Foreword: A History of 'Ideas'

GODFREY VESEY

Idealism in its philosophical sense is idea-lism. The root word is 'idea'. The word 'idea' has been used by philosophers in very different ways over the centuries. Properly to understand philosophical idealism one has to have followed the fortunes of the word. The changes in its use go along with fundamental changes in views about the objects of perception and knowledge, and how they are related; about mathematics; about space; about God and man; about thought, language and reality; in fact, about most of the central topics in philosophy. Much of the history of Western philosophy could be rewritten as a history of philosophers' use of the word 'idea'. To help the reader to place and assess the individual contributions to this volume of Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures I shall outline the relevant parts of the history of the word 'idea'.

The contributors are: M. F. Burnyeat, Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge; Dr M. R. Ayers, Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford; Graham Bird, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Manchester; W. H. Walsh, FBA, formerly Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at Edinburgh University; Patrick Gardiner, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford; D. W. Hamlyn, Professor of Philosophy at Birkbeck College, University of London; Michael Inwood, Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford; Dr Richard Norman, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Kent at Canterbury; A. R. Manser, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southampton; A. Palmer, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Southampton; Dr Ross Harrison, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge; Dr Crispin Wright, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Leeds; Dr Norman Malcolm, formerly Susan Linn Sage Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University; and Dr Derek Bolton, Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London. Some of the papers themselves contain contributions to the history of the word 'idea'. Where this is so I shall avoid covering the same ground.

The first philosopher to advance a theory of ideas was Plato. But Plato's 'ideas' are so unlike the sort of ideas we think of as having their home in people's minds that it is better to use a semi-technical term and talk of his theory as a theory of 'Forms'.

Plato's Theory of Forms has traditionally been seen as a theory of universals. Certain passages of the dialogue *Parmenides* (e.g. 131e–132a) lend themselves to this interpretation. It was evidently favoured by Aristotle, who opposed a theory of his own about universals (*universalia in rebus*) to the one he attributed to Plato (*universalia ante rem*). But the

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Parmenides passages are far from typical. There is no reference in them to any of the six central features of Plato's theory as expounded elsewhere.

The first of these six central features is the distinction between the visible world and the intelligible world. Plato introduces the distinction with what he says about 'opposites'. Opposites are things like thick and thin, tall and short, great and small, beautiful and ugly, just and unjust, holy and unholy, wise and stupid, one and many, equal and unequal. One cannot read key dialogues, like the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, without constantly coming across talk of these opposites. In one dialogue (*Greater Hippias*, 289a–d) Plato quotes Heraclitus. Man is both wise, by comparison with an ape, and stupid, by comparison with a god. He is both wise and stupid. Wisdom and stupidity are together, confounded, in man. Plato's exposition of the significance of opposites being confounded in the visible world is in terms, not of wisdom and stupidity, but of largeness and smallness. In the *Republic* (VII, 523b–524d) he contrasts seeing that something is a finger with seeing how big it is. Vision seems adequate for the judgment that the object is a finger, but not for how big it is. The finger next to the thumb is large by comparison with the outside, or 'little' finger, but small by comparison with the middle finger. 'The great and the small are confounded' in the finger. So it cannot be by vision that one is conscious of largeness or smallness. It must be by intelligence. 'Intelligence is compelled to contemplate the great and the small, not thus confounded but as distinct entities, in the opposite way from sensation. And it is in some such experience as this that the question first occurs to us "What in the world, then, is the great and the small?" And this is the origin of the designation *intelligible* for the one and *visible* for the other' (VII, 524c). In other words, although you cannot *see* the great without its being confounded with the small, you can *think* the great by itself, pure and unadulterated, a distinct entity, separate from the small.

But what does Plato mean by calling one of any pair of opposites, by itself, 'intelligible'? What is it to think the great, or the beautiful, or the equal, by itself? This brings us to the second of the six central features of Plato's theory. To think the great is to think what greatness is, that is, how it is defined. But not just any sort of definition will do. If what is under investigation is virtue then it is no good simply listing the various virtues. It is no good saying that courage is a virtue, and temperance, and wisdom, and dignity, and many other things (*Meno*, 74a). Plato rejects what may be called 'definition by listing examples'. The definition he is after is of the 'one essential form' (*Euthyphro*, 5d) of anything. The definition of virtue must cover all the instances of virtue by specifying what is essential to anything being a virtue. It is what might be called 'definition by essence'.

But how do we come by definitions by essence of things like greatness? How do we arrive at its 'one essential form'? Do we simply get together and agree on what we are to mean by the word 'great', how we are to use it?

