this is one matter about which you may be right or wrong; a subsequent visit to the picture may convince you that you were mistaken as to this. But in the second place you may also be believing that the colour you are thinking of is what other people would call "maroon"; in other words you may be entertaining a belief about the connection of the colour before your mind with a particular name—the name "maroon." And here again you may be right or wrong: although you may be right in thinking that the colour before your mind is the colour that you saw in the picture, you may be quite wrong in thinking that the right name for this colour is "maroon." I think such cases do constantly occur in which part of your belief at a given time is true and part false, although we should call the whole one belief. But now what I want to call attention to is that in is such a case the whole belief taken as a whole, is just simply false in the ordinary sense of the word. Taking the whole belief to be "that the colour you saw this afternoon is the one you now have before your mind and that the name of this colour is 'maroon'," it is plain that this *whole combination* does not correspond to any fact: there is no such fact as that "the colour before your mind is the one you saw this afternoon and that its name is 'maroon'." Where, therefore, a belief is partially false, the whole belief, *as a whole,* is just simply false, in the ordinary sense of the word: and the only thing that saves it from being *wholly* false, is that a part of it is not false in this sense. But *this* part of it, which is *not* false in the ordinary sense is also a belief. And if therefore, *every* belief were partially false, there could be no part of it which was not just simply false in the ordinary sense. If, therefore, every belief were partially false, it really does follow that *every* belief must be *wholly false*. The only thing that makes it possible for *any* belief to be partially but not wholly false, is that it should have some part which is not even partially false. For it must have some part which is *not* just simply

false, in the ordinary sense of the word. And we have seen that every partially false belief is just simply false in this ordinary sense. So that, if *every* belief were partially false, no belief could have any part at all which was *not* just simply false in the ordinary sense. This is the point on which the whole argument depends; and I am afraid it is not quite an easy one to see. But I think it does prove that if *every* belief were partially false, every belief must also be wholly so.

And what follows from this is that, if Mr. Bradley is using the word "false" in its ordinary sense, then it really does follow from his doctrine that all our beliefs are *wholly* false in this ordinary sense. Of course, if he be using the word in some quite different sense, it might possibly be the case that, *in that sense,* all our beliefs were partially false and none of them wholly so. But if he is only using the word in some other than its ordinary sense, then his doctrine can form no objection to our saying that, *in* the ordinary sense of the word, many of our beliefs are *wholly* true. Indeed what we have seen is that, if any of our beliefs *are* partially false, in the ordinary sense of the word, *some* of them *must* be wholly true: there must be some which are not even partially false. And this point—the point that some of our beliefs are *wholly* true in this ordinary sense, is the point I want to insist on. This ordinary sense is certainly *a* very important sense of the word "true," even if it is not the only important sense of that word. And I think Mr. Bradley does, in fact, mean to deny that any of our beliefs are *wholly* true, even in this ordinary sense. I think he would object to our saying that any of them are wholly true in any sense at all. I think, therefore, that this argument is in fact not merely a defence of my own doctrine, but also an attack on his.

Chapter 16

Being, Fact and Existence

I HAVE BEEN discussing certain questions bearing on the meaning of the words "real" and "true," in the hope of discovering exactly what is the nature of the immensely important properties which are suggested to our minds by

those words. And I want now to remind you what the point was from which we started on those discussions.

I started on them with two different objects. The first was this. We found that Mr. Bradley asserted most emphatically that Time is *not* "real"; while on the other hand he seemed to assert, equally emphatically, that Time *does* "exist," and indubitably *"is."* And in combining these two assertions he certainly does not think that he is contradicting himself and talking nonsense. But he certainly is contradicting himself unless the property which he denotes by the phrase "is real," is a different property from the one which he denotes by the phrases "exists," and "is." And one of my objects was to try to discover whether this is so or not—whether he really has two different properties before his mind when he uses the one word, and when he uses the other two; and, *if* he has, what these two different properties are, and how they differ from one another. This question as to what Mr. Bradley means was one of the two questions which I wished to answer. And the second was this. I wished, partly for its own sake, and partly for the sake of the light it might throw on Mr. Bradley's meaning, to try to answer the question: What do we commonly mean by the five phrases "is real," "exists," "is a fact," "is," and "is true"? What property or properties do those phrases commonly stand for? These two questions—the question as to Mr. Bradley's meaning, and the direct question as to the ordinary meaning of those five phrases—were the two questions I wished to answer. And I hope my discussion may at least have shewn, that there really are great difficulties in answering both questions. There are, in fact, many other difficulties besides the ones which I have pointed out and discussed. But I have already spent much more time on this discussion than I originally intended; and so now I want merely to try to state as clearly and simply as I can what I think is the correct answer to these two questions. Beginning with the question as to the ordinary meaning of the five phrases, I shall try first to point out what seems to me to be the *most important* notions or properties for which they stand; I must confine myself to the *most important,* for I cannot hope to be absolutely exhaustive. And, then, I shall try to state as briefly and clearly as possible what I take to be the real state of Mr. Bradley's mind when he says the things he does say about Time.

