ERROR

THIS paper offers no definite solution of the problem with which it deals. My excuse for attempting to deal with it at all is that it seems to me to be an underestimated subject. Writers of systematic treatises on logic and epistemology tend to treat error and false judgement (or the false proposition) as departmental questions, adjuncts to the main substance of their theory, instead of putting them into the centre of their discussion as the chief source of their difficulties. Most analyses of the judgement or of the proposition are analyses of the true judgement or the true proposition: that is to say, they involve elements the absence of some of which is precisely the difference between false and true beliefs or false and true judgements. But quite obviously the analysis of the nature of judgement or statement cannot be one when they are true, another when they are false: otherwise there is no reason to call them by one common name. If we maintain, and I cannot see how we can fail to do so, that the true and the false judgements are species of the same genus, or determinates of the same determinable, then the genus or determinable must be so analysed that neither of the species or determinates contains any element precluded by, or lacks any element contained by, the genus or determinable. Now this is precisely what the average theory of truth and falsehood, knowledge and error, signally fails to do: it assumes that the true categorical judgement can claim to be a fair representative of judgement in general, and is then forced to invent ad hoc theories to account for the false judgement; these latter either do not account for it at all, or if they even appear to do so, entail views inconsistent with the account of true judgement, which they presuppose. That this is generally the case it is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate.

The problem as I understand it divides into two distinct sections, the psychological and the epistemological. The first consists in asking what the conditions are under which error normally takes place, that is: What is the state of mind or of the

body of the person who errs which can be directly or indirectly connected with his making the mistake he makes? This I take to be a question for empirical psychology or physiology, or both, and therefore, however interesting, totally irrelevant. The second consists in asking, firstly: Of what is it that we are aware when we assert a proposition which we take to be true, but which is in fact false? (This presupposes an answer to the question: Of what I am aware when I am judging falsely, knowing that my judgement is false?) Secondly, and as arising from the first question: What is the relation borne by the content of the false judgement to the content of a judgement declared to be true? Thirdly: What is the nature of the state (or it may be act) of mind which consists in being deceived into supposing a false proposition to be true? And fourthly: What is the relation of that state of mind to the state of mind called knowing? These are epistemological questions and independent of any answer to the first, or psychological, question: no amount of knowledge of the physical, physiological, psychological or other empirically discoverable causes or concomitants of error can shed any light on the nature of the phenomenon itself. Indeed the first question presupposes the answer to the second – though of course we may feel certain of what error is, without knowing, or at any rate being consciously aware of, what epistemological consequences such a feeling of certainty entails.

The problem which concerns us was very clearly put by Plato in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, and left unanswered by him. He argued that when we are in error we must be aware of either something or nothing; we could not be aware of nothing since a state of sheer ignorance is not a state of awareness at all; therefore if we are aware at all we must be aware of something; however, our failure to state the truth meant that this something was other than the true answer to the question, and came somehow to be confounded with it. He points out four possibilities of confusion: either something was confounded with something, or something with nothing, or nothing with something, or nothing with nothing. The last is self-evidently nonsense. The second and third cannot be true since in that event either knowledge or error would consist in apprehending nothing, which contradicts the very definition of apprehension. It must therefore be the first: we take something for something else. But what is this something else? Plato does not tell us. A true statement or judgement – I use the terms interchange-

ably – states what is the case: but what does a false statement state? Of what use is it to be told that *ex hypothesi* it states what is not the case as if it were the case? If the expression 'what is not the case' is here precisely equivalent to the expression 'not what is the case', this, equally *ex hypothesi*, is not there for the statement to be able to bear any relation to it. In this very unsatisfactory state Plato leaves the problem.

Now two propositions appear to me to be quite certainly true:

1 That the question, of what we are aware when we are in the state of error, is not a meaningless question and must be answerable in principle, since the erroneous statement is intelligible even when it is known to be erroneous, and therefore refers to something and not to nothing.

2 That two types of attempts have been made to answer the question:

(*a*) The first postulates a special class of entities which stand in some sort of relation of correspondence to the false statement, and are themselves regarded as possessing that viciousness or at any rate incompleteness which makes the statements which assert them erroneous. Now it seems to me that all such attempts collapse for the same reason as the crude correspondence theory in the eighteenth century collapses: namely that they interpolate entities which are intermediate between the act of judging and the facts concerning which alone there is truth or error. In the case of false judgements these entities are regarded as vicious, but even when, as in the case of true judgements, they are regarded as virtuous and informative, they cannot lose their essential nature, which is that of a screen which at once hides the facts from the potential seeker of them, and makes the assertion that such facts exist in principle unverifiable. This removes all possibility of determining which of these *Zwischendinge* are to be trusted and which are not, and so makes impossible any awareness of the distinction with which we start, that is to say, that some 'ideas', to call them so for short, are trustworthy while others are not. I may add that this holds not only where similarity is taken as constituting the

representativeness of the ideas, but whatever other characteristic, however unique, is suggested.