This brings us to the third feature. I am fairly sure that a view ascribed to Cratylus, that names 'are natural and not conventional—not a portion of the human voice which men agree to use—but that there is a truth and correctness in them which is the same for Hellenes as for barbarians' (*Cratylus*, 383ab) is Plato's own view, and is meant to apply as much to words like 'great' and 'beautiful' and 'holy' as to proper names. Plato had inherited Socrates' distaste for the conventionalism and relativism of the Sophists. This comes out in the way he formulates his questions. If it is about holiness, for instance, his question is not 'What does the word "holy" mean?' There is no mention of words in his formulation of the question. His question is 'What is the essential form of holiness which makes all holy actions holy?' (*Euthyphro*, 6d). It is a question about the thing, holiness, not about the word 'holy'.

But if 'How do we come by the definition?' means, not 'How do we *agree on* the definition?', but 'How do we *know* the definition?', what sort of knowledge is it? Is it empirical knowledge, or what? This brings us to the fourth feature. If the definition were the object of empirical knowledge (like the definition of colour as 'an effluence perceptible by sight' in *Meno*, 76d), then it would be vulnerable to new discoveries in natural science; it would be 'unsafe' (Cf. *Phaedo*, 100d). According to Plato it would not be an object of knowledge at all, merely an object of opinion. Knowledge and opinion are different faculties, naturally related to different categories of objects (*Republic*, V, 478a–b). The object of knowledge is eternal and unchanging.

Incidentally, the introduction of the doctrine about knowledge being of the eternal and unchanging calls for a revision of what was said, or implied, earlier. Vision, it was said, seems adequate for the judgment that something is a finger. But a finger is not eternally a finger. It come to be a finger from what is not a finger and, after death, changes so as no longer to be a finger. But if there can be knowledge only of what continues always to abide and exist (*Cratylus*, 440) then vision is not adequate for knowledge of a finger. Or for knowledge of anything else in the visible world, for that matter. Everything in the visible world comes to be and passes away (*Republic*, VI, 508d; *Phaedrus*, 247c–e). The original distinction between opposites, like large and small, and non-opposites, like finger, is lost when one looks at things from the standpoint of eternity. From the standpoint of eternity, finger and non-finger are confounded in whatever undergoes the change in just the same way as, at a particular instant in time, the great and the small are confounded in a finger. The ground is prepared for asking not only 'What is the essential form of largeness which makes all large objects large?' but also 'What is the essential form of finger (man, etc.) which makes all fingers fingers (men men, etc.)?'

The fourth feature of Plato's theory, the doctrine that the object of knowledge is eternal and unchanging, gives rise to a problem. As beings

who exist in the changing sensible world our awareness is sensory and is of what is changing. How can we be aware of what is eternal and unchanging? Plato's answer, the fifth feature of his theory, can be approached via what he says about geometry. Geometry, he says, 'is the knowledge of the eternally existent' (*Republic*, VII, 526e–527c). And in the *Meno* (81a–86c) he propounds a theory about what it is to learn a geometrical truth. The theory draws on belief in the existence of a disembodied soul before birth. What we call 'learning' geometrical truths is really *recalling* what one had learnt, otherwise than by the use of the senses, when one's soul inhabited the intelligible world before birth. In the *Phaedo* (74a–75d) the recollection doctrine is put to use to answer such questions as 'How do we know what the real nature of equality is?' We see things in which equality is confounded with its opposite, inequality, and they remind us of what we must have known before we ever started seeing such things, that is, of what we could have known only before we became embodied, namely, what equality, by itself, is.

There is one remaining central feature of Plato's theory. Forms are somehow more real than sensible things. Plato says two things. First, he employs causal terms to describe how the intelligible is related to the sensible. Beauty, for example, is the cause of things being beautiful (*Phaedo*, 100c). Not in the sense in which a carpenter is the cause of a table, but in *some* sense. Secondly, he persistently employs words like 'imitate' and 'copy' when he is talking about how sensible things are related to the Forms. They can hardly be meant literally, but they indicate fairly clearly that Plato thought of the things in which opposites are confounded as being secondary, in some sense, to opposites by themselves, Forms. There is a hierarchy of some sort, in which Forms come above sensible things. In the *Republic*, Books VI and VII, Plato crowns the hierarchy. He posits a supreme Form, the Form of the Good. He gives it a role in the apprehension of the other Forms comparable to that of the sun in the apprehension of visible things. It 'gives their truth to the objects of knowledge and the power of knowing to the knower' and so is 'the cause of knowledge, and of truth in so far as known' (VI, 508c). The ultimate aim of the philosopher, he says, is to attain the apprehension of this supreme reality, 'the limit of the intelligible' (VII, 532b).