The most important difficulty about the meaning of the

five phrases, and the strongest excuse for making a sharp distinction such as Mr. Bradley makes, still seems to me to lie in the fact from which I started—the fact that it seems as if purely imaginary things, even though they be absolutely self-contradictory like a round square, must still have some kind of *being*—must still *be* in a sense—simply because we can think and talk about them. It seems quite clear that, in a sense, there *is* not and cannot be such a thing as a round square: but, if there is not, how can I possibly think and talk about it? And I certainly can think and talk about it. I am doing so now. And not only can I make and believe propositions about it: I can make *true* propositions about it. I know that a round square, if there were such a thing, would be both round and not round: it is a fact that this is so. And now in saying that there is no such thing as a round square, I seem to imply that there *is* such a thing. It seems as if there must *be* such a thing, merely in order that it may have the property of *not* being. It seems, therefore, as if to say of anything whatever that we can mention that it absolutely *is not*, were to contradict ourselves: as if absolutely everything we can mention must *be*, must have some kind of being.

But, if we consider the analogous case of false beliefs, it seems to me to become quite clear that we can think of things which nevertheless are *not*: have no being at all. For instance, one of my friends might be believing of me now, *that I am not in London*. This is a belief which certainly might quite easily be now occurring. And yet there certainly is no such thing as my *not* being now in London. I *am* in London; and that settles the matter. As we have seen, it may be held that, *if* any friend of mine is believing this now, then there *is*, in a sense, such a thing as my *not* being now in London; it may be held that there *must* be such a thing as the object of my friend's belief—the *proposition* which he believes—and that the words "that I am not now in London" are a name for this proposition, which undoubtedly *is*. And I don't mean now to dispute this view, though as I said, I don't think it is true. Let us grant that it *is* true. Even if it is true, it remains a fact that *one* thing, which those words *would* stand for, if his belief were true, certainly *is not*. It remains true that in *one* sense of the words there *is* no such thing as my not being now in London. In other words, even though we take the view that, where a belief is true, there are in the

Universe two different things having the same name, and that, where it is false, then there is only one of those two things—even though we take this view, yet it remains a fact that, if the belief is false, there certainly is, in a sense, no such thing as my not being now in London; and that this very thing which certainly *is not*, is the very thing that we are now conceiving or imagining, even if, in order to do so, we have also at the same time to think of something else, having the same name, which certainly is. We must, therefore, I think, admit that we can, in a sense, think of things, which absolutely have no being. We must *talk* as if we did. And when we so talk and *say* that we do, we certainly do mean *something* which is a fact, by so talking. When, for instance, my friend believes that I am *not* in London, whereas in fact I am, he *is* believing that I am not in London: there is no doubt of that. That is to say this whole expression "he believes that I am not in London" does express, or is the name for, a fact. But the solution of the difficulty seems to me to be this, namely that this whole expression does *not* merely express, as it seems to, a relation between my friend on the one hand and a fact of which the name is "that I am not in London" on the other. It does *seem* to do this; and that is where the difficulty comes in. It does seem as if the words "that I am not in London" *must* be a name for something to which my friend is related, something which certainly *has being*. But we must admit, I think, that these words may not really be a name for anything at all. Taken by themselves they are not a name for anything at all, although the whole expression "he believes that I am not in London" are a name for something. This fact that single words and phrases which we use will constantly seem to be names for something, when in fact they are not names for anything at all, is what seems to me to create the whole difficulty. Owing to it, we must, in talking of this subject, constantly seem to be contradicting ourselves. And I don't think it is possible wholly to avoid this appearance of contradiction. In merely saying "There is no such thing as a chimaera" you must seem to contradict yourself, because you seem to imply that "a chimaera" is a name for something, whereas at the same time the very thing which you assert about this something is that it *is not*: that there is no such thing. The point to remember is that though we *must* use such expressions,

and that though the whole expressions *are* names for facts, which certainly *are,* these facts cannot be analysed into a subject's "a chimaera" on the one hand, and something which is asserted of that subject on the other hand.

The question how such facts *are* to be analysed is of course another question, which presents great difficulties; and I don't pretend to be able to answer it. But what, I think, is clear is that they *can't* be analysed in the way proposed. In short we mustn't suppose that there *is* such a thing as a chimaera, merely because we can do something which we call thinking of it and making propositions about it. We aren't in fact really even mentioning a chimaera when we talk of one; we are using a word which isn't, by itself, a name for anything whatever.

I am going to say, then, in spite of the contradiction which such language seems to imply, that certain things which we can think of and talk about really have *no* being, in any sense at all. I think it is quite plain that wherever we entertain a false belief—whenever we make a mistake—there really is, in a sense, no such thing as *what* we believe in; and though such language does *seem* to contradict itself, I don't think we can express the facts at all except by the use of language which does seem to contradict itself; and if you understand what the language means, the apparent contradiction doesn't matter. And the first and most fundamental property which I wish to call attention to, as sometimes denoted by some of our five phrases, is just this one which *does* belong to *what* we believe in, whenever our belief is true, and which does *not* belong to *what* we believe in, whenever our belief is false. I propose to confine the name *being* to this property; and I think you can all see what the property in question is. If, for instance, you are believing now that I, while I look at this paper, am directly perceiving a whitish patch of colour, and, if your belief is true then there *is* such a thing as *my being now directly perceiving* a whitish patch of colour. And I think you can all understand in what sense there is such a thing. As a matter of fact, there really *is*. I *am* now directly perceiving a patch of whitish colour. But even if there weren't, you could all understand what would be meant by supposing that there *is*. This property, then, which does so plainly belong to this event (or whatever you like to call it) is the one I

am going to call "being"; and this seems to me to be the most fundamental property that can be denoted by any of our five phrases.