(*b*) The other type consists in a single *ignoratio elenchi* and either restates the problem in different words, or answers some other question. If my first proposition is correct, the fact that this should be so largely the case is regrettable. That this is so I must attempt to show.

We need not spend long in developing our criticism of the theories of type (*a*). The temptation to construct such a dualism is intelligible enough: illusions of sensation, particularly optical illusions, resemble so-called normal states so closely, that mere inspection of them cannot determine whether they be illusory or not, any more than mere comprehension of a proposition can show whether it be true or false. The sense data are real in some sense of the word, just as the proposition is intelligible: both possess natures of their own with which I must somehow be in contact, since otherwise I should be in a state of total nescience, in which I know I am not. But to assert, as Descartes does, that some perceptions are obscure and confused and that the unbridled will, which unlike the understanding is infinite, precipitates me to accept them as truths, or, like Locke, that some combination of ideas may be taken to, but in fact does not, correspond to real things, automatically deprives of any meaning the proposition that truth consists in correspondence. If there is a special class of entities or of combinations of entities the very apprehension of which constitutes error, objective error-involving complexes, as it were, then since the complexes are themselves as real as those whose inspection involves no error, to see them in their true character could in itself involve no error: error enters only if they are taken to be something which they are not. But this is precisely what those who posit them cannot allow us to do: it is not the ideas but the objects which are taken to be something which they are not, and it is *their* being so taken that is said to take the form of our accepting the ideas not for what they are not, but on the contrary for what they are, that is, at their face value. But the correct apprehension of anything – idea or anything else – cannot of itself constitute an error, since if that were so, we could, *ex hypothesi*, neither realise that we were in error, nor indeed

understand the meaning of the word: all ideas *qua* ideas are equally immediate data of awareness, and the difference between the truth and falsehood of our beliefs which is the *raison d'être* of the theory of ideas could not in principle be either detected or even understood. Which is no more than Hume had said: but it plainly needs reiteration, since it has cropped up again in the theories held by such respected philosophers as, for example, Meinong and Broad. This is so evident that no more on this head need be said.

If then we cannot explain error as due to the defects in the objectives or 'accusatives' of our thought, as they have been called, it must lie elsewhere. Our next task is to consider that group of thinkers who are, if we are right, guilty of totally ignoring the question at issue. Now whatever may be said against the various forms of correspondence and *Zwischending* theories, their propounders did at least appreciate the nature of the problem: they did realise that we were aware of something in error which both possessed some character of its own in virtue of which we could remember and describe it, and was in some sense homogeneous with that of which we are aware when we are said to be judging truly. For otherwise there would have been no such phenomenon as error. But some of those who have exposed the obvious and fatal weakness of such theories have not scrupled to substitute in their place theories of truth which overcome the problem by behaving as if it did not exist.

It is, I think, fair to assume that nearly everyone who deals with the subject at all assumes, either explicitly or not, that the judgement or statement or assertion designed to express that something is or is not the case involves the reality of at least three entities: the judging subject; the symbol, that is, words or marks on paper or gestures selected to convey meaning; and the referent, that is, what the symbols are intended to symbolise. Even those who believe that all judgements are ultimately judgements about reality recognise this, save that in their case the situation is made particularly complicated by the fact that sometimes the whole of reality is the referent, while at other times only an illegitimately abstracted aspect of it is what is symbolised, which leads to a fatal ambiguity. But this is fortunately irrelevant to the present point, which is that all analyses of the judging activity distinguish between the symbol and its referent.

