

# THE CRITIQUE OF THEOLOGICAL REASON

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## CHAPTER I

### *The status quo: genesis*

#### CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY TODAY

The most common assessment of the legacy of Descartes is that he left us with a picture of mind–body dualism more clearly drawn and more deeply and widely influential than Plato had produced, or Plato’s less sophisticated followers had managed in the centuries between. Two examples of such an assessment must suffice. The first is from a piece on neurophysiology by Peter Fenwick. ‘Descartes, in the seventeenth century, maintained that there are two radically different kinds of substance, the *res extensa* – the extended substance, that which has length, breadth and depth, and can therefore be measured and divided; and a thinking substance, the *res cogitans*, which is unextended and indivisible. The external world of which the human body is part belongs to the first category, while the internal world of the mind belongs to the second.’

Fenwick goes on from this general account of Descartes’s legacy to a brief survey of the philosophies of mind that dominate the current scene. At one extreme he places Dennett’s neurophilosophy: consciousness and subjective experience are just the functions of neural nets, and nothing is required to explain these except a detailed knowledge of neural nets. At the other extreme stands Nagel: subjective experience is not available to scientific method, as it is not in the third person and cannot be validated in the public domain. Searle, he argues, occupies an intermediate position: for Searle regards subjective experience as being a property of neural nets, but he does not think that a full understanding of neural nets is sufficient to explain subjective experience; indeed Searle awaits another Newton to provide a means of understanding, in some verifiable manner, the subjective substance. Subjective experiences, then, in the dual connotation of the experiences of being a subject and the experiences distinctive of subjects, are private, inner entities

which cannot (as yet) be understood or explained in any publicly verifiable manner. In this they differ radically, as a different kind of substance, from external entities available to public investigation, explanation and verification – such as neural nets. Hence the point of the reductionist approach, which maintains that subjective experiences are nothing other than neural nets, their properties and behaviour.

Of course, the dualism does not often appear to be quite as dichotomous as Fenwick's and other such brief accounts of it as that adopted here might suggest. On the Dennett side of the argument there is commonly said to be more than merely neural processes. There are said to be rule-governed systems of symbols, like computer programs, or some such systems composed also of causal connections; and these are described as epiphenomena with respect to neural states and processes. However, since these bear little resemblance to our actual experience of on-going consciousness and its procedures, and since they are in any case as difficult to establish in reality as anything other than the ever developing results of the latter's continuous investigative creativity, they can scarcely function to relieve us of the dichotomously dualist choice between merely physicochemical processes and something called mind or consciousness, particularly when we try to choose between the Dennett and the Nagel side of the current argument. In a phrase of Ted Honderich's, from his review of Searle's latest book, proponents of these rule-governed systems 'aimed at rescuing consciousness from being ghostly stuff, and turned it into yet less'.<sup>1</sup>

Just such a simple mind–body dualism of dichotomously distinct kinds of substance is assumed, in fact, by many of those engaged in cognitive science today, and not only by those who specifically study the brain and nervous system. The common linguistic currency of this dualism is that of internal or inner, private, subjective, for the substance variously named mind, soul or spirit; and external or outer, public (as in publicly verifiable) and hence objective, for bodily or physical substance. And much the same linguistic currency is used by philosophers; indeed it is most likely philosophers who put it into circulation, as it was philosophers rather than scientists who in the modern era attributed it to Descartes. D. Z. Phillips, to take but one example from contemporary philosophy, in his challenge to the very existence of such an entity,

<sup>1</sup> Peter Fenwick, 'The Neurophysiology of Religious Experience', in Dinesh Bugra (ed.), *Psychiatry and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 168. John Searle, *Mind, Language and Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999); and Honderich's review in *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1999, pp. 1–2.

describes a Cartesian self as an inner and necessarily private subject, whose very existence, not to say its nature, we must infer from publicly observable bodily behaviour.<sup>2</sup> Hence we have in contemporary discourse the widespread assumption of a simple dichotomous dualism of inner, private, subjective mind-self and outer, extended, public, objective body. This assumption governs a very great deal of the contemporary discussion of selfhood and personhood and of its place and prospects in the whole range of reality. In fact, until Searle's Newton of neurophysiology comes along, it rather favours those who either deny the existence of mind-self in any sense exceeding that which the most physical of sciences study as the extended substance of body. Or, at the very least, it restricts views about mind-selves to the realm of private, subjective opinion – a realm to which religion (and morality?) may then also be restricted – and debars these in any case from expression in verifiable or falsifiable propositions.

This state of affairs is commonly fathered upon Descartes. Now, it undoubtedly represents a most common caricature of Descartes, even if there are features of Descartes's philosophy which still invite the caricature. But does that matter any longer? Is it worth even a small expense of time attempting to rehabilitate Descartes? Would it not be better to criticise the status quo as we find it? Descartes is long dead.