Another way of pointing out what this property is which I mean by "being," and a way which does, I think, serve to make it clearer in some respects, is to say that to have being is equivalent to belonging to the *Universe,* being a constituent of the Universe, being *in* the Universe. We may say that whatever has being *is* a constituent of the Universe; and that *only* what has being can be a constituent of the Universe: to say of anything that there *is no such thing,* that it simply *is not,* is to say of it that it is not one among the constituents of the Universe, that it has no place in the Universe at all. This distinction between belonging to the Universe and not belonging to it does, I think, seem clearer in some respects than the mere distinction between being and not-being. Only, if we use this way of explaining what we mean we must recognise that the explanation is, in certain respects, inaccurate, and liable to be misunderstood. In the first place, if we say that "to be" is equivalent to being a constituent of the Universe, this, taken strictly, would imply that it is *only* things which are constituents of the Universe which have being at all, and hence that the Universe, itself, as a whole, has no being—that there *is* no such thing. But this is perhaps absurd. It is natural to think that the Universe as a whole has being in exactly the same sense in which its constituents have it. So that, to speak quite strictly, we should perhaps have to say that the only things which have being are (1) the whole Universe itself and (2) all its constituents. For this reason alone it is not quite accurate to say that to "be" is equivalent to "being a constituent of the Universe"; since the Universe itself may form an exception to this rule: the Universe as a whole is certainly not a mere constituent of itself, and yet it seems as if it had being.

In the second place, if we use this conception of "belonging to the Universe" to explain what we mean by "being," we may be tempted to suppose that to say that a thing "is" or "has being" is not merely *equivalent* to but strictly the *same thing* as to say that it belongs to the Universe. And this, I think, would be also a mistake. If this were so, we should not be able to think that a thing had being, without first thinking of the Universe as a whole, and thinking that the

thing in question belonged to it. But this is certainly not the case. People can think that certain things *are* and others *are not,* before they have even formed the conception of the Universe as a whole; and even when we have formed it, we certainly don't have it before our minds every time that we think that one thing *is* and another *is not*. The conception of "being" is certainly, therefore not the *same* as that of belonging to the Universe, even though the two may be *equivalent* to the extent I pointed out. The truth is that though the conception of belonging to the Universe does seem in some ways clearer than that of being, yet the former can really only be defined by reference to the latter; not *vice versa*. If we want to say what we mean by the Universe, we can only do so by reference to the conception of "being"—by saying, for instance, that by the Universe is meant the sum of all things which *are,* or in some such way as this. In other words, the conception of the Universe presupposes the conception of "being," and can only be defined by reference to it; so that we cannot really define the latter by reference to the former.

And this brings me to the last respect, in which the proposal to explain "being" by saying that it is equivalent to "belonging to the Universe," is inaccurate and may be misleading. Suppose it really is the case, as we commonly do suppose, that besides the things which *are now* there are some things which *have been* in the past, and are *no longer* now; and others which will be in the future, but *are not yet*. It seems quite plain that, of these three classes of things, it is only those which are now that actually have, in one sense of the word, the property of "being": of those which were, but are no longer, it is only true that they *did* have it, *not* that they have it now; and similarly of those which will be, but are not yet, it is only true that they *will* possess it, *not* that they do possess it. Of course, as we have seen, there are some philosophers who seem to think that there is nothing whatever which either has been, or is now, or will be: that everything which *has* being at all, *has* it in some timeless sense—that is to say, has *not* got it *now,* but nevertheless *has* got it; and that nothing whatever either *has* had it in the past, or will have it in the future: that in short there has been no past, is no present and will be no future. One of the things we are trying to discover is whether Mr. Bradley really does

think this or not. And I don't mean now to assume that these philosophers, if any do think this, are wrong. What I want to point out is that, *supposing* they are wrong—supposing some things *have been,* which are no longer, and others *will be*, which are not yet, there does arise a difficulty as to what we are to mean by the Universe. The difficulty is this: Are we going to say or are we not, that all the things which *have been* and *will be* do belong to the Universe—are constituents of it—just as much as those which are now? I think many people would say "Yes": that the past and future *do* belong to the Universe just as much as the present does. And I think this is certainly *one* common sense in which we use the expression "the Universe": we do use it to include the past and future as well as the present. But if we are going to say this, then, you see, we must admit that, for still another reason "belonging to the Universe" is *not* strictly equivalent to "being." For we must admit that many things, which *do* belong to the Universe, nevertheless, in a sense, *have* not got the property we mean by "being," but only have *had* it, or *will* have it. We should have to say that to "belong to the Universe" means, *not* to *have* now the property we call "being," but *either* to have had it, *or* to have it now, *or* to be about to have it; and we might have further to add a fourth alternative: namely to *have* it, in some timeless sense—to *have* it in a sense which is *not* equivalent to having it now. For, as we have seen, some philosophers believe that the only sense in which anything can *be* at all is some timeless sense; and even those philosophers who believe that there has been a past, is a present, and will be a future, do many of them believe that there is *besides* a timeless sense of the word "is"; and that beside the things which have been, are now, and will be, there are many other things also belonging to the Universe, which *are* and yet are not *now*. In other words they believe that "being" is a property which not only *did* belong to many things, does belong to many *now,* and *will* belong to many in the future, but that it also belongs in some timeless sense to many things, to which it does *not* belong *now*. I am not at all sure, whether these philosophers are right or not. For my part, I cannot think of any instance of a thing, with regard to which it seems quite certain that it *is,* and yet also that it is not *now*. But we must I think admit that the alternative