But what is the referent of a false judgement? If I believe that something is the case which in fact is not the case, what am I thinking about, and what am I thinking about it? If I believe that the planet Mars is inhabited, and in fact it is not inhabited, what is the referent of my judgement or statement? (I assume that Mars is a real name and not a descriptive phrase, and that I know this to be so: it may at worst be the name of an imaginary object; but this, as I hope to be able to point out later, does not involve its being a pseudo-name, or masked descriptive phrase, since I shall maintain that imaginary objects are particular and not clumps of attributes or incomplete symbols.) The referent is certainly not anything in my head: the image or sound which is in fact a regular concomitant of my meditation about Mars is neither inhabited or uninhabited, nor do I say that it is either. Nor will any other intermediate entity do, as I hope I have shown above. Nor can I be said to be simultaneously referring to two real entities, Mars and being inhabited, both of which are constituents of the world, one as a substance, the other as a characteristic of substances, but not, as it happens, of the substance called Mars, since a mere simultaneous reflecting on two entities is not tantamount to an act of judgement or predication: it is not even a Meinongian *Annahme*, or supposal, let alone an affirmation. The fact that I can connect symbols or images as I choose does not help me to answer the question 'What am I contemplating or asserting?' when I attempt to say something not of the image or symbols but of what these symbolise or are taken to be images of.

I propose to deal as briefly as I can with three answers to this question on the part of thinkers who have seen the suicidal effect of admitting *Zwischendinge*. The first and crudest is given by McTaggart, who, in arguing against the reality of propositions, says that the unique and unanalysable relation of correspondence which constitutes the truth of the true judgement is a relation between beliefs and facts, or, as he would analyse it, beliefs and the complexes formed out of substances and characteristics. He faces the question of what corresponds to false belief, and provides this very simple answer: 'False belief is in a relation of non-correspondence to all facts, and is therefore false.'[1] Non-correspondence is, I suppose, taken to be a positive relation: and a belief, when intelligibility is held to depend on its having some

[1] [ref.?]

relation or other to the facts, is held to be intelligible as being related to the universe by the relation of non-correspondence. This is plainly wrong and bears no examination: non-correspondence, like the logical monsters not-A-ness or not-B-ness, embraces the rest of the universe and has no positive content whatever. The childish procedure of reducing a negative to a positive relation by the introduction of a hyphen – for that is all that McTaggart does – needs no fresh refutation by now. All that McTaggart succeeds in doing, therefore, is to assert the pure tautology that if to be veridical is to correspond to something, to be falsidical is not so to correspond; which leaves us where we were before, or perhaps not even there, since it sets out by describing belief as being some relation to the facts about which the belief is said to be a belief, and ends by leaving us with a class of beliefs defined as having no such relation. I have quoted this treatment of the problem because McTaggart was a careful, consistent and conscientious thinker who understood what need objectives or propositions which exist independently of the mind were designed to fill, and the particularly striking unsatisfactoriness of his solution is due to the genuineness of the problem.

A slightly less simple attempt to analyse false judgement is made by Mr Richard Robinson, who can I suppose be taken fairly to represent the Cook Wilsonian tradition: he follows his master in recognising as real only that which we can be truly said to *know*: all else has no claim to be considered real. When I am asserting that *a* is *b* I am either knowing or not knowing: if I am knowing that *a* is *b*, then what I know is the case, a real fact or complex of real facts whose nature is independent of my act of apprehension. If I assert, without knowing, that *a* is *b*, then one alternative is that I know that I am not *knowing*, which involves knowledge of what additional evidence, if it were known (as it is not), would constitute knowledge that *a* is *b*, and this is called opining, which results not in a proposition that *a* is *b*, but in a proposition about the proposition '*a* is *b*', namely that what is known is not sufficient evidence for holding that '*a* is *b*' is the case. Alternatively it may be an instance of assuming, supposing, doubting and so forth, but it may be none of these, it may be an instance of believing, or taking for granted that, or jumping to a conclusion that, *a* is *b*. And this may well be a false belief, a jumping to a wrong conclusion.

Now even if it is conceded without argument both that knowledge exists in the sense in which it is here used, that is, in the immediate apprehension of a necessary connection, and that whenever we entertained what is here called a belief we knew it to be such, and that it was not knowledge, then, although the problem of what the objectives are of acts other than knowledge would still remain unanswered, yet the specific problem of error would not arise, since it would not occur at all. But Cook Wilson himself recognised openly that there is no psychological criterion by which we could distinguish knowing from believing: that we can be in a state of mind in which we in fact give credence to what is not the case, and that if we were asked whether we *knew* that which we were asserting to be true, we might answer that we did, and still be in error; that is, that there is a state of mind which apes or imitates knowledge in such a manner as to be subjectively not distinguishable from it. And Mr Robinson in his book *The Province of Logic* and in an article in *Mind* criticising Mr Ryle repeats this, and says baldly that as only the objectives of knowledge are real, and as the state of mind of a man in error is not knowledge but only pseudo- knowledge, a counterfeit of it, its objectives cannot be real and are, I suppose, pseudo- objectives, with no place in reality.