Well, there is a case for a brief revisit of Descartes. On such a visit it is possible to discover larger perspectives and more promising developments in Descartes's own philosophical investigations of human nature, perspectives and developments which dominant impressions of too dichotomous a dualism serve to hide from view. It is also possible that, had these larger perspectives been followed further by himself or his successors, Descartes and his followers might well have left us today with more adequate philosophical views, and with more adequate philosophical underpinnings for the progress of science. A revisit of Descartes, then, can throw some light upon the critical role of those who followed him in the company of Western philosophers: including those who resisted his influence, those who shaped it more crudely and those who, in response perhaps, then tried for a greatly improved version. For then one can review the present state of the Cartesian inheritance with some real prospect of recovering some lost and better parts of it, and of deciding to move forward with it or from it.

<sup>2</sup> D. Z. Phillips, *Death and Immortality* (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 5. See also Ilham Dilman, *Philosophy and the Philosophic Mind* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

## CARTESIAN PHILOSOPHY ACCORDING TO DESCARTES

Descartes made much reference to ‘primitive notions’. These are foundational ideas in our knowledge of reality, which could be critically analysed and deployed, certainly, but could neither be substituted for nor produced by any prior process of reasoning. In this matter of current concern, these contemporary references to Descartes which we have just seen seem to assume that he operated with but two primitive notions, namely, that of inner mind and that of extended matter. But this is not so. Descartes’s investigation into human nature begins in fact from three primitive notions: the two just named are followed or, perhaps better, preceded by a third, the notion of the one united human being, ‘une seule personne, qui a ensemble un corps et une pensée’. This is quite clear from the *Meditations* of 1641. It is also quite clear to the attentive reader of Descartes that from 1641 to the publication of the *Traité des passions* in 1649, later to be called *Les Passions de l’âme*,<sup>3</sup> he became increasingly preoccupied with the issue of the one united person, viz., the union of body and soul, and with the best means of investigating and describing this. His correspondence, and particularly his correspondence with Elizabeth, shows this preoccupation.

In the sixth of his *Meditations* Descartes makes it clear that he did not accept the ‘pilot in the ship’ analogy, or any similar analogy which would suggest the ‘ghost in the machine’ idea so often employed in his name. The kind of analogy he does use is that of weight which is distributed throughout the whole body, while not itself being an extended entity, though it can be brought to bear through any particular point of a body.<sup>4</sup> And as far as the implications of talk of two substances are concerned, he does say that spirit and body are incomplete substances with respect to the human being they compose; but when they are taken separately they are considered complete substances.<sup>5</sup> As if the three primitive notions were interlocked in ways which analysis would at first threaten, and only further analysis would restore.

He came to believe that it is in the investigation of the emotions, *passions*, that the unity of the person, the union of soul (or spirit, or mind) and body, could best of all be seen and described. In his *Principia Philosophiae* (pt 1, paras. 66, 75) of 1644, when he is occupied with the nature and enumeration of clear and distinct ideas, he names three

<sup>3</sup> R. Descartes, *Les Passions de l’âme*, ed. G. Rodis-Lewis, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> R. Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: L. Cerf, 1897–1913), vol. 9a, p. 240.     <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 173.

(again, not just two) in the matter which presently concerns us: the idea of body, the idea of soul; but now, as a third, he names the idea of those sentiments, affections and appetites which belong to the union of body and soul. Indeed, in one of his letters, to Morus, he claims that the *Traité des passions* contains his final thoughts on the union of soul and body.<sup>6</sup> It is worth rehearsing very briefly, then, Descartes's treatment of the emotions; not merely in order to come to grips with the kinds of dualism which have so much affected modern philosophy, but to anticipate already the role of emotion in coming to an adequate philosophy of moral behaviour and moral value, a matter that is of central concern to the second part of this investigation.

The emotions or passions are to be distinguished, according to Descartes, both from those perceptions which arise in the soul as a result of stimuli from external objects, carried through the nervous system, and from those appetites or affections which derive from motions or states peculiar to the body and are consequently felt in the soul; such as hunger, thirst, pain. Emotions or passions strictly speaking consist of sentiments which belong to the soul, but are aroused or sustained with the help of those 'animal spirits' for a further description of which one must have recourse to Descartes's detailed physiology. Suffice it to say here that the emotions truly belong to the united person, to the union of soul and body in the whole human being. They cannot be accounted for as activities or passivities of either the soul or the body as if these were separate entities accidentally conjoined at, say, the pineal gland.

There are two further features of Descartes's treatment of the emotions which are worth noting here. The first is this: that they are described as perceptions or 'knowings', *perceptions ou connoissances*, albeit confused and obscure. The appetites and affections, such as hunger and so on, which belong to the body and are felt in the soul, are also described by Descartes as certain confused ways of thinking; and of course stimuli from external objects also give rise to perceptions. The emotions, then, in combination with the affections of the body and the stimuli from external objects, all form part of the process by which human beings know reality; and the pivotal place of the emotions, belonging as they do to the *one person* ('une seule personne'), suggests an epistemology in which the emotions are as integrated as they possibly have not been since the early Stoics rejected the soul-body dualism altogether and made the emotions an integral part of that process of

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 347.



judgement by which we establish as much of the truth about reality as is available to us.