is a possible one: that the very same property called "being" which *did* belong and *will* belong to things, to which it does *not* belong now, may also *belong* in some timeless sense to things to which it does not belong now. And hence we must admit that the phrase "So and so *belongs* to the Universe" may mean either of four different things: it may mean *either* "So and so *has* been," *or* "So and so *is* now," *or* "So and so will be," *or* "So and so *is,* but *not* now." For this reason I think that to explain what we mean by "being" by saying that it is equivalent to "belonging to the Universe" or being a constituent of it, may possibly lead to misunderstanding. If we are going to mean by "being" a property which did and will belong to some things to which it doesn't belong *now,* then we must say that *in a sense* these things *do* not belong to the Universe, but only did or will belong to it; while in *another sense* they *do* belong to it, in spite of the fact that they *have* not got the property we mean by "being," but only did have it or will have it. And these two senses of the phrase "belonging to the Universe" are, I think, liable to be confused with one another. Each is also liable to be identified with the property which we mean by "being": so that we get two different senses of the word "being," which are liable to be confused with one another. But, apart from this possible misunderstanding, and the two others which I mentioned before, I think it does really serve to make clearer what I mean by "being," if I say that it is equivalent to being a constituent of the Universe—if I say that in asking what things *are* and what things *are not*, we are merely asking what things really are or are not constituents of the Universe.

So much, then, to explain what I mean by the first and most fundamental property denoted by our five phrases—the one which I propose to call "being."

And secondly I want to consider the phrase "is a fact," in that use of it, in which we say: It is a fact that bears exist; It is a fact that I am now talking; It is a fact that twice two are four. Obviously we do mean something immensely important by this phrase too. It is a phrase which we constantly use to express things which we particularly want to insist on. The question is: "*What* do we mean by it? Do we use it to express the very same property to which I have given the name 'being' or a different one? And, if different, different in what respect?" There certainly is some difference between

our *use* of this phrase, and our use of the word "being," for, whereas it is quite natural to say "It is a fact that bears exist," "It is a fact that twice two are four," it is not quite natural to say "That bears exist" *is*; or "That twice two are four" *is;* and conversely, while it is quite natural to say that bears are constituents of the Universe, or that the number 2 is a constituent of the Universe, it is not quite natural to say that the fact that bears exist or the fact that twice two are four is a constituent of the Universe. But nevertheless I am inclined to think that this difference of usage does not really indicate any difference in the nature of the predicates or properties meant by the two phrases. So far as I can see, when we say of one thing that it is a fact, and of another that it has being or is a constituent of the Universe, the property which we mean to assert of the two things is exactly the same in both cases. The reason for the difference of usage is, I think, only that we instinctively tend to use the one phrase, when we wish to attribute the property in question to certain *kinds* of things, and the other when we wish to attribute it to *other kinds* of things. In short, the difference of usage expresses not a difference of *predicate,* but a difference in the character of the *subjects* to which it is applied. And the difference of character which leads us to make this distinction, really is, I think, one of the most fundamental differences that there is among the constituents of the Universe. We may divide all the constituents of the Universe—all things which are, into two classes, putting in one class those which we can only express by a clause beginning with "that" or by the corresponding verbal noun, and in the other all the rest. Thus we have, in the first class, such things as "the fact that lions exist" or (to express it by a verbal noun) "the existence of lions," "the fact that twice two are four," "the fact that I am now talking," and absolutely all the immense number of facts which we thus express by phrases beginning with "that."

In short, this class of constituents of the Universe consists of the sort of entities which *correspond* (in the sense I explained) to true beliefs. Each true belief corresponds to one such entity; and it is *only* to entities of this sort that true beliefs do correspond. And this first class of entities—the class of entities which correspond to true beliefs, certainly constitutes I think, one of the largest and most im-

portant classes of things in the Universe. The precise respect in which they differ from all other constituents of the Universe is, I think, very difficult to define. So far as I can see, you can only point out the character which distinguishes them, by pointing out, as I have just done, that they are the class of entities which we name by calling them "The fact that so and so," or that they are the kind of entities which correspond to true beliefs. But the difference between them and all other kinds of entities is, I think, easy to *see,* even if it is not easy to define. Surely everybody can see that the fact that a lion does exist is quite a different sort of entity from the lion himself? or the fact that twice two are four quite a different sort of entity from the number 2 itself? Of course, to say that things of this sort form a class by themselves is to say that they do, in fact, possess some common property which is not shared by other things. And hence we might say that when we use the phrase "It is a fact that so and so," we are *not* merely attributing "being" to the thing in question, but are *also,* as well, ascribing to it this other peculiar property, which is *not* shared by *all* the things which have being. If this were so, there would be a real difference between the property meant by "being a fact" and the property meant by merely "being." But as I said, I don't think we commonly do mean to *attribute* this property when we say "It is a fact that so and so," but only the property of being. We do instinctively use the phrase "it is a fact" instead of "it *is*," when we are talking of things, which *have,* in fact, got this property as well as that of being: but I don't think that what we mean to say of them is that they have it. However, the question whether this is so or not, is a question of comparatively little importance. The important thing is to recognise what the property is, which makes us apply this phrase "It is a fact that" to some things, whereas we can't apply it equally naturally to others. And I am going now, for the purposes of this discussion to restrict the name "facts" to those constituents of the Universe and those only which have this property. Thus we shall say that the existence of lions is a fact, but that lions themselves are not facts; we shall say it is a fact that twice two are four, but that the number two itself is not a fact. And if we understand the word "facts" in this sense it is important to notice that "facts" are neither more nor less than what are often called "truths."