But this is a pure *obscurum per obscurius*. To say of error that it apes knowledge is, of course, to say something which, so far as it goes, is quite true, but it goes hardly any distance at all. The question which we are asking is: What is the nature of the content of that state of mind which is described as false? That it is false, since we are in fact deceived, is true but tautological; the question of what it is that makes us err when in fact we seek the truth is one for empirical psychology, and so irrelevant; the only question which, as epistemologists, we can ask is: What is the nature of that of which we are aware when we are in error? To reply with the Cook Wilsonian that it is not real, because only objectives of acts of knowing which are identical with facts are that, is to ignore the question. If they are not real, neither are they nothing at all: to say that they are unreal, that is, nothing at all, is not a real proposition. Unreality is not a predicate: all that can therefore be meant is that, unlike events or substances, if such there be, they do not exist in time and space, but are nevertheless real entities. But this is either a restatement of the question itself in another form, or else a debatable proposition (to which we shall return later) vehemently

rejected by Cook Wilsonians as conferring reality on objects of a type of awareness other than knowledge; and so repugnant to their doctrine.

All that their explanation amounts to is a restatement of the old Cartesian doctrine which holds that, though knowledge is only possible of interconnections clearly and distinctly apprehended, yet it so happens, that even where the mind does not apprehend these, it is deceived into supposing that it does, or at any rate behaves as if it did: except that Wilson, though by no means all his followers, concede that even if we question ourselves, after each declaration of knowledge, as to whether we really are knowing, we might still be deceived and say that we were knowing, when in fact we were not. To say that only that element in a false judgement which is known, that is, not false, is real, is to ignore the status of the residue, which alone is in question, an ignoration unsuccessfully hidden by the statement that this residual element imitates knowledge, and so is not 'about' anything, for there is nothing for it to be about. In that case it is neither true nor false, since there is nothing for it to conform to, and yet it is intelligible. Which is self-contradictory: even the sedulous ape or the impostor, one would have thought, must have some sort of natures, to be as degraded as they are. And (we may state in parentheses) the same criticism applies to those followers of Spinoza who speak of parts masquerading as wholes as the cause of error: this is not helpful unless we are told something about that in the parts which enables them so to masquerade, to abet the disguise so to speak, which is what deceives us. But of this we are told nothing.

Finally we come to the third attempt to deal with the question, made by those who believe that in error what we are confusing is a hypothetical proposition with a categorical one. A false proposition is a proposition which asserts what *would be* the case if it, the proposition, were true. And a true proposition is one which asserts what *is* the case. We fall into error whenever we take what would be the case to be the case. Now this appears to me, though not in any sense which would be recognised by the supporters of the theory, to be on the right track. For their formulation of it is a pure tautology. 'A false proposition', it is said, 'states what would be the case if the proposition were true'. Truth is defined as the character of those propositions which state what is the case. Substituting for the word 'true' the expression 'stating what is the

case', we get this: 'A false proposition states what would be the case if it stated what was the case'. So the objective of a false proposition is 'what would be the case if it were the case', that is, facts which would be facts if they were facts. This is not very helpful.

The question which we are asking is: What is the objective of false propositions? If propositions are what they are in virtue of some relation to facts, what facts is the false proposition related to? We are answered: 'hypothetical facts', facts which would have been the case if, in fact, they were so. Not, let it be noted, 'if the proposition were true' for that carries the false suggestion that the facts are what they are owing to propositions being what *they* are: which is plainly not intended. But what interests us is the question: To what does the apodosis of the hypothetical statement, that is, 'what would be the case' correspond? Or to put it in another way: Of what universe are hypothetical facts constituents as categorical facts are of the so-called real world? Or to put it in a slightly different way: If true propositions refer directly to facts, while false propositions refer to protases of the form 'if the proposition were true', which themselves refer to whatever it is that they state, what is it that they state? So that again the attempted answer turns out to be but the statement of the question in another form. Nevertheless this last method of looking at the question possesses two distinct advantages. Firstly it does not tacitly presuppose that the false judgement refers to nothing. Secondly it provides a somewhat mysterious entity called hypothetical facts, which is yet more than other theories have given us, and may upon analysis provide some clue to the truth.