Second, and as a consequence of realising their role in our thinking or knowing, attention to the nature and number of these emotions can actually cast some light on the nature of knowing, and in particular on the nature of the knowing process that is characteristic of human beings. There are, according to Descartes, six simple or primitive emotions: admiration, desire, love and hate, joy and sadness. All the other named emotions are either derivatives from, or mixtures of, these. Admiration, which some might be surprised to find named amongst the emotions, and even more surprised to see named first, enables us to detect that which may be important for us. Desire drives us to engage with it. Love and hate are engaged respectively with what is good or bad for us in it; and so on.

Now, these are brutally brief depictions, and they do not even begin to adumbrate the expansions and nuances which follow in the writings of Descartes, especially as the derivatives and mixtures of the simple emotions are investigated and described. But they suffice to make the point that is presently relevant, namely, that the process by which we know the world of which we are so integral a part, is a process in which our embodied spiritual presence is active in engagement with it and passive with respect to its active engagement with us. Further, the process of knowing is, in a central and pivotal part of itself, a process of evaluating. It would then follow that value judgements and judgements of truth and falsehood may not be separable in the manner in which some contemporary epistemologies and theories of morality suggest they are. And these important epistemological insights both the nature and the pivotal role of the emotions do a very great deal to secure, as described by Descartes.

It would be idle at this point to speculate how these very real developments in Descartes's own thought, had they been continued by his successors, might have yielded something other than a dichotomously dualistic notion of human being – a notion to which, as we may later note, some modern denials of the very existence of mind, soul or spirit are as much indebted as are most affirmations of the existence of these. It would be idle to speculate at this point how much sooner a more unified view of human being might have yielded some of the more promising philosophical insights that are just beginning to emerge today. These are, in particular, views of the absolute integrality of emotion and praxis in the very genesis and in the whole development of

human cognitive endeavour, which the most advanced developmental psychology now proposes. And indeed, as some developmental psychologists now argue, views of an original and persistent intersubjective nature of that knowing process. For Descartes envisaged a prenatal stage in which four passions or emotions have already arisen, with the 'newly united' soul-body: joy, love, hate and sadness. These emotions already enable the foetus to react emotionally to what may affect the mother. Further, the first coincidence of an object or event with a particular emotion predisposes the brain to an association of such object with such emotion. However, and finally, since emotions consist in 'confused and obscure' perceptions or knowledge, experience and reason have a role in forming the emotions so that they become an ever more reliable adjunct and access to the good life; in short, the emotions are patient to a process of education and learning.

These elements in Descartes's treatise on the emotions certainly hold out the promise that, on a less dichotomously dualistic view of the matter, even if the self is identified with the mind, soul or spirit, yet, provided only that its real unity with the body is sufficiently established, it can be known directly through its emotional and embodied activity just as substantially as it itself knows all that it knows, including other selves, through these. In short, the knower is known, and just as directly known, by the same means by which it knows. It does not need to be inferred, as something 'inner', by arguing from 'outward' phenomena which, since they belong to an altogether different substance, serve mainly to conceal it. However, it would indeed be idle to speculate on how much sooner such developments of the fuller reaches of Descartes's philosophical investigations of human reality might have come about, on what form they might have then taken, and on how successfully they might have been established. In actual fact, it was the dominant dualist impressions of Descartes's philosophy, of the kind so confidently represented by Fenwick and Phillips and by so many others, that came to prominence in succeeding centuries; amply aided as they were by other philosophical movements to which our attention must shortly turn. And there is little doubt that much in Descartes himself rendered considerable assistance to this otherwise unfortunate turn of philosophical events. This is not altogether because Descartes failed to bring his whole planned philosophical system to published completion during his own lifetime.<sup>7</sup> For even in that part of his system in which impressions of too

<sup>7</sup> A convincing argument could be made that with the *Traité des passions* in particular, Descartes came closer to this completion than he is normally credited with doing.

dichotomous a dualism seem to be most impressively overcome, that is, in his treatment of the emotions, Des-cartes introduces in the end a dual system of emotions.

The soul, remember, is characterised by *pensées*, that is, the ‘perceptions’ of the understanding and the inclinations of the will. The body is characterised by its own actions, passivities and affections; the soul–body unity, by the emotions as already described. But then Descartes does introduce a parallel set of ‘interior emotions’. These have the same names as the previous set: love and so on. However, they are based on judgements of the mind; they can in fact be called *pensées raisonnables, plus claires*, when the corresponding emotions are *pensées confusés*.<sup>8</sup> They are not subject to the perturbations of the previous set; and on them the identification and advance to the *summum bonum*, our ultimate good, depends. In contexts such as these Descartes is describing a certain aloofness of the rational will with respect to the ordinary or ‘exterior’ passions which he had considered all along. For with respect to the latter the rational will, since it could not directly arouse or allay them, had to work with them – by directing attention to objects that aroused more acceptable emotions or, as a last resort, simply preventing the action to which an unwanted emotion would otherwise naturally lead. Here, then, with the introduction of these ‘interior emotions’ the reader can reasonably suspect the influence of a popular Platonism which envisages a separable mind or rational soul, and a level of dualism which tends at least to run contrary once more to the impressions of unity so carefully cultivated in the basic analysis of the emotions. Of course, in Descartes’s assent to the traditional doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the separability of the soul is given in any case. In fact, unless that particular doctrine were to be subjected to a more constructive critique than Descartes apparently felt like devoting to his inherited Christian faith in general, the further development of the investigation of the unity of the *one person* (‘une seule personne’) was never likely to come to fuller fruition in his own writings.