I pointed out before that a phrase of the form "It is *true* that so and so" can absolutely *always* be used as equivalent to the corresponding phrase of the form "It is a *fact* that so and so." And similarly anything which is a fact, in this sense, can always equally naturally be called "a truth." Instead of talking of the fact that $2+2=4$ we can equally well talk of the truth that $2+2=4$; instead of talking of the fact that lions exist, we can equally well talk of the truth that lions exist: and so on, in absolutely every case. And it is important to notice this because this property which belongs to a "truth," and which makes it a truth, is an utterly different one from that which we have been discussing in the last two lectures—the property which belongs to *"true" beliefs,* and in virtue of which we call them "true." To say of a truth that it is a truth is merely to say of it that it is a fact in the sense we are considering; whereas to say of an act of belief that it is "true" is, as we saw, to say only that it *corresponds* to a fact. No one, in fact, would think of calling a true act of belief a truth: it is quite unnatural to use such language. And yet, I think, it is very common to find the two things confused.[1] It has, for instance, been very commonly supposed that truths are entirely dependent on the mind; that there could be no truths in the Universe if there were no minds in it. And, so far as I can see, the chief reason why this has been supposed, is because it has been supposed that the word "true" stands for a property which can belong only to acts of belief, and that nothing can be a "truth" unless it has *this* property. It is, of course, quite obvious that there could be no true beliefs in the Universe, if there were no minds in it: no act of belief could be true, unless there *were* acts of belief;

[1] A mistake which is perhaps even more common is that of supposing that every true proposition is a truth. This is a mistake which analogies in language would naturally lead us to make: it is natural to suppose that we should use the expression "a truth" to mean anything that is true. But it seems to me quite plain that this is not how we in fact use the expression "a truth." The *fact,* with regard to any proposition that it is true, can be quite naturally called "a truth"; but the fact that a given proposition is true is obviously something quite different from the proposition in question and also from the equivalent proposition that the proposition in question is true. No proposition is a truth; but in the case of every proposition which is true, the fact that it is so is a truth. (1952.)

and there could be no acts of belief if there were no minds, because an act of belief is an act of consciousness. It is therefore, quite obvious that the existence of *true acts of belief* is entirely dependent on the existence of mind. But the moment we realise that by a "truth" is meant *not* a true act of belief, but merely a fact—something which corresponds to a true belief, when there are true beliefs, but which may *be* equally even when no one is believing in it, there ceases to be any reason to suppose that there could be no truths in the Universe, if there were no minds in it. It is the very reverse of obvious that there could be no facts in the Universe, if there were no minds in it. And as soon as we realise that "a truth" is merely another name for a fact, and is something utterly different from a true act of belief, it becomes quite plainly possible that there *could* be truths in the Universe, even if there were no minds in it. For this reason it is, I think, important to notice that "a truth" is merely another name for a fact, although the word "true," as applied to *acts of belief*,[2] means something quite different—does *not* mean that the act of belief in question is a truth. And it is also I think, worth while to notice a connection between the phrase "It is a fact that" and the word "real." To say "It is a fact that lions exist" is obviously merely equivalent to saying "Lions *really* do exist." That is to say we use the word "real," in this adverbial form, merely to express the same idea which we also express by "It is a fact that." Of course, though it is natural to say "Lions *really* do exist," it is not at all natural to say "It is *real* that lions do exist": nothing could be more unnatural. And this shows that there is some difference in the usage of the phrases "is real" and "is a fact." But at the same time this use of the adverb "really" does, I think, point to a connection between the two.

I am going, then, to use the name "facts" simply and solely as a name for that kind of constituents of the Universe which correspond to true beliefs—for the kind of things we express by phrases beginning with "that." But, of course, I don't mean to say that this is the *only* sense in which the word "facts" is commonly used. Philosophers, at all events, certainly sometimes use it in a wider sense: they will

