G. E. Moore

The Early Essays

Edited by

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To my teachers,
Peter Heath and David Yalden-Thomson,
who introduced me to
Moore's philosophy

whole sets of results are nearly equal in total value, as to decide that they are nearly equal in pleasure-value: and in practical cases, as has been said, such a judgment is all that we can hope for. In the vast majority of cases, cases in which we do not raise a question, Common Sense clearly has no doubt that the total of good on the one side is unquestionably greater than on the other; and the philosopher who argues that there is a superiority of pleasure on the same side cannot avoid bearing witness to the clearness of this judgment, and generally bears witness also to his own conviction that the judgment is correct. Mr. McTaggart himself does not fail to give indications of the ease with which he can judge totals of good other than pleasure: "The happiness a man gives is" he can see "generally more closely proportioned to the development of his ideals than is the happiness he enjoys" (p. 125). In any case, whether it be easier or not, it is by endeavoring to compare totals of [370] different goods and not of pleasure only, that men always have attacked and do attack their practical cases; and most men find it easy to see a decisive superiority on one side. They may, perhaps, be as often wrong as right; but, until a further philosophical investigation has settled the point, there is reason to think that, since the value of pleasure is small, when they are wrong, they are less wrong, than if they had taken pleasure for their guide.

NOTES

1. By John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, M. A., Fellow and Lecturer of Trinity College, in Cambridge. Cambridge: At the University Press, 1901.
2. Mr. McTaggart himself admits that it occurs, p. 134.
3. So Mr. McTaggart himself admits, p. 126 note.

10

Kant's Idealism

"It has been hitherto assumed," says Kant,[1] that all our knowledge must conform to objects; but on this assumption all attempts to make out anything about those objects *a priori* by means of conceptions, in such a way as to enlarge our knowledge, came to nothing. Then let us try for once, whether we do not succeed better in the problems of Metaphysics, by assuming that objects must conform to our knowledge; an hypothesis, which is immediately more agreeable to the desired possibility of an *a priori* knowledge of them—a knowledge which can establish something with regard to objects, *before they are given to us*.[2] It is with this assumption as with the first ideas of Copernicus, who, when he found he could not advance in the explanation of the motions of the heavenly bodies, on the assumption that the whole host of stars revolved around the spectator, tried whether he could not succeed better, if he supposed the spectator to revolve and the stars to stand still. Now a similar experiment can be made in Metaphysics, so far as concerns the *Intuition* of objects. If our intuition were bound to conform to the nature of the objects, I do

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not see how we can know anything *a priori* about that nature; but if the object (as presented to the senses) conforms to the nature of our intuitive faculty, I can very well imagine such a possibility. Since, however, I cannot stop short at these intuitions, if they are to be converted into knowledge, but must relate them as presentations to something or other as object and must determine this object by their means, I can again [128] either assume that the *conceptions*, by means of which I bring this determination to pass, also conform to the object, and then I am again in the same perplexity regarding the manner in which I can know anything about it *a priori*: or else I assume that the objects or (which is the same thing) our *experience*, in which alone they are known as given objects, conforms to these conceptions, and then I at once see an easier way out of my difficulty, since experience is itself such a kind of knowledge as to require the Understanding; and I must presuppose the rule of the Understanding *in myself*,[3] before objects are given me, that is, must presuppose it *a priori*—a rule which is expressed in *a priori* conceptions, to which accordingly all objects of experience must necessarily conform, and with which they must agree."

In this passage Kant gives a sufficiently clear account of one of the points in which his Idealism differs from the Idealism of Berkeley, with which he was so angry at having his own confused. And this point is the one to which, as he himself explains, he refers by calling his theory Transcendental Idealism. He means by that title that he attributes merely ideal existence, or existence in the mind, to certain entities which are not indeed *transcendent*, since they are not *objects*, but which are also not *parts* of experience or particular experiences, since they are, as he says, conditions of all possible experience. These entities are not *objects*—substantial individuals or things—but are merely "forms" in which the objects of experience are arranged: they are the forms of Intuition, Space and Time, and the forms of thought, conceptions of the Understanding or "categories," of which one instance is "causality." Kant's Idealism is Transcendental, and differs from Berkeley's in that, whereas Berkeley only maintained the "ideality," or merely mental existence of particular objects, Kant maintains the ideality of the forms in which these objects are arranged. Berkeley and others before Kant had not perceived the [129] necessity of distinguishing so clearly between sense-impressions, "the matter of knowledge," and the forms in which all such impressions are always arranged.