I am not at all sure what is meant by the expression 'hypothetical facts': what I take those who employ it to mean is something like the apodosis of a conditional clause, the 'then' part of a complex 'if–then' proposition. 'Fact' is used in a sense in which it is interchangeable with 'proposition', and is to be carefully distinguished from the other sense of 'fact', in which it is not identical with 'proposition' but is the referent the independent character of which makes the proposition true or false. And I believe that the first is the sense in which the expression 'hypothetical fact' is used, because those who so use it believe that all propositions other than the propositions of logic, and possibly mathematics, are empirical propositions which, in their simplest

form at any rate, affirm qualities or relations of real spatio-temporal particulars, whether they are, to use Broad's terms, continuants or events, which can ultimately be denoted by names or demonstratives; and that hypothetical statements, and for that matter false statements, and the propositions made by writers of fiction, are therefore, since they are not necessarily about entities in the single spatio-temporal system in which we are contained, not about particulars at all, for particularity involves being contained in that system, but may be, and most often are, about qualities, or relations, or so-called 'incomplete symbols', or logical constructions from these, which are themselves nothing at all unless they qualify, or relate, or are completed by, or are analysable into, particulars or demonstratives or names.

Now as all facts in the second sense – if by facts be meant the particulars' being qualified by a quality or related by a relation – must be facts about particulars, and as all particulars are existent entities, that is, events or continuants in space and/or time, there can be no facts in the second sense which are hypothetical in the sense that they are facts not about actual but about hypothetical particulars, for it is held that there are no such things: a hypothetical particular on such a theory is a pure *Unding*. But unless this whole discussion is meaningless, we are in error conscious of something, and even if we abstract from it those elements whose reality is guaranteed by the fact that even error, however wild, must presuppose knowledge of something, else there would be nothing to err about, even if we consider only the residual something which *ex hypothesi* we do not *know*, though there is nothing to distinguish our apprehension of it from genuine knowledge, this something is apprehended even in error, by direct acquaintance, and cannot be a quality or relation which as a universal, symbolised by an incomplete symbol, is not a this at all, but a suchness.

To obtain a satisfactory answer to what this something is, is the whole purpose of this paper: when we are told that hypothetical facts are what we are looking for, this appears to be a possible answer at first, because a fact looks like a particular, a something; but so soon as one realises that the users of that expression mean by hypothetical fact anything but a particular, the answer is seen to be no answer, and we must look elsewhere. The name itself, however, is suggestive, and if we explore one of its possible

meanings, we may discover an answer which may not only provide an adequate if undramatic and almost too obvious solution to the problem of error, but will be seen to be explicitly presupposed in the possibility of historical knowledge and of imaginative experience, and implicitly in that of ordinary daily life.

II

One of the commonest things which beginners in philosophy have to know is that it is impossible to be acquainted with bare particulars; and that the growth of knowledge in any sphere is in some sense a process of discrimination and noting of differences, whether the field within which the differences are noted be a reality independent of the percipient, or the immanent content of it, or whatever it is held to be on any other theory. The point is that the particular positive judgement involves and is involved by certain negative ones which demarcate the object of acquaintance from its context and establish its proper character as being other than the system or collection of which it is a member or part.

This is fairly trite. A point not quite so trite is that the entities from which it is distinguished must be homogeneous with it, that is, possess the same ontological status and structure with it. That is, a particular is seen to be what it is by being distinguished from other particulars, a quality or relation by being distinguished from other qualities or relations: there can be no discrimination between members of different types. *This* round table cannot be distinguished as this table by being discriminated from brownness or squareness or the colour brown: but only from *that* square brown floor. Things or continuants can be grasped as such-and-such only by being distinguished from other things or continuants, events from other events. And ordinarily we do distinguish the furniture of our normal experience by contrasting each item either with some other item of the same type, of whose compresence with it we are aware, or with a past item of this kind called up to mind either in memory or by description. But if we are historians, and attempting to record events or conjecture human motives, our procedure, though essentially the same in kind, tends to differ from the other in one important respect: we discriminate events we call actual not merely from other actual events in time, but from what we conceive of as unrealised possibilities, that is, that which given a situation previous to the situation which we desire

to examine, might equally well have arisen (so far as we can tell with the evidence at our disposal) as a result of, a successor to, that previous situation, in place of the situation which in fact did occur. And our acumen both in giving a unique description of the events as they actually occurred, and in judging that understanding of their surroundings and foresight which is explicitly or implicitly presupposed in the deliberate activity of agents in the situation, consists very largely in being able to see, on the one hand, what these possibilities really were, and, on the other, how far they were seen to be what they were by persons who are thought to have taken part in actualising one or other of them: in seeing, that is, what particular disjunctive set of possible states of affairs was capable of being made actual at any given moment of time. Only by discriminating between the actual state of affairs, the actual event or actual state of a continuant and the states and events compossible with it, can we hope to approach comprehension of its individual character, *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*.