[2] And also, of course, as is much more commonly the case, as applied to propositions. (See footnote, p. 323.) (1952)

say for instance not merely that the existence of lions is a fact, but that a lion itself is a fact, or they will say that this whitish patch of colour—which I am now directly perceiving —this sense-datum itself—is a fact. And I don't mean to say that this wider usage is wrong: I only want to make it quite plain that I am not going to adopt it for the purposes of the present discussion. And what I think is still more important is to point out that in ordinary life, we very often use the word "fact" in a *narrower* sense than that in which I am using it: we apply it only to *some* among the class of things which I am calling facts. The usage I am thinking of is that in which *facts* are often opposed to theories, or in which it is said that questions ought to be settled by an appeal to *the facts*. In *my* sense of the word a theory *may* be a fact, in spite of its being a mere theory; it will be a fact *if*, when anybody believes in it, his belief is true. And, so far as I can see, the chief distinction between this narrow usuage of the word "fact" and my usuage of it, is that in the common usage the word is confined to those kind of facts, which we do or can absolutely *know* to be facts. It is held, that is to say, that among the many *facts*, in my sense of the word, which there are in the Universe, there are certain kinds which we can, under certain circumstances, absolutely *know* to be facts, whereas there are other kinds, which we can never (in the present state of knowledge) absolutely *know* to be facts. Thus it might be said that where a man believes in a thing, and his belief is true, yet what he believes is *not* a fact, unless it is something which some man now is capable of absolutely knowing. Whereas in my sense of the word, whenever a man believes in a thing, and his belief is true, what he believes in *is* a fact, even if nobody living could absolutely know it to be so. And, of course, my sense of the word is one of the senses in which the word is commonly used; everybody does constantly use language which implies that, when a belief is true, then what is believed in is, in a sense, a fact, whether anybody can know it to be so or not. But there certainly is also, I think, a narrower sense of the word, in which it is confined to things which are held (rightly or wrongly) to be capable of being absolutely known; and I want to make it clear that I am *not* confining it to this narrow sense.

I have, then, so far, tried to give definite meanings to two

of our five phrases—the phrase "is" or "has being," and the phrase "is a fact." But the phrase I want most to consider is the phrase "exists." This also is certainly a phrase of the utmost importance. Nothing can well be more important than to know whether certain kinds of things do exist, or will probably exist in the future, or not: there is nothing which we are more constantly anxious to know. And the question we have to raise is: What exactly is "existence"? What is the property which we denote by the word? Is "to exist" simply the same thing as to be or to be a constituent of the Universe, or is it not? And, if not, how do they differ? And, as regards this question, I used to hold very strongly, what many other people are also inclined to hold, that the words "being" and "existence" do stand for two entirely different properties; and that though everything which exists must also "be," yet many things which "are" nevertheless do emphatically *not* exist. I did, in fact, actually hold this view when I began these lectures; and I have based the whole scheme of the lectures upon the distinction, having said that I would deal first with the question what sort of things exist, and then separately, as a quite distinct matter, with the question what sort of things *are*, but don't exist. But nevertheless I am inclined to think that I was wrong, and that there is no such distinction between "being" and "existence" as I thought there was. There is, of course, a distinction of usage, but I am inclined to think that this distinction is only of the same kind as that which I tried to explain as holding between "being" and "being a fact." That is to say, when we say of a thing that it exists, we don't, I think, mean to attribute to it any property different from that of "being"; all that we mean to say of it is simply that it *is* or is a constituent of the Universe. And the distinction of usage only comes in, because we instinctively tend to use the word "existence" only when we mean to attribute this property to certain kinds of things and not when we mean to attribute it to *other* kinds which also, in fact, have it, and are constituents of the Universe just as much as the former. But as I said in the other case, I do not think the question whether this is so or not is really of much importance. In merely saying that there is a class of things, to which we tend to confine the word "existence," we are, of course, saying that these things have some common property, which is *not* shared by other

constituents of the Universe. And, of course, you may say, if you like (though I don't think it is strictly true) that when we say of anything that it exists we mean to say of it two things at once namely (1) that it *is*, or is a constituent of the Universe and (2) that it has this peculiar property, which does *not* belong to all the constituents of the Universe. The important thing is to recognise as clearly as possible *that* there is such a property, and *what* it is: that there is a class of things in the Universe, of which we tend to say exclusively that they exist, and how this class of things differs from other kinds of things, which do quite equally belong to the Universe, and are constituents of it, though we should not say of them that they "exist."

And I think the best way of doing this is to point out what are the classes of things in the Universe, of which we *cannot* quite naturally say that they "exist." And so far as I can see we can divide these into two classes. The first is simply the class of things which I have just called "facts." It is in the highest degree unnatural to say of these that they exist. No one, for instance, would think of saying that the fact that lions exist, *itself* exists; or that the fact that $2+2=4$ exists. We do, therefore, I think, certainly tend to apply the word "existence" *only to* constituents of the Universe, *other* than facts.

But there is, it seems to me, also another class of things, which really was constituents of the Universe, in the case of which it is also unnatural, though not, perhaps, quite so unnatural, to say that they "exist." The class of things I mean is the class of things which Locke and Berkeley and Hume called "general ideas" or "abstract ideas," and which have been often called by that name by other English philosophers. This is, I think, their most familiar name.

And in order to explain quite clearly what the distinction is which seems to me to justify a distinction between "being" and "existing," I think it is absolutely essential to discuss the nature of "general" or "abstract" ideas. And this is, I think, a subject which is eminently worth discussing for its own sake too. I have hitherto said nothing at all about it. But questions as to the nature of general ideas have, in fact, played an immensely large part in philosophy. There are some philosophers who say that there are no such things at all: that general ideas are pure fictions like chimaeras or griffins.