Kant, then, here gives us one point in which his Idealism differs from Berkeley's; he holds, what Berkeley did not expressly hold, that space and time and causality exist only in or for the mind. And he also gives us one of the reasons which lead him to think this particular view of his true. If, he says, we only saw that particular objects had geometrical properties, we could not possibly be entitled to assert that *all* objects would *always* have them. It is only if the mind is so constituted that, whenever anything is presented to it, it invests that thing with geometrical properties, that we can be entitled to assert that everything we shall ever experience will have those properties. In short, Kant offers his theory as an explanation of how we can know that certain things are true of *all* objects. If, he says, we know that the mind always attaches these predicates to everything presented to it, then we can know that everything presented will have these predicates. Therefore, he concludes, the only predicates which do attach to *all* things—formal predicates—are given to them by the mind.

Kant's Transcendental Idealism is thus connected with what was certainly a great discovery of his. He discovered that all mathematical propositions are what he calls "synthetic"—as he here says, that they "enlarge our knowledge." They do not merely tell us that a certain predicate is a part of that of which we predicate it: they tell us that A has the predicate B, although B is neither identical with A, nor a part of A; they are not identical nor analytic. Hume had convinced Kant that the proposition, "Every event has a cause," was not analytic; and, in thinking of this fact,

Kant discovered, what no one had clearly recognised before, that 2 + 2 = 4 was not analytic either. Hume had inferred that we had no reason whatever to believe that every event had a cause; but Kant thought it was obviously absurd to maintain this of 2 + 2 = 4: it was [130] absurd to say that we had no title to assert "2 + 2 are *always* 4"; to admit that 2 + 2 might sometimes make 4 and sometimes not. But, on the other hand, all previous philosophers, who had held that we did know *universal* propositions, had held that they were analytic; that it was only because they asserted "B is a part of A B," or "A" is identical with "A," that we could know them to be *always* true. Kant, therefore, saw an entirely new difficulty. He saw, in consequence of what Hume said, that 2 + 2 = 4 was synthetic; yet he was convinced (what Hume would have led him to deny) that 2 + 2 = 4 was *always* true—true of every case. In his own words, he recognised for the first time that there are "*a priori* synthetic propositions." He asked himself the question: How are synthetic *a priori* propositions possible? And Transcendental Idealism was his answer. They are possible only because Space, Time, and the categories are "ideal"—ways in which the mind arranges things.

I have thus represented Kant's Transcendental Idealism as an attempt to answer the question: How can we know *universal* synthetic propositions to be true? This is certainly a part of the meaning of the passage which I have quoted: Kant certainly does maintain this, whatever else he may maintain besides. And it is only this theory which I propose to consider. I may, perhaps, explain (since I have used ambiguous language) that I mean by a universal proposition, any proposition which asserts, either "All instances of A have the predicate B," or "Anything which has the predicate A has the predicate B." I may also add that I have no doubt whatever that the instances of such propositions which I have quoted, namely, all mathematical propositions and the proposition, "Every event has a cause," are, as Kant thought, synthetic.

I do not propose to argue that point. I regard it as an exceedingly important discovery of Kant's—a discovery which would, perhaps, by itself alone, entitle him to the rank usually assigned him among philosophers.

[131] My present business, however, is with Transcendental Idealism.

I propose to consider *both*, whether Transcendental Idealism gives a satisfactory answer to the question: How are synthetic propositions *a priori* possible? *and* whether Transcendental Idealism is true. And for this purpose, I will first try to re-state, in the simplest possible terms, with less reference to Kant's own language than I have hitherto used, precisely what the question is, to which I doubt whether Transcendental Idealism is a satisfactory answer. Kant, as I have said, may be trying to answer other questions as well; the meaning of his terms is much more complex than that of those which I shall use: but he certainly does pretend to have solved the difficulty I shall state—that was one of the difficulties in his mind—and I only propose to consider that part of his doctrine.