I dare say that it is the case that our historical analysis never can, in principle, give us the individual, which is a sort of vanishing-point, the term outside the series of finer and finer disjunctions of determinables or genera or classes into their subdivisions, towards which only various degrees of asymptomatic approximation are possible. But we do speak of particular events or continuants as though we see them as such individuals – and for all practical purposes this must be held to suffice – in which case the entities with which we deal in historical research, particular persons, events and so on, if they are distinguished from that which might have been but did not in fact materialise, must be distinguished not from species or universals of any kind but from their own likes, other persons, events and the rest, these being not actual, but, for want of a better word, possible, or perhaps potential. What metaphysical view about the structure of events we hold is not relevant: whether, that is, we believe that we apprehend necessary causal connections between events, or only a regular and uniform succession, particular streams of which can be mapped out by the application of inductive methods – in particular what Mill called the Method of Agreement – this is not directly relevant, since its function is to provide the method of determining possibilities which in fact we presuppose, whether openly or tacitly. At worst, if we possess no historical sense at all – and this is

a sort of limiting case – our possibilities are pure logical possibilities, in the sense in which Leibniz understood the term 'possible', in which case, though I do not suppose that anyone has ever done so, all we find to which to compare and with which to contrast the particular event we seek information about is an enormous set of all possibilities stated by all non-self-contradictory propositions having the same logical subject as that of which we ask our question, where the subject itself is no more than any instance describable by a very generalised descriptive phrase. But this does not normally happen: what is usually the case is that the situation our awareness of which we take to be – I hesitate to say know to be – true is fairly concrete, and the real possibilities against a set of which it is determined are equally concrete, since they must be of the same type as that of which the question is asked.

This is the only account, it seems to me, which makes sense of unfulfilled conditionals, for example, for I cannot see what we can possibly mean by saying 'if the Arabs had won the battle of Tours there would have been minarets in Oxford' unless it is that the protasis stands for a particular, an exact, as much as the true proposition 'The Arabs did not win the battle of Tours' – only the event in the latter case is actual, in the first possible – and the apodosis equally stands for something particular, and is in this sense not a descriptive phrase or a set of incomplete symbols, but a denotative expression symbolising a this, a quiddity, so to speak. As for what the implicative symbols 'if–then' stand for other than to show that the status of the objectives of the proposition is not one of actuality but one of possibility, this is an independent question, involving one's theory of the nature of the ontological connection between events within each type, and so not relevant.

My point, which I have perhaps not made very clear, is that in order to understand a proposition asserting something about a particular, one must not only distinguish it from other particulars coexistent with it and known to be so (though this often suffices in ordinary life when no accurate knowledge of the particular is desired, and any method of discrimination which enables one to act successfully will do); but when such knowledge (which approximates, and perhaps sometimes reaches, direct acquaintance) is sought, the particulars from which the given particular is distinguished are those non-existent might-have-beens whose particularity is not in question, since you can compare

elements only *in pari materia*. And my opinion of a given historian will be high in proportion as I believe him to be able to explain actual events by contrasting them with what so easily might have been, and to estimate and evaluate the motives and the general character of given personages because I believe that he really has conjectured more or less adequately how far they themselves understood what the real possibilities, at a given moment, were, whether they saw them all or were blind to some, and how far they were, through ignorance or inadvertence or bias or whatever other material conditions of error there are, contemplating possibilities real enough at some moment previous to the given moment, but left unactualised and without actualisable progeny by the fact that events had occurred which altered the actual situation and so made the next lot of possibilities different from their predecessors – which alone gives the historian something to contemplate.

Now if the expression 'Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo' or 'I am sitting on a chair' is an expression denoting particular events, with which it is, in principle, possible to be directly acquainted, so is the expression 'I might have been standing up' or 'Napoleon might have won the battle of Waterloo', which state real *possible* events: and either this is all that is meant by those who speak of descriptive phrases, or null classes, or universals which have no instances, or say that possibility is wider than actuality; or else they do not see the problem.