In *Parmenides*, 131e–135c, there is no mention of these central features of Plato's Theory of Forms. Most importantly, the original reflection about vision not being adequate for judgments about something being large or small, because large and small are opposites, and opposites are always confounded in the visible world, and about our therefore being compelled 'to contemplate the great and the small, not thus confounded but as distinct entities, in the opposite way from sensation', is replaced with a quite different reflection, namely that 'when it seems to you that a number of things are large there seems to be a certain single character which is the

same when you look at them all' (132a). This is the reflection which, if taken as the justification for a Theory of Forms, makes it a theory of universals.

The third central feature of Plato's theory is that the definitions are not the product of agreement and convention; they are there to be *known*. The nearest one comes, in the *Parmenides* passages, to one of the six central features of Plato's theory is to this one. But it is no more than a similarity in a certain respect. One could argue that the distinction between a definition being an object of knowledge and its being a product of agreement and convention is a distinction between its being, somehow, objective or real, and its being, somehow, subjective or less than real. And if one thinks of thoughts as being subjective, and 'what thoughts are of' as being objective, then there is something in the *Parmenides* passages that corresponds, in respect of Forms being held to be objective in some sense, to the third of the central features of Plato's theory. For Socrates asks: 'May it not be that each of these forms is a thought, which cannot properly exist anywhere but in a mind?', to which he gets the answer that a thought must be *of* something, 'in fact, of some *one* thing that thought observes to cover all the cases, as being a certain single character', this '*one* thing' being a Form.

The sixth central feature of Plato's theory is that Forms are more real than visible things. The Form of beauty, for instance, is said to be the *cause* of things being beautiful (*Phaedo*, 100c). Plato introduces the notion of explanation by reference to Forms in the context of a discussion of scientific explanation that begins with Socrates undertaking to describe his own experience in this connection (96a). When young, he says, he puzzled primarily over such questions as 'Is it when heat and cold produce fermentation that living creatures are bred?' (96b). But then he heard someone reading from a book by Anaxagoras, and was pleased by the explanation that 'it is mind that produces order and is the cause of everything', an explanation which seemed to him to imply that 'if anyone wished to discover the reason why any given thing came or ceased or continued to be, he must find out how it was best for that thing to be, or to act or be acted upon in any other way' (97c–d). In short, he thought that Anaxagoras must be leading up to giving a teleological explanation of the ordering of things, with the *telos*, or end, being the best possible state of affairs. But when he procured the books for himself he was dismayed to find that 'the fellow made no use of mind and assigned to it no causality for the order of the world, but adduced causes like air, and aether and water and many other absurdities' (98b–c). It was as if someone had asked why he, Socrates, was where he was and had received, not the answer that it was because he thought it more right and honourable to submit to whatever penalty his country ordered, but an answer in terms of his bones and sinews. Had he not bones and sinews he could not have come to be where he was, but 'Fancy being unable to distinguish between the cause of a thing and the

condition without which it could not be a cause!' (99b). The ideal explanation would be one in terms of 'a power which keeps things disposed at any given moment in the best possible way' (99b–c). But, Socrates says, he has been denied knowledge of any such power, and so has worked out his own 'makeshift approach to the problem of causation' (99c).[1]

Plato, of course, is being ironical when he describes his own approach as 'makeshift'. It is the approach on which he sets such store, his Theory of Forms. 'The one thing that makes the object beautiful is the presence in it or association with it, in whatever way the relation comes about, of absolute beauty' (100d). Absolute beauty, the Form of beauty, is the cause of things being beautiful. But this is not to say that it is the cause of beautiful things existing. There is not the problem of understanding how an intelligible thing, a Form, could bring a visible thing into existence. There is, however, a connected problem. For someone who approaches Plato via Aristotle it can be put like this. In Aristotle's conceptual scheme, 'matter' is 'in-formed' by 'forms'. What, in Plato's theory, corresponds to 'matter' in Aristotle's theory? Plato's solution to this problem is in the *Timaeus*. By the time he came to write the *Timaeus* he had left behind his original fascination with opposites. By now there were said to be Forms of fire, water and earth. These Forms are, in Plato's terminology, 'copied' in the sensible world. But the 'copies' of them are not sensible fire, water and earth conceived of as *things*. They are, rather, the fieriness, the wateriness, and the earthiness of some other 'thing'. Plato's question is: What is this other 'thing'? He needs a third form of reality, something into which the Form is copied, or, as he puts it, a 'receptacle' for the copy (*Timaeus*, 49a). It must itself be devoid of character, lest the characters it is to receive get distorted. We shall not be far wrong, Plato says, in thinking of it as 'an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible' (51a–b). He finally concludes that the third form of reality is *space*.