Berkeley and Hume, for instance, said this. But a majority of philosophers would, I think, say that there are such things; and *if* there are, then, I think there is no doubt that they are one of the most important kinds of things in the Universe. *If* there are any at all, there are tremendous numbers of them, and we are all constantly thinking and talking of them. But the question *what* they are, if there are such things, seems to me to be one of the most perplexing questions in philosophy. Many philosophers are constantly talking about them; but so far as I know there is no perfectly clear account of what a general idea is, and as to exactly how it differs from other constituents of the Universe. I want, therefore, to do the best I can to shew that there *are* general ideas, and what properties they have which distinguish them from other things. But, as I say, the subject seems to me to be fearfully confusing: for one thing, there seem to be so many different kinds of general ideas and it is very difficult to see what they have in common. I don't suppose, therefore, that I can make the subject really clear, but I want to do the best I can.

The first point that it is necessary to be quite clear about is that the name "general idea" or "abstract idea," like the name "idea" generally, is dangerously ambiguous: it may stand for two entirely different things. I have already had occasion to insist several times on this ambiguity in the word "idea"; but it seems to be a point which some people find it very difficult to grasp. Let us take an example. Everybody would agree that the number two, or any other number, is an abstract idea if anything is. But when I, or anybody else, *think* of the number two, two entirely different things are involved, *both* of which may be called an "idea." There is in the first place my mental act, the act which consists in thinking of or being conscious of or apprehending the number two; and this mental act itself may be called "an idea." And if we use the word in this sense, then ideas are things which can be only in the mind: they are another name for acts of consciousness. The mental act which I perform in thinking of the number 2 is, in this sense, "an idea"; it is an idea of *mine,* and belongs exclusively to me. But obviously the number two *itself* does *not* belong exclusively to me; it is not an idea of *mine* in this sense. So that we have to recognise as something quite distinct from my mental act the thing *thought* of—the number two itself—the *object* of

my act of apprehension—*what* I apprehend: and this also is often called an "idea." And obviously if we use the word "idea" in this sense, then an "idea" is a thing which can quite well *be,* without being in any mind. There may be two things, and they may really be two, even when nobody is thinking of them, or of the fact that they are two. I want, therefore, to make it quite plain that when I talk of "general ideas" I mean, *not* acts of apprehension, but the things apprehended: *not* my act of apprehending the number two, but the number two itself, which is *what* I apprehend. With regard to the act of apprehension, the mental act, I don't wish to suggest for a moment that it doesn't exist. I think myself that *it does,* though some people would doubt this. It is only with regard to the object apprehended, that I wish to suggest that it doesn't "exist." The object apprehended, then, *not* the act of apprehension is what we are going to discuss; and in order to avoid confusion between the two, I think I had perhaps better not use the name "general idea" or "abstract idea" at all. I will use instead another name which is often used for these kind of objects, though it is not so familiar: I will call them "universals." What, then, I want to do is to point out what kind of things "universals" are and that there are such things—that they are not pure fictions, like chimaeras and griffins.

And I will begin with an instance, which is not perhaps in some respects as simple as could be taken, but which I want to take, because it brings out one point which will presently be of importance. When I look at my two hands so, I directly perceive two sets of sense-data, two patches of flesh colour, of the sort of shape you all know very well, which are at a certain distance from one another. The distance, as you see, is not great, so we will say they are *near* one another. And for the sake of convenience, I will talk of these two flesh-coloured patches as *my hands,* though, as we have seen, there is reason to suppose these flesh-coloured patches are not, in fact, my hands, or any part of them. When, therefore, I talk of my *hands* you will please understand that I am talking *solely* of these two flesh-coloured patches, which I directly perceive. I don't want to assume that I have any hands at all, in the ordinary sense of the word. I want to talk solely of things which indubitably *are*; and so I want to talk only of these sense-data which I am

directly perceiving, and for the sake of convenience I will call them "my hands." Well, then, it is a *fact,* in my sense of the word, that this hand—this flesh-coloured patch—is at this moment at a certain distance from (a distance which we will call "near") this other hand—this other flesh-coloured patch. It is a fact this right hand is now near this left hand. But this fact seems plainly capable of being analysed into the following constituents. When I say that it can be analysed into them, I don't mean to say that it *is* nothing more than the sum of its constituents: I think plainly it is *not*—it is not merely identical with the sum of its constituents: I only mean to say that the constituents in question *are* parts or constituents of it—that they are contained in it. The constituents I mean are these. This right hand—this sense-datum —is one of them—and the other is *what* we assert of this sense-datum, the property which we attribute to it—namely the property *of being near the left hand.* The fact is *that* the right hand is *near* the left: and we can analyse this into (1) the right hand itself—that is one thing which enters into the constitution of the fact: and (2) what is asserted of this right hand—namely the property of being now near the left. Well, this second constituent—the property of being near this left hand—is a *universal,* and one of the most indubitable instances of a universal. You see why it should be called a "universal." It is so called, because it is a property which can be (and is) *common* to this hand and to other things. Other things can in fact also share the property of being near this hand: other things do: this white patch which I see in looking at the paper, is also *near* this hand, and so is the coloured patch which I see in looking at the desk. All these three things have the common property of being near this hand. They are all *near* it in exactly the same sense, though, of course, each of them *also* has relations to it which the others have not got. And this property of being *near* this patch of colour, in the sense in which it is *common* both to the sense-datum of my right hand and the sense-datum of the desk and the sense-datum of the paper, really is what is commonly called a "general" or "abstract" idea. The relation which I mean by "being *near*" is certainly not *identical* either with the space which I see between this hand and that, or between the hand and the desk, or between the hand and the paper. All these spaces are different. But what I mean

by being "near" is something which is absolutely identical in all three cases. We have, therefore, in this property of *being near this sense-datum,* a real instance of a "universal" or abstract idea. And why I have begun with this instance, is because, in this case, the universal seems to me obviously to consist in the having of a relation to something which is *not* a universal. This coloured patch which I actually see, is obviously not a universal or abstract idea; nothing could be more of a *particular.* But yet the universal consists in the having of a relation—the relation of nearness—just to *this* coloured patch: the property of *being near this coloured patch* really is a property which is and may be shared in common by several different things.