#### THE SUBSEQUENT RECRUDESCENCE OF DUALISM

It is time, then, in pursuit of the fate of the subject in modern philosophy, to leave these thoughts of what might have been, and to turn to

<sup>8</sup> Descartes, *Oeuvres*, vol. 4, pp. 60ff.

those subsequent movements in modern philosophy which can be reasonably read as contributing to the eventual loss of the subject, whether by assuming or establishing too great a separation between mind and body, or in some other way. Immanuel Kant is the next philosopher whom even the briefest of investigations along the present lines must visit. But a slight diversion to take in the philosophy of Hume would seem to be indicated. This is not simply because Kant attributed to Hume the credit for awakening him from his dogmatic slumbers. Rather, the tradition of philosophy represented in Britain, the currently named Analytic tradition which is so influential in the Anglophone areas, has been much indebted to the philosophy of Hume, and Anglophone philosophy will loom larger in later reaches of the present investigation. There is a combination of effect and influence, therefore, which is apparent on the contemporary scene, and which requires a look to its origins, and a brief visit to Hume.

*Hume's scepticism concerning the self*

When Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (bk 1, sec. 6) comes to consider what he calls personal identity, his first page could be construed as a direct attack upon Descartes. This is especially so if we consider that the *Cogito*, the thinking thing, the content of the foundational certainty of the Cartesian system, constitutes the real self for Descartes; and that the self is not constituted, rather, as further actual and potential developments of Descartes's thought might suggest, by the *one person* ('une seule personne').

Hume rejects at the outset the assertion by 'some philosophers' that we enjoy a direct and intimate consciousness of a self, that is, of something in us which maintains its identity and 'simplicity' over a continuous span of existence. For all our knowledge is based upon impressions made upon us, according to Hume the would-be empiricist, and there simply is no impression from which such an idea of a self could be derived. What we actually experience is a whole collection or succession of impressions in the forms of sensations, passions, perceptions. Each and every one of these is different, distinct or at least separable from the others. There is not amongst them any impression of an entity which maintains its own simple and undifferentiated identity through the flow or succession of the others; much less an impression of such an entity to which all the other impressions could then be seen to refer, as to their source or sustainer. Or, to put the matter slightly differently, one

can never catch a glimpse of one's self in a pure and simple state; innocent, that is to say, of any (other) attendant impression, any particular and passing sensation, passion or perception. The self, then, which Hume does indeed equate with the mind or thinking principle, is likened by him to a kind of theatre in which a plethora of perceptions make their appearance, come into being and pass away, and combine together in an apparently infinite variety show. Except that we must not take the metaphor of the theatre literally; for there is no 'theatre', and only the successive and varied perceptions exist, and it is to that 'bundle or collection' that we must apply words such as mind, thinking principle; for 'self' suggests a mind or thinking person, something over and above, or beneath this bundle.

How, then, do I come to talk of my self, as of an entity that persists with its identity intact through the whole course of my life? According to Hume this fiction, for that is what it is, is created by the combined contributions of the memory, the imagination and what he calls the three uniting principles of the ideal world. Well, in actual fact, just two of these uniting principles are operative in this case, namely, the uniting principles of resemblance and causation. The third uniting principle, contiguity, is not applicable here, presumably because it can apply only when we are explaining similar fictions of unity and identity in the case of physical things such as plants or animals. The memory, then, is a faculty by which we are made aware of the continuity and succession of perceptions; but it is not on that account and of itself that which produces the fiction of personal identity. There is a role for imagination.

In short, the memory brings together in a kind of chain the images of successive and simultaneous perceptions, and as it does so by retaining and linking images of past perceptions, and images resemble their objects, the uniting principle of resemblance begins to operate by courtesy of the imagination, which can move smoothly then from one link to another of the chain of images which memory creates. Much the same may be said for the uniting principle of causation which the work of memory also enables to operate, as impressions are imagined to be linked causally with ideas which habitually succeed them, and vice versa. And so the work of memory enables the imagination, through the operation of the uniting principles of the ideal world, resemblance and causation, to move so smoothly from one link in memory's chain to another, that the whole bundle or collection is made to seem like the continuance of one and the same object, or in this case of one identical self or subject.