> There is a third nature, which is space and is eternal, and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended, when all sense is absent, by a kind of spurious reason, and is hardly real—which we, beholding as in a dream, say of all existence that it must of necessity be in some place and occupy a space, but that what is neither in heaven nor in earth has no existence. Of these and other things of the same kind, relating to the true and waking reality of nature, we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth about them (52b–c).

[1] It would be a mistake to regard this as an irrevocable rejection of teleological explanation. It is arguable that by relating all Forms to the Form of the Good Plato reinstates teleology at the fountain head of his theory. See C. C. W. Taylor, 'Forms as Causes in the *Phaedo*', *Mind* 78 (1969), 52–54.

To Plato's brightest pupil, Aristotle, this self-confused state of unclarity about how to talk of sensible things and their essential characteristics must have seemed like an open invition to review the whole theory.

Before turning to Aristotle, however, there is one other aspect of Plato's theory which is significant for our history of 'ideas'. In the *Phaedo* the Form of beauty is said to be the cause of sensible things being beautiful. But the Form of beauty is not a cause in the sense in which a craftsman who, with his (intellectual) eyes on the idea or Form of couch or table, is the cause of the couches and tables we use (*Republic*, 596b). Besides the Forms, the 'copies' of them, and the 'receptacle', space, Plato needs a fourth 'form of reality', a craftsman-like cause of coming-to-be and change in the sensible world. He needs what Aristotle was to call 'efficient causes'. The question then arises as to whether the efficient causes of change are all to be found *within* the natural order, conceived of as 'always in existence and without beginning', or whether there is what might be called a 'divine craftsman', outside the natural order, who created it. In the latter case, did the divine craftsman pattern it on unchangeable Forms or on something changeable? Plato considers these questions in the *Timaeus* (28a–29d). To the second question he gives the answer that, since 'the world is the fairest of creations and he [the divine craftsman] is the best of causes', he must have patterned it on the Forms. It is 'framed in the likeness of that which is apprehended by reason and mind'. In giving this answer to the second question Plato seems to have thought he had disposed of the alternative answer to the first question, viz. that the efficient causes are all causes within an everlasting natural order.

There is no suggestion, in what Plato says, that the Forms exist merely as ideas in the mind of the divine craftsman. But this is what they became in Plotinus (*Ennead*, III, 9.i), and in the Christian Neo-Platonism of St Augustine (*De Diversis Quaestionibus*, LXXXIII, Question 46) Plato's Forms became archetypal ideas in the mind of God. And the ground was laid for philosophical acceptance of the conception of ideas as *non*-archetypal things in the minds of *men*. But only the ground. Another major change was needed before the 'Way of Ideas' of Descartes and Locke could grow in that ground. Whereas Plato's 'Forms' are 'apprehended by reason and mind' Locke's 'ideas' come from sensation, or from something said by Locke to be very like it, reflection (introspection). And to understand how that change came about we need to consider both Aristotle's reactions to Plato, and Descartes's reactions to Aristotle.

Whereas for Plato sensible things are copies, in a receptacle, of the primary things, intelligible Forms, for Aristotle sensible things (individual men or horses, for instance) are substances 'in the truest and primary and most definite sense of the word', and the species within which these primary substances are included (on account of being, essentially, men or horses), along with the genera to which the species belong (in this case the

genus animal), are secondary substances (*Categories*, 2a11–18). With sensible things being things in their own right and not merely copies of Forms in a receptacle, space, it is possible to treat space not as something absolute, albeit incomprehensible, but as relational, at least in the sense that to treat the concept of space in terms of place is to treat it as relational. The notion of a receptacle for a copy of a Form is replaced with that of 'matter' which, given a certain 'form' (with a small 'f', to distinguish it from Plato's 'Form'), is an individual thing. The notion of space being incomprehensible is replaced with that of prime matter (matter without any form) being only an intellectual abstraction, not something that could actually exist. Rejection of the Platonic conception of characteristics as copies of Forms in a receptacle is expressed as the logical requirement that where there is a characteristic there must be an individual thing that is characterized. The 'separate' Platonic Form is read into the individual thing; it becomes what the thing essentially is. Plato's theory of intelligible Forms becomes a theory of sensible things with intelligible essences. The Platonic heaven is brought down to an Aristotelian earth.