To make this clearer: to say that the proposition 'Napoleon the First lived to a ripe old age' is in fact a proposition the referent of which is a null class, that is, that there is no class of entities such that the characteristics of being called Napoleon the First and having reached a ripe old age both belong to it, is but to say that the negative proposition 'Napoleon the First did not attain to ripe old age' is true, but it does *not* answer the question what is *meant* by the person who propounded the first proposition through ignorance of the real facts, since the class to which it might have referred does not exist, that is, is not there for him to be able to refer to it. So that I cannot agree with those who maintain that the postulation of subsistent entities is due to verbal confusions: to say 'an imaginary Napoleon' is the referent seems to be more pompous but far nearer the truth. And I think that a great many of Meinong's supposals, if that is the proper equivalent for *Annahme*, satisfy exactly this want, and so do Stout's possibilities, and so do

hypothetical facts, if 'facts' is not taken to mean either on the one hand only what has been or is or will be the case in space and time, or, on the other hand, propositions in the sense in which 'proposition' is the name of a content as opposed to the referent of a judgement or statement. But I certainly do not think that *all* classes of sentences which Meinong and Husserl refer to as propositions are possibilities. Nonsense expressions, for example, are not: I do not think that 'round squares' or 'pink promises' refer to anything. They are, I think, included among subsistents for irrelevant reasons, because they appear to mean something, but are in reality mere word groups which produce, owing to their meaning in other contexts, combinations of mental associations whose incongruity and bizarreness may be entertaining. But whatever the psychological conditions of meaning may be, they can never be reduced to *mere* association.

Nor, again, having wandered so far from my subject, do I wish to volunteer anything about scientific and mathematical objects, save suggesting, very tentatively, that there may be an analogy between the systems of physics or mathematics and that of events in time, such that supposals – for example, *reductiones ad absurdum* – are incompatible with their premisses in the same sort of way as a given possibility cannot be coactual with a rival actualised possibility which belongs to the same type or set, so that in both cases there is some point in the generic tree which by itself, other things being equal, allows of the actualisation of either possibility, in one case in time and space, in the other ideal. But I do not undertake to vouch for the validity of this parallelism.

Further, if we consider the case of fiction, the same account seems to be the only one which is at all satisfactory. A really well-drawn character in fiction is certainly not a clump of characteristics in search of a proper subject, which in fact is not there for them to attach themselves to. It is only in cases of poor writing that something approaching this occurs: either the characteristics attributed to the fictional character are incompatible with one another, in which case we fail to form any definite conception of the character, and the symbols simply fail to symbolise, as in nonsense phrases; or the characteristics are so general that they would apply to a whole class of subjects, in which case we are reduced to thinking of the subject as 'someone-or-other', which is tenuous and unsatisfactory, but still logically a subject and

denotable by a name. Where the artist is successful he presents us with a character whom we apprehend as an individual, whom we can imagine in situations other than those created for him by the author, and the apprehension of whom is an act akin to intuition or perception, and not to awareness of a group of related qualities symbolised by a descriptive phrase. Thus when I think of Don Quixote as doing this or that, what I am apprehending is not the proposition 'If there were a person who did this at the time and in the place specified by Cervantes, he would be called Don Quixote; but there is no such person and the name is no one's name' – which no doubt is true in one sense at least – for if I thought that a contemporary of Cervantes' really lived and did these things and was called Don Quixote, I might in fact have been in error. But even if I did that, and learnt of my error later, though I should no longer be deluded, the illusion, if you like to call it so, which is what deluded me, should still be with me, and would not be resolved into the above propositions, but would remain an individual entity bound by certain laws, of which some belong to the categorial characteristics of all reality, such as not being in two places at once, some are laws of the author's spatio-temporal universe tacitly presupposed by him, such as the human inability to fly, and some are artificial conditions invented by the author and used by him to build an individual system or fictional world in which his heroes have their being. The particular imaginary world and all its contents is created by the author when he stops at some point in the history of the actual world and embraces not the actualised possibility but one of the unactualised ones, and explores it, and certain other possibilities flowing from it, for their own sake, or to give pleasure to his audience: the remoter from the actual present the point of departure is, the more fantastic the fiction, but however fictional the fiction, if it is the work of imagination at all, it deals with particulars which are in principle nameable, save that the names are not names of actual entities but of their frustrated rivals. In this sense both the historian and the novelist deal with particulars, and the worlds to which these belong are also particular: in neither the one case nor the other am I thinking of the pictures or noises which are the sense data which I employ, or the author employs, as symbols, but of what these symbolise.

The light which all this, if it is true, throws on error, is clear. What happens is that I am asking a question concerning some particular entity which I must *know* to be possessed of some character, else I cannot ask the question, for there is nothing before my mind. The false answer which, when in error, I adopt as true, or whose truth I presuppose in behaving as I do, refers to a particular entity in one of the parallel, unactualised, members of the disjunctive set of determinates knowledge of whose determinable I presuppose in my question. If asked how it happens that this real but misleading entity has interpolated itself into the space reserved, as it were, for the actual entity, I have to answer that that is a psychological, or at any rate empirical, question, of no particular epistemological importance, though, no doubt, very important and interesting in itself, and belongs to the field of inductive science.