In Hume's own words, then:

The whole of this doctrine leads us to the conclusion, which is of great importance in the present affair, viz. that all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties. Identity depends upon relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of the easy transition they occasion. But as the relations, and the easiness of transition may be diminished by insensible degrees, we have no just standard, by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time, when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity. All disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union, as we have already observed.

It is difficult to respond critically to any element in Hume's work without taking a general view of his philosophy as a whole, and then arguing in some detail for that view. That cannot be done at this point. In the meantime, may it not be permissible to see the strength of Hume in his relentless scepticism – in 'setting aside some metaphysicians', for example, as he puts it – rather than in any constructive positions we might be able to attribute to him? For we might be tempted to attribute to him the following construction of reality; even if, in deference to himself and his followers, we were to refrain from calling it a metaphysic:

There is a physical world and an ideal world. That latter phrase is his, but it simply means a 'world' of sensations and emotions, in short, impressions or perceptions, ideas and relations of ideas, and so on. We can only know with any certainty (probability?) that discrete objects in the former world make impressions in the latter world and give rise there to perceptions. Our beliefs that there are souls, selves and substances, forging continuous identities where there is only the flux of discrete objects and perceptions, are fictions based on relations of ideas rather than on received matters of fact. One is reminded of Bertrand Russell's translation into the categories of this Humean tradition of Descartes's *Cogito* as 'there is a thought now'.

But if we were to foist this construction of reality on Hume, on the merest pretence that this is what his talk of objects and perceptions on the whole suggests, we should immediately have to ask some awkward questions of him. To take but one example from the small but central section of his philosophy just now analysed: if he were to apply to his notion of memory, say, the very same technique of critical questioning which he applied to the notion of mind, how would it fare? He calls it a

faculty. Never mind the question, a faculty of what or of whom? Ask merely, do we have an impression of some stable identity which retains the images of a great variety of distinct and different perceptions, affections and so on, and in particular of those that succeeded each other over a period of time? And if we have not, then how on his own philosophical methodology can we know that there is such a thing? And if we cannot know that there be such a thing, then how can he say that it plays such a pivotal role in the creation of the fiction of a mind or self? Much the same point could be made concerning the imagination and the very substantial role it is called upon to play in Hume's philosophy. In the end, indeed, would it not be just as simple to say that mind exists, and we know it, as it is to talk as if memory existed, and as if we knew that?

It is possibly best, then, to see Hume simply and solely as a sceptic. A man, perhaps, in a small way – a very small way – like Socrates; convinced only of his ignorance, intensely aware of what he realised he did not know, and wielding his *elenchos* (probing interrogation), and urging all of his followers to wield it, so that what is received as truth should never escape the closest critical appraisal, and so also that some advance might thus be made, if only through the long conversation of the company of questers after wisdom down the centuries. Indeed from the moment when A. J. Ayer said that, like Hume, he divided all genuine propositions into two classes, those which concerned relations of ideas and those which concerned matters of fact, that the former make no assertions about the empirical world, and the latter, in respect of which the matter of truth arises, can be probable but never certain,<sup>9</sup> the philosophical movement then known as Linguistic Analysis was often presented and received as a technique for separating sense from nonsense, rather than one which wished to propose its own construction of reality, a task it seemed to want to leave to the empirical sciences. Seen in such a role, then, Hume can certainly take his place in the story of the loss of the subject in the course of the modern era of philosophy. But then that achievement of his, in this matter which presently concerns us, must be suitably qualified. Hume did not bring about the loss of the subject in the sense that he achieved a critical and valid construction of reality from which anything which we could rightly call a self or subject was demonstrably absent. Instead, he mounted a devastating critique of the notion of a mind-self which was the received notion of his time and place, and the only one which he, as a practising sceptic, was

<sup>9</sup> A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Gollancz, 1954), p. 31.

obliged or perhaps enabled to consider. This was in fact the notion of self of a kind which was thought to derive from Descartes, particularly by those who keep the focus upon Descartes's distinction between mind and body, and provided that these also ignore the material in Descartes's works concerning the mind-body union, and the actual and possible development of that material towards a possibly more advanced notion of self or subject.

To be more precise, the proposal is, first, that Hume's philosophy should not be treated as an attempt to construe reality in the broadest available sense of that word; treated, that is, as metaphysics, in traditional terminology. The reason for this suggestion is not that Hume's philosophy, after a fashion established by Descartes for virtually all of modern philosophy, is initially and predominantly epistemology. In most, if not all, modern philosophy the issue of what is or can be known is inextricably bound up with the issue of the nature and prospects of the knowing process itself; and this bond differs considerably in degree from any previous era in the history of Western philosophy. For, as Sartre quite rightly observed, 'If every metaphysics in fact presupposes a theory of knowledge, every theory of knowledge in turn presupposes a metaphysics.'<sup>10</sup> And it would take no great ingenuity to detect the construction of reality entailed in Hume's philosophy. Reality would consist of a multitude of discrete objects in the physical world – although 'world' would need to be queried as a metaphysical term, since it suggests a unity that is apparently not given. In addition, there would exist the impressions and affections of which these objects are somehow the source, together with perceptions and ideas (there is a thought now, there are thoughts now and then . . .), and some very odd entities such as memories and imaginations; but no minds, souls, selves – definitely none of these.