I said that in the *Phaedo* the Platonic Socrates describes his own experiences in connection with scientific explanation. At one time he had considered explanations of how living creatures are bred such as those in terms of heat and cold producing fermentation. Then he had been led by what Anaxagoras said about mind producing order to think favourably of the possibility of teleological explanation. But Anaxagoras had proved disappointing on that score. And Socrates, having been denied knowledge of a teleological power, settled for explanation by reference to Forms. Perhaps teleology comes back into the picture with the Form at the top of the hierarchy, the Form of the Good, or with the divine craftsman who is 'the best of causes'.

Possibly with this passage in the *Phaedo* in mind, Aristotle in his *Physics* (Bk II, Ch. 8) describes Anaxagoras as only touching on some other sort of cause than that according to which if certain things are of such and such a kind then other things *necessarily* are and come to be. He is strongly opposed to the notion that nature as a whole works 'not for the sake of something, nor because it is better so, but just as the sky rains, not in order to make the corn grow, but of necessity' (198b17). It is impossible, he argues, that this should be the true view. The true view is as follows (*On the Parts of Animals*, 639b13–16): 'The causes concerned in the generation of the works of nature are, as we see, more than one. There is the final cause and there is the motor cause. Now we must decide which of these two causes comes first, which second. Plainly, however, that cause is the first which we call the final one. For this is the Reason, and the Reason forms the starting-point, alike in the works of art and in works of nature.'

In this outline of the history of the word 'idea' I move on, now, to the seventeenth century and René Descartes. It is not difficult to relate

Descartes to Aristotle. In his *Principles of Philosophy* (I, 28) Descartes makes it clear that his programme is to replace final by efficient causes, teleology by mechanism. In his conversation with Burman he admits that when he said, in the *Meditations*, that the customary search for final causes is totally useless, he had Aristotle in mind.[2] And in a revealing letter to Mersenne (28 January 1641) he implies that the *Meditations* were written to provide a philosophical basis for his physics, and asks Mersenne not to say so lest those who favour Aristotle would have more difficulty in approving his principles. Descartes had learnt a lesson from the Church's condemnation of Galileo for his *Dialogue on the Two Systems of the World*. It was a case of 'softly, softly, catchee monkee', the monkey being acceptance of the new science.

We can restructure Descartes's thought, supposing there not to have been the awful example of Galileo. Such a restructuring will begin with something in common to Descartes and Aristotle, admission of mathematics as the paradigm of what is necessarily true. Roughly, the Greeks sought some sort of connection between relations of numbers and relations in other realms of being (or becoming) to lend authority to any claims they might want to make to knowledge in these other realms. Descartes, also, sought this. But he had the advantage of being a brilliant mathematician. He invented analytical geometry, which shows how every geometrical object or relation can be given numerical expression. It follows that if the 'extension' of spatial (i.e. physical) objects is the 'extension' of geometrical objects (something both Descartes and Kant assumed), and if 'matter' is defined, not as the correlative of 'form', but in terms of this extension, then matter is thereby brought into the domain of what is necessarily true. From being an incomprehensible 'receptacle' for number-like Forms, space is elevated to the position of being, itself, through and through numerical. Numbers, the relations between which are necessary, are shown to be constitutive of physical reality. Mathematics can be used in physics not simply for the pragmatic reason that physical objects and the changes in them lend themselves to mathematical measurement, but for the metaphysical reason that the essence of matter is extension, the same extension as is the subject-matter of analytical geometry. A new essentialism, based on a revolutionized conception of 'matter', made possible by analytical geometry, takes over from the essentialism of Plato and Aristotle.

There are a number of difficulties with this new essentialism.

The main one is that for there to be a science which explains change by one thing acting on another (e.g. one billiard ball causing a change in the position of another by striking it) there must be more to matter than mere extension. There must be something to account for one material thing's

[2] *Descartes' Conversation with Burman*, trans. John Cottingham (Oxford University Press, 1976), 19.

resistance to another's occupying the same place. In plain words, there must be some *stuff* which *has* the extension. Otherwise there is only a characteristic, being extended, and not a thing characterized, an extended thing. Descartes knew that people would have this difficulty with his theory that the essence of matter is extension, but disputed the need for any other characteristic (*HR*, I, 255–260).[3]