Well, then, we have the fact that we do make judgments of the following kind. We believe that: If there be *any* two groups of objects, of each of which it may be truly predicated that there are two objects in the group, then it may be truly predicated of the whole that it is a group of four objects: this proposition is *universal*, it concerns *all* groups of the kind named. And we have similar geometrical beliefs. We believe that: Of any objects of which we can truly predicate certain geometrical relations, we may also truly predicate some other different geometrical relation. Finally, we can at least think, whether we believe or not, that: Every event in time has been preceded at a certain interval by some other event, such that, whenever an event of precisely this second kind exists, an event of the first kind will exist after it at exactly the same distance in time: *i.e.*, every event has a cause.

These are all of them universal propositions, they all assert that a certain predicate, of what Kant calls a *formal* kind, attaches to *all* objects to which a certain other predicate attaches. And, [132] being universal, they are all independent of experience in the following sense: they all assert that certain predicates apply to things which we never have seen and never shall see—to things which nobody has even thought of: they say that certain predicates apply to *all* objects of a certain kind, whether actually experienced or not. This was Kant's difficulty. How can we know that certain predicates do attach to things which we have never experienced? How can we know that any universal proposition is true? And his answer is: Because the mind is such that it attaches these predicates to everything whatever which it ever experiences. This is the doctrine of Transcendental Idealism.

Now what I want first to point out is that Kant's question is ambiguous. He is asking, as if they were one, *two* quite different questions. *Two* questions are always asked, whenever we ask: How can we or do we *know* a thing? for the simple reason that knowledge is a complex concept. When we say we *know* a thing, we mean *both* that we believe it, that we have a certain mental attitude towards the proposition in question, and also we mean that the proposition is *true*. Hence, when we ask: How do you know that? we are asking both: (1) How do you come to believe it, what is the *cause* of your believing it? and (2), How do you know that what you believe is true? What title have you to say that your belief is knowledge and not *mere* belief? What evidence proves that the object of your belief is true?

Now it is evident that the second of these questions is far the more important; and it is evident also that Kant intended to answer this second question. He wished to explain the *validity* of universal propositions; not only how we could come to believe them, but how they could be valid. Only so, could he be contradicting Hume's sceptical conclusion. Hume asserted: We have no

title to believe that every event has a cause; and Kant answers: We have a title; I can prove it *true* that every event has a cause.

[133] Kant, therefore, is trying to prove the validity of universal propositions—that we have a title to assert them. And he regards his Transcendental Idealism as giving this title. His argument is: Every object will have certain formal predicates, because mind always gives an object that form. I wish to point out two absolutely conclusive objection to this argument:—

(1) Kant says: From the fact that mind is so constituted as to give to every object a certain form, we can infer that every presented object will have that form. And this reasoning is perfectly valid; the conclusion does follow from the premiss. But the *first* objection which I have to make to the whole argument is this, namely, that the premiss itself is a universal proposition of exactly the same kind which it was proposed to *prove*. The premiss is: Mind *always* acts in a certain way upon, arranges in a certain manner, *everything* which is presented to it. That is to say, the only evidence which Kant offers to prove the validity of universal propositions is—merely another universal proposition. It is, then, perfectly certain that he has not done what he professed to do—given us a title to believe all universal propositions. There is *one* universal proposition, at least, which he has simply assumed, for which he has given no reason. If you ask him: How can you know that mind will *always* act in that manner? he has no answer to give. He simply assumes that *this* proposition is true, and that there is no need of evidence to prove it so. It is certain, on the contrary, that it needs evidence just as much as $2 + 2 = 4$; if we need a title to believe that $2 + 2 = 4$, we certainly need one to believe that mind always acts in a certain way on every presented object. I do not now say that this universal proposition of Kant's is untrue; I shall presently try to show that it is. My present point is only this perfectly certain one: that there is *one* universal proposition, at least, which Kant has given us no title to believe; that,

therefore, Kant has *not*, in his own words, "explained the possibility of *all* synthetic propositions *a priori*."