The proposal, then, that Hume's philosophy should not be treated as an attempt to construe reality in the broadest sense traditionally known as metaphysics, is to save Hume, and his followers, the embarrassment of seeming to subscribe to such a truly unintelligible metaphysics as that just described. The proposal is certainly not meant to give any credence to the followers of Hume in their assertion that he or they have rid philosophy of metaphysics; it is too blatantly obvious, even if Sartre had never said so, that every theory of truth and logic entails a metaphysics. Nevertheless, it is surely permissible to take the philosophy of Hume and

<sup>10</sup> J.-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 10.



his successors as a thorough questioning of received certainties concerning the make-up of reality. And to deal with the very scepticism that ensues, not by an all too easy pillory of the alleged attendant metaphysics, but by critically revisiting the received certainties that are most clearly challenged.

To continue to be more precise, the proposal is, second, that the focus should be on Hume's argued scepticism concerning the single, not to say solipsistical, mind-self of the *received*, 'Cartesian', dichotomously dualistic notions of mind-self and body. For it is on such strictly dualistic notions of mind and body, in which mind in and of itself partakes of nothing of the body (and initially at least partakes of nothing of another mind), and body in and of itself partakes of nothing of the mind, that Hume's arguments against the real existence of mind can be deemed successful. On such a strictly dualistic account of the matter, bodies are the source of impressions which the single and initially solipsistic mind receives, thereafter to become the locus of those ideas of perceptions, affections and so on which follow on from the impressions. Hence the force of Hume's question: What impression of mind itself is there, lying behind or beyond the impressions that have their source in bodies? Hence his confident assertion that he comes upon no such purely mind-originated impression of something that could be thought of as mind, as an entity that continues its existence and identity through the passing parade of the impressions collected in memory. Hence, the loss of the subject which Hume secures – as a piece of negative metaphysics? – is the loss of a subject conceived according to the kind of received dualism that still to this day claims Descartes as its father.

If this view of Hume is at all acceptable, even as a practical manoeuvre, then it is time to turn to Kant, in order to see how Kant in his critical stage managed to set philosophy on a course which might carry it safe from the scepticism of Hume. Needless to say, the nature and position of the subject in the ensuing construction of reality – for Kant does certainly include as an essential part of his philosophy an attempt to construe reality – must continue to provide the focus on this wider question.

*Kant's countermove, and the phenomenon–noumenon divide*

The broad outlines of Kant's attempt to secure the future of knowledge, whether philosophical or scientific, from the scepticism of Hume, are well known and need only the briefest of rehearsals here.

In the transcendental aesthetic of *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant establishes to his own manifest satisfaction that since all sense perceptions (or intuitions, as he calls them) are always characterised by being in time, and perhaps also in place, then time and space themselves cannot be counted as things that exist in their own right (things in themselves) and independently of the perceiving subject; for then time and space would themselves have to be perceived in a time and a space, and an infinite regress would ensue. We are left with no option, then, in Kant's view, but to regard time and space as *a priori* mental forms of sense intuition. Whether time and space are also characteristics of things in themselves, independently of the process of our perceiving them, we can by the very nature of sense perception never know.

Having established these *a priori* forms of intuition, Kant then proceeds to investigate the next level of knowing, the level at which we think things through or understand things. At this level also he establishes the existence of forms of understanding which serve to synthesise what would otherwise be the discrete manifold of impressions made, as Hume saw the matter, by a discrete manifold of objects in the outside world. And once again at his level, it is the synthesising processes of these forms, now referred to as the categories of the understanding, that enable knowledge to take place, rather than an incoherent sequence of impressions. Thus, the synthesis of the manifold takes place at the level of intuition through the *a priori* forms of space and time; and it takes place at the level of thought through the *a priori* categories of the understanding, namely, the categories of quantity, the categories of quality, the categories of relation and the categories of modality. But thought according to the categories allows us to make no more claims to the way it is with things in themselves, before or beyond our understanding them, than happened in the case of the intuitions. The understanding cannot bypass the intuition in such a way as to find a more direct route to things as they exist in themselves. It operates, rather, by adding a further level of formal, *a priori* structures to the process by which we receive impressions from the world without.

Finally, Kant considers the process by which we apply these categories of the understanding to the objects that one intuits according to the forms of sense perception. We do this, he argues, by means of the schemata. Now, a schema is itself a mental construct, a product he says of the imagination, which enables us to apply an idea to its object. And the schemata are, as Kant put it, determinations of time. The schema of cause and causality consists in the succession of the manifold, in so far as

that is subject to rule. The schema of substance consists in permanence in time. The schema of reality consists in existence at a given time. The schema of necessity consists in the existence of an object at all times. And so on.