Another difficulty is that it does not follow from the truths of arithmetic and geometry being objectively necessary that we cannot be mistaken about them. Objective *necessity* is not the same as justified subjective *certainty*. This was a difficulty about which Descartes was prepared to do something. He recognized the need for a 'criterion', and argued as follows. The intuition 'I think, therefore I am' is true without any possibility of doubt. What assures me of its truth is my clear and distinct perception of it. Therefore clear and distinct perception of anything should be a sufficient condition of its being true. But perhaps there is some all-powerful malicious demon who makes things appear to be true which are not. There could not be both an all-powerful malicious demon and an all-powerful perfect God. I have a clear and distinct idea of the latter. It is evident by the light of nature that this idea must be caused by something with at least as much reality as that attributed in the idea. So there must be an all-powerful God. This guarantees the truthfulness of what is clear and distinct to me, such as the propositions of arithmetic and geometry, since a perfect God would not allow me to be deceived with respect to what I clearly and distinctly perceive.

This solution of the problem of the gap between objective necessity and subjective certainty raises more questions and difficulties than it is intended to resolve. I shall consider only one of them. It parallels the difficulty about extension being the essence of matter.

It might be said that all that cannot be doubted by someone, when he thinks 'I think, therefore I am', is that there is this thought. The question of who is thinking it does not arise for him. He does not observe his self. And yet Descartes writes as though the thinker is sure not only of the characteristic, thinking, but also of a thing characterized, a thinking thing. He thinks the thinker is sure of this because he (Descartes) accepts the Aristotelian requirement that you cannot have a characteristic without a thing characterized (*HR*, I, 240). He then goes on to ask himself if there is more, essentially, to this thinking thing than that it is thinking. He decides that there is not, since if I *do not know* with certainty that some-

[3] *HR* = *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge University Press, 1931). The reference is to Volume I, 255–260.

thing *is* the case (viz. that I am a bodily as well as a conscious being) then I *do know* with certainty that it *is not* the case.[4]

Here the parallel ends. Whereas Descartes had realized that people would feel the need for there to be more to matter than extension, so that we can understand talk of material things, in the plural, acting on one another, he seems not to have realized that people would feel the need for there to be more to people than thinking, so that we can understand talk of there being people, in the plural (and so to talk of there being a person, in the singular).

Descartes's matter/mind dualism has implications for our understanding of perception. Seeing something will now have to be construed as a case of the substance, mind, being causally affected by the substance matter.[5] An effect is produced in a mental thing by a material thing. But what are these effects, required by the theory, to be called? In his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (*HR*, I, 38) Descartes lists various suppositions about perception. The third is that there is a soft part of the brain which, like a piece of wax, receives shapes or forms from the external senses. Descartes calls the soft part of the brain 'the fancy or imagination' (elsewhere he refers to it as 'the corporeal imagination' to make it clear that he is not talking about something mental), and the shapes or forms impressed on it he calls

[4] This is the summary of the argument given by A. M. Maciver ('Is there mind–body interaction?', *Proc. Arist. Soc.* XXXVI (1935–36), 101), and described by him as a simple fallacy. Descartes's actual argument involves the additional notion that if I am able to apprehend two things as distinct they must really be distinct, 'since they may be made to exist in separation at least by the omnipotence of God' (*HR*, I, 190).

[5] Not all the seventeenth-century philosophers who succeeded Descartes agreed with him about people perceiving things by virtue of their minds being causally affected by them. One of the more interesting exceptions was Antoine Arnauld. Part of his *Treatise on True and False Ideas* (1683) is a detailed refutation of Nicolas Malebranche's Cartesian theory of perception. Arnauld argued against Malebranche that 'objective presence' to a mind does not require 'local presence'; and that for something to be objectively present to a mind is not the same thing as for it to be causally active on it. Intermediary entities called 'ideas' are needed neither as local presences nor as effects. The only 'ideas' are acts of perception, and these in no sense come between the perceiver and the object perceived. Arnauld felt all the more strongly about this because the view he was attacking was one he had himself held earlier. The first sentence of Part I of *The Art of Thinking* (1662), which he wrote with Pierre Nicole, the book sometimes referred to as the Port Royal *Logic*, was 'We have no knowledge of what is *outside* us except by the mediation of the ideas *within* us'. Arnauld's *Treatise* views were carried forward by Thomas Reid in his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785). Reid says that he believes ideas, in the sense of images of external objects in the mind, to be 'a mere fiction of philosophers' (Essay I, Ch. I).