We have, then, one type of universal which consists in the having of one identical relation to something which is *not* a universal. But, if we consider the following facts, we get an instance of another new sort of universal. This left hand of mine is not the only left hand in the Universe: there are ever so many other left hands, and there may even be other sense-data similar to this which I am now directly perceiving. But, in the same sense in which these things here are near my left hand, other things may be near the left hands of other people. So that there is such a property as that of *being near some left hand or other.* This, you see, is a property which these things here share with all the things that are near anydody else's left hand. All of them are near *some left hand or other.* This property also, therefore, is a universal, and it is plainly of a different type from the first one which we took. This property does not consist in the having of a specific relation to some *one* thing which is *not* a universal; but in the having of a specific relation to *some one or other* of a group of things which are not universals. And universals of this type are universals which we are constantly thinking about and talking about. Many of the very commonest words we use are names for them. For instance when we say of a man that he is a father, what we mean is that he has the relation of fatherhood to *some* human being *or other*: this is the property which is shared in common by all fathers, and obviously a great many of the commonest words are names for universals of this sort: universals which consist in the having of a certain relation to *some one or other* of a group of things which are *not* universals.

We have got, therefore, examples of two different types of universals: (1) the universal which consists in being near this hand of mine; and (2) the universal which consists in being near some left hand or other. And it might be thought that there can be no doubt at all that there *are* such things as these two universals. There certainly is, it would seem, such a thing as the property of being near *this* hand, and also such a thing as the property of being near *some hand or other*. But, in order to see why there has been doubt about the matter, we have to consider another quite different type of universal, which is involved as a constituent in both of these. Both of those properties has, as a constituent, a *relation*—the relation which I have called "being *near*." And most people would say that this relation is itself a "universal": it certainly is a "general idea." Indeed, if this relation were *not* a universal, in at least one sense of the word, neither of these two properties could be so either. And in its case I think I shall be able to shew why Berkeley and Hume thought there were no such things as universals; and also several other points, which it is very important to notice, if we are to get really clear as to the nature of universals.

Chapter 17

Truths and Universals

I HAVE SAID that some people are inclined to make a distinction between "being" and "existence" of the following kind. They hold that there are in the Universe enormous numbers of things, which undoubtedly *are*—undoubtedly have being, and which yet do *not* exist. And I was trying to explain exactly what justification there seemed to me to be for saying this.

I have said that I think there are two kinds of things, with regard to which it can be urged with some plausibility that they *are*, and yet do not *exist*. And I have been trying to explain what these two kinds of things were. The first was the class of things which I proposed last time to call "facts" or

"truths." And I am very anxious to make it quite clear what sort of things I do mean by "facts" or "truths." I admit that the word "facts" is by no means always applied exclusively to things of the kind I mean or to what are supposed to be such. "Facts" is a very ambiguous word, although it is so constantly used as if it were clear. It *is* quite often used simply and solely as a name for the class of things I mean; but it is also quite often used both in a wider and in a narrower sense. That is to say, it is often used as a name for kinds of things, which don't belong to the class I mean; and also often as a name for only *some* among the things which *do* belong to the class I mean. I think, therefore, it will perhaps be better if I don't use this ambiguous name "facts," but use the name "truths" instead. About this name "truths" there is, I think, only one ambiguity of the same type as in the case of the name "facts." The name "truths" is not too narrow, for absolutely everything which does belong to the class I mean can quite naturally be called a "truth"; and also, with one single exception, it is not too wide, since it is quite unnatural to call anything "a truth" except things which do belong to the class I mean—*with one single exception*. The single exception is this. We may, I think, perhaps apply the name "a truth" not only to things of the class I mean but *also* to the forms of *words* by which we express them. When, for instance, we say "It is a truth that twice two are four"; we may, I think, perhaps mean *either:* "The form of words—the sentence—"Twice two are four" is a "truth"; *or* we may mean that the fact which they express—the fact that twice two are four—is a truth. And there is always some danger of confusing words with what they express. But this ambiguity which attaches (if it does attach) to the expression "a truth" is not, I think, so dangerous—so liable to lead to misunderstanding—as the ambiguities which attach to the expression "a fact." It will be comparatively easy to remember that when I talk of "a truth," I never mean merely a form of words, but *always* only the kind of thing which certain forms of words express. But nevertheless the expression "truths" is, I think, liable to lead to misunderstanding in other ways. There are two different things, other than mere forms of words, with which *truths* are liable to be confused; namely, (1) true acts of belief and (2) the kind of thing which I said some people called "propositions," and which are also very often called "beliefs." The