[134] But (2) there is a far more serious objection to Kant's argument. I have just said that a certain conclusion will follow from Kant's premiss, if once you assume that premiss to be true; and it is, I think, this fact—the fact that that conclusion does follow from the premiss, which gives to Kant's Transcendental Idealism whatever plausibility it possesses. But what is the conclusion which follows from the premiss? The premiss is: "Mind always gives a certain form to everything presented"; and the conclusion which follows from this is: "Everything presented will always have the formal predicates which mind gives to it." And what I have now to point out is that this conclusion, which *does* follow from Kant's assumption, is *not* the conclusion which Kant set out to prove. Let us remember what the universal propositions were, of which Kant was going to prove the possibility. One of them was: The total number of objects in any two groups, of two each, is 4. And *this* conclusion will *not* follow from Kant's premiss. What *will* follow is only this: Whenever we perceive two groups of 2, then the whole group has the predicate 4 given it by mind. That is to say, it does not entitle us to assert that *any* 2 groups of 2 make 4; but only that any two presented groups make 4 *at the time when they are presented.* Kant's premiss does not entitle him to any more than this: he has given us no reason whatever to think but that the moment 2 groups of 2 objects cease to be presented, precisely the very same objects in those same two groups, which had the total number 4 when presented, may have the total number 7 or 5 or a hundred billions. In other words, Kant's premiss does *not* prove that $2 + 2 = 4$ in every case: on the contrary, it allows that more often than not $2 + 2$ may make 5 or any other number. That is to say, Kant's Transcendental Idealism gives no answer to that scepticism, greater than Hume's, which he devised it to answer.

But, so far, I have given to Kant's argument the interpretation which is the most favourable for him in one respect: [135] I have assumed his principle to be that mind does really give to objects the formal predicates in question, so that when they are presented they really and truly have those predicates; I have allowed that, assuming his premiss, it would follow that 2 and 2 are *sometimes* 4; and this is certainly the *most* favourable interpretation possible: his premiss certainly will not entitle us to assert that 2 and 2 are always or even generally 4. But even this conclusion—that 2 and 2 are *sometimes* 4—will only follow if we assume him really to mean that mind *gives* these predicates to objects, so that, for the moment, they really belong to them: and I believe that this hypothesis was part of what was in Kant's mind. Yet I believe also that he would never for a moment have entertained such a belief, unless he had confused it with another, which is quite different and much more plausible. No one, I think, has ever definitely maintained the proposition, that mind actually *gives* properties to things: that, *e.g.*, it *makes* one thing the cause of another, or makes 2 and $2 = 4$. What it *is* plausible to maintain is that the nature of our mind causes us to *think* that one thing is cause of another, and to *think* that 2 and 2 are 4. This, I think, is certainly *part* of what Kant meant by his Transcendental Idealism; though he confused it with the different theory that mind gave objects these properties. Indeed, I think it may be worth while to point out that this interpretation strictly follows from one doctrine of Kant's, the precise meaning of which has not received all the attention it deserves. Namely, Kant holds that we cannot know *at all* what properties belong to "Things in Themselves." What I wish to point out is that if we examine carefully the meaning of the statement, it merely amounts to this: That we never can know that a thing, *as it is in itself*, really has, even for a moment, any property whatever. It would follow, therefore, that in Kant's view, when I think "The fingers on this hand are five," I do not really know

that those fingers, as they are in themselves, are five; and if I don't know that, the only alternative is that, in Kant's view, I merely [136] *think* them to be 5. A good deal of confusion has, I think, arisen from the failure to see that the only alternative to the admission that we do know things *as they are in themselves*, is the admission that we have no knowledge at all. We cannot escape this dilemma by contrasting with "Things-in-themselves" the "objects of experience": for, if we know anything about the objects of experience, then we know what properties the objects of experience have, *as they are in themselves*. Even to know what we think about them is to know a Thing-in-itself. For if we do know that we think a thing at all, then we know that our thought, *as it is in itself*, really is a thought of that thing. Thus, in so far as Kant denies any possible knowledge of "Things-in-themselves," there is reason to suppose that he does not really think that mind *gives* predicates to objects, so that even for a moment those objects really have their predicate: his theory is that we do not know what properties anything really has itself.

Let us then suppose his Transcendental Idealism to mean that the mind is so constituted as always to *make us think* that the objects presented to it have certain predicates. Can he infer from this premiss the validity of universal propositions? On the contrary, he cannot now infer that 2 and 2 are 4 even in any one instance: he can only infer that we shall always think them to be so. From the fact that we always think a thing it certainly does not follow that what we think is true.