'ideas', in keeping with an old use of the word 'idea' to mean something like a shape. Descartes then proceeds to use the same word, 'idea', for the effect in the mind. Thomas Reid was later to suggest that he did this because of 'analogical reasoning from a supposed similitude of mind to body', but it seems more likely that it was because he held a very strange theory to the effect that imagining something involves the mind applying itself to a physical image in the brain (*HR*, I, 39, 185). Finally, Descartes recognizes how confusing it is to have both a shape or form impressed on the brain, and something in the mind, called by the same name, 'idea', and decides to refuse the title of 'ideas' to impressions on the brain (*HR*, II, 52).

Descartes sometimes calls the 'ideas' which are effects in the mind 'images' to distinguish them from a different category of 'ideas'. In the *Meditations* (*HR*, I, 159) he says that 'of my thoughts some are, so to speak, images of the things, and to these alone is the title "idea" properly applied'.[6] In his *Conversation with Burman* (p. 13) he calls this the 'strict and narrow sense' of the word 'idea'. There is also 'a rather extended use of the word'. Ideas in the extended sense are 'ideas of common notions'. Common notions are, for example, the notion that 'that which can effect what is greater or more difficult, can also accomplish what is less' (*HR*, II, 56).

The upshot is that Descartes's philosophy comprises *two* dualisms. There is the dualism of two sorts of substance, matter and mind. And there is also the dualism of two sorts of ideas. There are what may be called 'image-ideas' and there are what may be called 'proposition-ideas'. Furthermore, as if it were not enough that he should have reversed the Aristotelian position on the philosophy of science by elevating efficient over final causes, Descartes reverses the Platonic position on the relation of the intelligible to the sensible by making image-ideas ideas in the proper or strict sense, and proposition-ideas ideas in an extended sense. Sensible colour would be an idea in the strict sense for Descartes, but the notion that 'shape is that in which a solid terminates' (*Meno*, 76a), or that a circle is 'the thing which has everywhere equal distances between its extremities and its centre' (*Ep.*, VII, 342c), would be an idea only in the extended sense. It is not surprising that Kant should protest that anyone familiar with Plato, as he was, 'must find it intolerable to hear the representation of the colour, red, called an idea' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A320/B377).

Given the two dualisms, a whole new range of problems, and possible solutions to them, is opened up for philosophers. Descartes is indeed the

[6] *Improperly* applied, according to Spinoza (*Ethics*, II, Prop. XLIX Note): 'Those who think that ideas consist of images which are formed in us by the concourse of bodies . . . regard ideas as lifeless pictures on a board, and preoccupied thus with this misconception they do not see that an idea, in so far as it is an idea, involves affirmation or negation'.

Father of Modern Philosophy. I shall say something about four problems, all of them relevant to the history of 'ideas'. They are (1) the problem of the difference between shapes or forms impressed on the brain and ideas in the mind, (2) the problem of the relation of proposition-ideas to image-ideas, (3) the problem of how we know the 'external' world exists, (4) the problem of 'ideas' which are neither image-ideas nor proposition-ideas.

(1) The question is: Are image-ideas (i) presented to us by the senses, or (ii) innate, the impression on the brain being merely the occasion for us to form them by means of an innate faculty? Descartes's answer is that 'nothing reaches our mind from external objects through the organs of sense beyond certain corporeal movements, . . . but even these movements, and the figures which arise from them, are not conceived by us in the shape they assume in the organs of sense', from which 'it follows that the ideas of the movements and figures are themselves innate in us' (*HR*, I, 443). He continues: 'So much the more must the ideas of pain, colour, sound and the like be innate . . . for they have no likeness to the corporeal movements'. He then switches abruptly from image-ideas to proposition-ideas, and writes:

> Could anything be imagined more preposterous than that all common notions which are inherent in our mind should arise from these movements, and should be incapable of existing without them? I should like our friend [Regius] to instruct me as to what corporeal movement it is which can form in our mind any common notion, e.g. the notion that 'things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another', or any other he pleases; for all these movements are particular, but notions are universal having no affinity with movements and no relation to them.

I think this is worth mentioning for purposes of comparison with what Plato says about the Form of equality (*Phaedo*, 74d ff.). Descartes's doctrine of innateness may be compared with Plato's doctrine of recollection. It is as if, in this connection, Descartes wants to treat image-ideas as on a par with proposition-ideas.