What the solution I offer is a solution to is Plato's question, with which I began: What do I confuse with what when I am entertaining a false belief? My principal reason for thinking this particular solution to be the right one is that all other attempts to answer have, as I endeavored to point out earlier, either made the false judgement refer to nothing at all, or else made the objectives of false belief themselves responsible for error, which involves one in the absurdity of supposing that there are entities to know which is *ipso facto* to be in a state of error, or else provided a certain class of hypothetical statements as the objectives, which is merely to push the question a stage backwards, for all that is apprehended in error is the apodosis by itself, which must itself carry reference to something outside it, otherwise it has no meaning and there is no error. And anyhow erroneous and true thinking must be sufficiently *in pari materia* for it to be the case that, if all thinking is thinking of *a* as *b*, or of *a* as having a relation R to *b*, or, conceivably of *a* as having a relation R to *a*, then false thinking no less than true must involve the reality of all the terms and relations concerned, such that, whatever the differentia between true and false thinking, they must, *qua* thinking, be about something-or-other, which something-or-other must have some one status which is the same in both cases; otherwise the proposition that there can be confusion of one with the other, which is what error is, is unintelligible, nor should we be able, after discovering the nature of our mistake, to contemplate it side by side with the truth, for

there would be no 'it' to contemplate. This *desideratum sine quo non*, the objective of the illusion which no longer deludes, the whole of which, illusion and objective, can be the objective of a memory-act, seems to me to be accounted for by the theory of real possibilities, or more correctly real *possibilia*, and by no other that I can think of. And this conclusion grows more convincing when one considers that the arts both of history and of fiction presuppose some such conception, and so also does one's normal view of the possibility of free choice in action, whether such choice be regarded as real or as a systematic illusion.

Yet I admit that I do not feel altogether satisfied with this answer: real *possibilia* seem very peculiar entities, especially those which are dated in time. If we are asked what is the difference between the Minotaur and the existent image of it in my head now, in virtue of which the latter is an existent section of my own psychical history, whereas the former is called a fictional entity, I cannot, like McTaggart, answer simply that the differentia is the ownership of a characteristic, that is, existence, which one possesses and the other lacks, for that involves one in a belief in the genuineness of existential propositions, and of the ontological argument, which on other grounds I regard as false. Nor will being in our common or my private spatio-temporal system be a criterion of actuality, since in the case of historical error, the unfulfilled *possibilia* stated by my saying that Caesar might have left the Rubicon uncrossed are strictly dated in the sense that the determinable of which they are the unactualised determinates is a fact about an event in time, that is, the situation before the actual crossing: so that there must be a sense in which some real *possibilia*, at any rate, are in time and/or space, though not all of them need be so, or at any rate not in the so-called real space and time of physical events, as, for example, the *possibilia* of fictional universes. What they must all be, however, is individual *possibilia* or characteristics of individual *possibilia*.

What this appears to prove is that particularity or individuality is not involved by, nor does it involve, being in objective time and space, whatever these may be. If so, then we are compelled to say that we cannot analyse the natures of, or difference between, actuality and possibility, actualisedness and actualisability, but know them by direct inspection; and know moreover that actuality

is a special case of possibility, that is, the actualised case, which is as it were the centre of a fan of possibilities.

All this has an obvious resemblance to the compossible universes of Leibniz, a suggestion which he failed to elaborate. We can go on to say that there is potentially an infinite number of such universes, some which possess space and time series of their own, as in novels or fairy-tales, in contrast to the historical *possibilia* which are contained in the time and/or space of actual events, while some universes, as for example that of algebra, dispense with space and time: though it may be doubted whether such possess particulars in any real sense, and so are in the least relevant. The categorial characteristics of each are either given us, as in the so-called real world, or in history, or possibly in dreams or mystical visions, while some are created by us, as in fiction. There are also certain trans-universal categories, such as particularity and universality, or unity and plurality, which characterise all possible systems.

I repeat that I do not think this answer very satisfactory, since it does not appear to me absolutely self-evident that it is so necessitated by the data as to render the use of Occam's razor obviously inappropriate: and *possibilia*, especially those in time, which the historian spends his time upon distinguishing and eliminating when he is intent on precision in his knowledge, seem suspicious, as all simple and unanalysable entities always do. But I cannot at present see either that Plato's formulation of the problem rests on a mistake, or that any other method of dealing with it even begins to see its real force.

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