I have, then, tried to show that on neither of two possible interpretations of Kant's Transcendental Idealism will it follow from that doctrine that universal propositions are valid: on the first, it will only follow that 2 and 2 are sometimes 4, on the second it will not follow that 2 and 2 are ever 4, but only that we always think so. And, before that, I pointed out that Kant's Transcendental Idealism was itself an universal proposition; and

that, therefore, even if it proved the validity of any others (as we now see it doesn't), it does not prove the validity of all.

[137] I now propose to deal briefly with the question: Is this universal proposition itself—the proposition that the mind always attaches to things certain formal predicates, or makes us think that things have these predicates—itself true? And first of all: What reason has Kant to give for it? Here we find, curiously enough, that his chief reason is the assumed fact that other universal propositions are true: he infers that this must be true of the mind, from the assumed fact that mathematical propositions and the principle of causality are true. What he says is: They could not be true, *unless* mind contributed these predicates; we could have no title to assert that all things had causes, unless the mind gave them this predicate. Since, therefore, all things have causes, and 2 and 2 are always 4, the mind must give these predicates. This reasoning obviously will not prove Transcendental Idealism. From the mere fact that the number of objects in two groups of two is 4, we cannot infer that mind caused them to have that predicate; nor from that fact can we even infer that mind caused us to think that they were 4. There is, therefore, so far, no reason whatever to think Transcendental Idealism true; and I am not aware that Kant gives any other reason for it. He does not profess, by an empirical observation of the mind, to discover that it always does cause events to have effects or cause us to think that 2 and 2 are 4. Nor do I know of any facts tending to show that this is the case. It may be true that every mental event has some mental cause; and thus if Transcendental Idealism only asserted that our *belief* in universal propositions has some mental cause, Transcendental Idealism might possibly be true. But even this is quite doubtful; I have only to say, as against one form of the theory, that I can find no evidence that, when I apprehend that 2 and 2 are 4, that apprehension is any more due to the activity of my mind than when I see the colour of that tablecloth. I can appre-

hend that 2 and 2 are 4 as passively as I can apprehend anything. Transcendental Idealism may possibly be true if it [138] be understood as this comparatively unimportant psychological proposition; what is certain is that it does not explain the possibility of experience, if by that be meant that it gives us a title to assert universal propositions, and not merely that it asserts our belief in them to have some mental cause.

So much then for Kant's Idealism, so far as regards the point, in which, as I said, it differs obviously from that of Berkeley, namely, the contention that our knowledge of universal propositions is due to the constitution of our minds. This appears to me to be the only Idealistic contention for which Kant offers any arguments, and I have tried to show with regard to those arguments (1) that it will not explain the validity of universal propositions, *i.e.*, will not give us any ground for thinking them true, and (2) that it will not follow from their validity, and is at best merely a doubtful psychological assumption. But I have now to mention certain idealistic opinions, for which Kant gives no arguments, but which he certainly holds and which differ in no respect from those of Berkeley. Kant holds, namely, that spatial and temporal properties, that sounds and colours, and that causality exist only in the mind of him who is aware of them. He holds that space and time themselves are forms of consciousness, that sounds and colours are sensations, that causality is a conception. In all this he agrees with Berkeley; Berkeley also held that everything of which we are aware is an idea or a notion—a constituent part, that is, of our own minds. Kant himself has denied furiously that he does agree with Berkeley; he says he holds that we do know that objects really exist in space; and if he had held that, he certainly would not have agreed with Berkeley. But I shall try to show that he himself did not know what he held; that, at least, he certainly held that objects do not exist in space. It has often been pointed out that at one time Kant says his difference from Berkeley is that he asserts the existence of Things-in-themselves, while Berkeley de-

nies it; and at another time says his difference is that he [139] asserts the existence of things in space, while Berkeley denies that. On the first point he certainly does not differ from Berkeley, since Berkeley also holds that there do exist things-in-themselves, though he says there are none except God and other minds. But that matter exists, Berkeley certainly does deny: and what I have now to show is that Kant denies it too.