So, from the first (level of) intuition, through the thinking or understanding, to the final issuing of a judgement, or the application of ideas to objects, the whole process of knowing is characterised and controlled as much by already existing (*a priori*) structures of the mind itself – forms of intuition, categories of the understanding, schemata of the imagination – as it is by the input of the objects in the world which one claims to know. One obvious result of this theory of knowledge, designed to save knowledge itself from the effects of Humean scepticism, was a new and more extensive kind of dualism than Descartes or his followers had contemplated. And it was a result which Kant himself was quite happy to acknowledge and indeed to assert. The dualism in question is that between the ‘thing as it appears (to us)’, or the phenomenon, and the ‘thing (as it exists) in itself’ independently of our knowing anything about it, or, in Kant’s terminology, the noumenon.

Furthermore, a kind of quite radical agnosticism followed upon this dualism, and once again it was something which Kant was quite happy to acknowledge and indeed assert. We could never know the ‘thing in itself’. Could we even know that such a thing or things existed at all? Kant argued that we could, and he argued in a manner that has been repeated by later philosophers of like-minded phenomenological persuasion. He argued, for example, that some permanent reality must exist beyond the flow of consciousness, since we experience this as a flow rather than as a number of discrete and unrelated impressions.<sup>11</sup> But it is not the success of such arguments for the existence of a world beyond our knowledge of it that needs concern us here. Such arguments are needed, and are forthcoming, from most if not all theories of knowledge. What must concern us here are two related questions, namely, does Kant’s knowledge of the thing-as-it-appears, the knowledge of the phenomenon only, leave the prospects of knowing any better off than Hume left them; and more particularly, does it leave us with any more secure knowledge of self?

In order to answer these questions, it may be useful to remark that just as modern philosophy may be characterised in general by the fatherhood

<sup>11</sup> I. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), p. 175.

of Descartes, so it may be characterised somewhat more specifically by the early and progressive influence upon it of a newly born and precociously successful science. One thinks of Roger Bacon's manifesto for philosophy, of Descartes's initial exemplary references to analytic geometry, or of Kant's to mathematics and physics. Paul Hazard, in his lucid survey of the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, wrote: 'A political system without divine sanction, a religion without mystery, a morality without dogma, such was the edifice man had now to erect', and his very next sentence acknowledged something of the extent of the contribution which the new architects expected of the newly burgeoning science: 'Science would have to become something more than an intellectual pastime; it would have to develop into a power capable of harnessing the forces of nature to the service of mankind. Science – who could doubt it? – was the key to happiness.'<sup>12</sup>

But if it is useful to notice the influence of the new science in these formative centuries of the modern era in philosophy, it is necessary to avoid a certain anachronism in so doing. (Indeed there may be a hint of such anachronism in the words of Hazard's second sentence above.) In much more recent times science and philosophy have tended to move apart. In the earlier Analytic philosophy, philosophy is generally regarded as a second-order study; in Continental philosophical movements, it is thought in general to deal with human concerns or human features such as language, or symbolism in general, when the different sciences deal largely with the physical features of the world. As a result of this more recent falling apart, philosophers are inclined to think of scientists in a number of ways. For some scientists provide the accounts of what can be known, and philosophers provide a logical service, mainly sifting sense from nonsense in popular accounts of reality; occasionally, as with Quine, preparing the analytic ground from which perhaps new hypotheses can arise. These philosophers tend in the main to be reductionists: just as science is dominated by the more physical sciences, so these feel that everything that needs to be explained or can be known is to be reduced to empirical, predominantly physical components and processes. Other philosophers do not welcome such reductionism. Those who do, take the second-order-study approach; those who do not, attempt to secure for philosophy the treatment of such human features as morality and, perhaps, religion; but because of the

<sup>12</sup> Paul Hazard, *The European Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), p. xvii.

dominant influence of the more reductionist tendencies, the latter feel constantly under siege concerning the objectivity, the verifiable truth, of what they assert about the human features taken to be the subject matter of philosophy.

Now, it is obvious, even from the words of Hazard just quoted, that it would be quite anachronistic to attribute this kind of relationship of philosophy and science to the philosophers and the centuries presently under investigation. The current separation between philosophy and the empirical sciences, a separation which can facilitate mutual estrangement to the point of depriving the scientific quest for truth of its inherently moral and human dimension, and the wider philosophical and theological quests of their very claim to verifiability, simply cannot be thought to characterise an age in which, for example, Newton's masterpiece could be entitled *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. In this early-modern period, on the contrary, the new science and the new philosophy were thought to form a kind of seamless robe, much as they formed in fact at the very dawn of Western philosophy, when the first philosophers set about a critical rational investigation of all the things that are, *ta onta*; wishing to rule nothing out in advance, least of all on some dualist conceit concerning mind and matter, with the exception of those imaginary entities of doubtful moral influence which had survived from a corrupt mythic past.

The more recent separation of science from philosophy results, no doubt, from a number of factors. Amongst them the increasing specialisation in academia. Amongst them also the myth created largely by Thomas Huxley on the back of his defence and popularisation of Darwin's theories that science and religion, and hence also science and theology, were intrinsically inimical to each other and inevitably, therefore, at war. When in actual fact, even at that time, theologies in their inherently critical-analytic mode were adjusting, as they had done from their beginnings as part of the seamless robe of pre-Socratic thought, to the advances in scientific investigation of the world.

But the main factor in bringing about the current mutually compromising separation between philosophy and science may well consist in some failure in the successive philosophies now under investigation to establish critically the prospects of verifiable claims to know the things that are, both knowers and known. For if such a failure were to occur and were not to be subsequently corrected, then it would be small wonder if the sciences were tempted to get on with the investigation of the restricted areas or aspects of reality to which they devoted their ever

more specialised attention; to renege on the wider ambitions to speculate on the influence of their findings on the understanding of reality as a whole (except, of course, in the form of reductionist claims they might be tempted to make); and to ignore as largely, if not entirely, irrelevant the products of philosophy which itself in any case no longer included any comprehensive ambitions.

Hence the importance of the question to Kant: does his knowledge of phenomena leave the prospects of knowing any better off than Hume left them? And hence also, in view of the large and increasing influence which the success and prestige of the new science exercised on these philosophers, the need to ensure that this question is not asked anachronistically from the perspective of a more recent and largely unhelpful relationship between science and philosophy; and particularly between science and that part of philosophy which remained theological or, rather, that kind of theology which in this early-modern period was so resolutely philosophical.<sup>13</sup> In their efforts to save the prospects of true knowledge of real things and real processes, none of these early-modern philosophers were even tempted to save knowledge of some compartments or aspects of reality, at the possible expense of knowledge of others. So then what is to be said of Kant?

The understanding, Hume had declared, never observes any real connection amongst the objects of which perceptions are available to it. There exist a plethora of affections and sensations, impressions or perceptions, and the ideas to which these in turn give rise. But the understanding never observes behind this variegated pluriformity any subsisting entity, any substance retaining its identity through any number or succession of such sensations and affections, or their related ideas; it never observes any identical entity to which this variety may be referred. The feeling we may have of some subsisting identity that unites these varied and manifold perceptions in the case of the human mind, as indeed in the analogous cases of plants or animals, houses or ships, the ever changing parts of which we also observe, is a fiction produced by memory and imagination. That latter in particular is enabled to pass smoothly and effortlessly from one idea of a perception to another, taken either as a perception simply or as a perception of a part or aspect

<sup>13</sup> In the history of Western philosophy there is no atheistic philosophy, no philosophy that does not contain a formal and explicit theological dimension integral to it, until some left-wing Hegelians arrive on the scene, and particularly Karl Marx. Modern historians of philosophy and classical scholars who describe early philosophers, such as Socrates for instance, as atheistic, or in such equivalent terms as secularist, engage therefore in a most unscholarly anachronism. See Mark L. McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

of a plant, animal, house. This smooth and effortless passage is facilitated by such relations between ideas as resemblance, contiguity, causality; and that last at least is already itself no more than the result of a habitual association of ideas of impressions of things that follow regularly one on the other. And it is this smooth and effortless transition that creates the fiction of subsistent entities such as selves, souls or substances. But it is, of course, a fiction.

Now, science, or natural philosophy, proceeds by categorising the entities we encounter in our empirical world according to their properties and behaviour, and by investigating the ways in which these entities, particularly through their specific properties and behaviour, bear upon other entities. In this way science, and any philosophy of which this science is both model and content, leads to an understanding and explanation of the very fabric of reality, and of all the entities that form part of that fabric, at least in so far as such understanding and explanation is within our presumably limited human grasp. However, if the categorising in which we engage, and the causal relationships which we say we uncover, are to be attributed to an imagination which itself is regarded as the source of nothing better than fictions, what can now be said for science, irrespective of how comprehensively or narrowly science is conceived? Little or nothing, is Kant's answer. But do Kant's own life-saving efforts on behalf of *scientia*, knowledge, leave us any better off?

The point of putting the question in this rather elaborate and slightly repetitive form is to suggest a negative answer. It appears clear from this way of asking the question that Kant simply takes these structures of the knowing process which Hume had analysed, that he adds perhaps some similar ones, and then, instead of treating them as processes predominantly of the imagination which therefore give rise to mere fictions, Kant distributes them between the sensing faculty (as forms thereof), the understanding (as categories thereof) and the imagination (as schemata thereof), and declares that through them we know the entities we encounter, because they represent the *a priori* structures of the mind through which alone the entities we wish to know appear to us.

For example, according to Kant, I know of substances which are related to each other causally, by the combined operation of schemata of the imagination upon the intuitions I receive from entities in the real world; in this case, the schema of permanence in time and the schema of succession of the manifold, in so far as that succession is subject to a rule (as a rule). This knowledge, therefore, is a fiction, at least in the literal