Let us consider what is Kant's theory of experience. He holds that objects of experience, *e.g.*, chairs and tables, consist of the "matter of sensation," colours, sounds, and other qualities, arranged in the "forms" of space and time, and connected by the categories or forms of understanding. With regard to the first of these entities, sensations, he never suggests for a moment that he means by them anything but mental facts: on the contrary, he repeatedly insists that what he is talking about is *presentations* (Vorstellungen), *i.e.*, when he says "blue," he means *the consciousness of blue*; when he says "hard," he means *the sensation of hardness*. It is, then, these mental, purely subjective, elements, out of which, according to him, when they are arranged in space and time, matter and all material objects are *composed*. When we perceive an object in space, what we perceive, according to him, is merely some sensations of our own arranged in space and time and connected with other things by the categories. That is to say, the *subjects* of what I have called his formal predicates are exclusively our own sensations: when I say that there are 4 chairs there, he understands me to say that I have 4 groups of sensations—it is to my sensations that the predicate 4 attaches. It is plain, then, that the matter of sensation is, according to him, merely in my mind. But it is equally plain that time and space and the categories are so too: his great discovery is, he often says, that the former are ways in which the subject is affected, and that the latter are ways in which it acts. If, then, he did maintain that matter really existed, other than as a part of mind, he would be maintaining that [140] out of three subjective things, things in my mind, there was some-

how composed one thing that was objective, *not* in my mind. But he never does maintain this: what he does maintain is that to say that sensations have spatial predicates and are connected by the categories, is *the same thing* as to say that they exist objectively. And, if this be understood, it is plain why he thought he disagreed with Berkeley. If to say that matter exists is simply equivalent to saying that the categories do apply to it, he does hold that matter exists. But the fact is that the two statements are *not* equivalent: I can see quite plainly that when I think that chair exists, what I think is *not* that certain sensations of mine are connected by the categories. What I do think is that certain *objects* of sensations do really exist in a real space and really are causes and effects of other things. Whether what I think is true is another question: what is certain is that if we ask whether matter exists, we are asking this question; we are not asking whether certain sensations of ours are connected by the categories. And one other thing is certain too, namely, that colours and sounds are *not* sensations; that space and time are *not* forms of sense; that causality is *not* a thought. All these things are things *of* which we are aware, things *of* which we are conscious; they are in no sense parts of consciousness. Kant's Idealism, therefore, in so far as it asserts that matter is composed of mental elements, is certainly false. In so far as it asserts this, it differs in no respect from Berkeley's, and both are false. Whether or not Kant's further contention, in which he also agrees with Berkeley, is also false—namely, that what we really do mean by matter, something *not* composed of mental elements, does not exist—this, as I say, is quite another question.

NOTES

1. Preface to Second Edition of *Critique of Pure Reason.*
2. My italics.
3. My italics.

Index

Absolute, The, 21, 113, 152, 158, 159, 160, 165, 183, 204, 205, 206, 207, 222
Absolute Idea, 151
Agnosticism, 141
A posteriori, 74
Appearance, 28, 29, 30, 138, 149, 165
A priori, 69, 70, 72, 74, 75
Aristotle, 41, 42
Arithmetic. *See* Numbers; Propositions, mathematical; *and* Synthetic *a priori*
Arnold, Matthew, 101, 103, 104, 105, 116, 117, 119
Ayer, A. J., 5, 6

Balfour, Arthur, 106, 116, 117, 119
Berkeley, Bishop George, 9, 157, 234, 235, 244, 245, 246
Bloomsbury Group, 13
Bosanquet, Bernard, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23
Bradlaugh, Charles, 101
Bradley, F. H., 8, 9, 10, 13, 19, 21, 23, 53, 59, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 79, 139, 145n, 158

Categorical Imperative, 30, 31
Causality, 99
Christian, 101, 102, 103, 105, 106, 113
Clifford, Professor, 27, 28
"Cogito," 78, 97
Common Sense, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231
Concepts, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 79, 80; *a priori*, 75; empirical, 75
Conceptual difference. *See* Identity
Consciousness, 155–157

Determinism, 26, 27, 28, 29, 34, 35, 39, 43
Ding an Siche ("Things in Themselves"), 24, 39, 54, 241, 242, 244, 245