(2) There is a possible solution to the problem of the relation of proposition-ideas to image-ideas in the theory that thinking is mental vision of image-ideas (or of 'abstract ideas' obtained from image-ideas by 'abstraction') in some sort of relation. Descartes's advocacy of the mental vision doctrine is nowhere more evident than in his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. The second paragraph of Rule 9 begins: 'Truly we shall learn how to employ our mental intuition from comparing it with the way in which we employ our eyes' (*HR*, I, 28). In Rule 12 he says that the only mental effort needed to know the difference between two 'simple natures' is that of 'isolating them from each other and scrutinizing them with steadfast mental gaze': 'We must be content to isolate them from each other, and to give

them, each of us, our individual attention, studying them with that degree of mental illumination which each of us possesses' (*HR*, I, 46). The *Rules* were not published until after Descartes's death, but there was a manuscript copy at Port Royal. The Port Royal *Logic* took over Descartes's mental vision doctrine, and added a doctrine of abstraction. This, in turn was taken over by Locke, almost without change.

(3) It is one thing to define matter in terms of the extension which is shown by analytical geometry to be subject to the necessary laws of arithmetic. It is quite another to know that our image-ideas are caused by (or, more strictly, are formed by us on the occasion of) material things affecting our sense-organs and brain. Descartes dealt with the problem by invoking God. We know by the light of nature that our ideas of material things must be caused by something with at least as much reality as is attributed in the ideas. We have a natural impulse to believe the causes to resemble the ideas, that is, to be material things. One possibility is that God should have given us the ideas directly, without there actually being any material things. But, God not being deceitful, we can rely on the natural impulse he has given us to believe the causes to be material things. Berkeley thought otherwise. Far from our having a natural impulse to believe our ideas to be caused by material things, the notion of a material thing is incoherent. Berkeley found comfort in the thought that his idealism could not be shown to be inconsistent with language. The proper use of words being 'the marking of our conceptions, or things only as they are known and perceived by us' it follows that idealism 'is nothing inconsistent with the right use and significancy of language' (*Principles*, LXXXIII). In other words, *if* one accepts the theory that thinking is mental vision of image-ideas in some sort of order, and that language is translating such thoughts into words, *then* one must also accept that idealism is consistent with the right use of language. Berkeley is right. The question becomes one of whether Descartes was right about what thinking is. And that becomes one of whether he was right about his two dualisms, the first dualism, of matter and mind, and the second dualism, consequential upon the first, of image-ideas and proposition-ideas.

(4) There is a problem for Descartes and the philosophers who succeeded him in that some things we might be inclined to call 'ideas', such as the 'idea' of the self, and the 'ideas' of 'cause' and of 'substance', do not fit into the dichotomy of image-ideas and proposition-ideas. What makes it particularly embarrassing is that they are key ideas in philosophizing. One cannot simply write them off as fictions. And yet they cannot be shown to be 'real' as can ideas of simple natures. Simple ideas, Locke says, must all be real, because they are the effects in us 'of powers in things without us, ordained by our Maker to produce in us such sensations'. Their reality lies 'in that steady correspondence they have with the distinct constitutions of real beings. But whether they answer to those constitutions as to causes

or patterns, it matters not; it suffices that they are constantly produced by them' (*Essay*, II, xxx, 1–2).

Locke's distinction between 'real' and 'fantastical or chimerical' ideas is not altogether unlike Plato's distinction between what something, such as holiness, *is*, in itself, and what it is *said to be*, in accord with the conventions of a linguistic community. The difference between Plato and Locke is that whereas for Plato the extra-linguistic reality to which language is expected to conform is that of the intelligible Forms, for Locke it is that of the physical world. The similarity is that in neither case is the extra-linguistic reality that of the sensible world. Plato 'separated' the Forms from the sensible world. Descartes and Locke split the Aristotelian (and common-sense) notion of a sensible quality in two: it became a sensible 'idea' in the mind, and an unsensed 'power' in matter. Implicit in both Plato and Locke there is the notion that language should be shown to conform to reality, but in both Plato and Locke the status 'real' is assigned in such a way that language and reality cannot be straightforwardly compared. We have the notion of language/reality conformity, but no way of putting the notion to use.

The above are some of the problems Kant inherited from Descartes and the British empiricists. He wanted to provide an alternative answer to scepticism to those of Descartes and Berkeley. And he wanted to prove our right to use the concepts (of cause, substance, etc.) with which the empiricists had had such problems. Like Descartes, he started out from a view about mathematics and space. Space is not 'out there' at all; it is not a thing in itself. It is only a 'form' of our intuition of things. This explains the possibility of *a priori* knowledge of geometry, and it guarantees the spatiality of the things we experience. But, of course, there is a price to pay for this answer to scepticism. The spatial objects whose existence is guaranteed are merely phenomenal. We are saddled with a distinction between a subjectively conditioned spatial world and an objective non-spatial world, and with the problem of how they are related.

Kant accepted what Locke had said about why simple ideas, like those of colour, must be real—except, of course, that being a good Platonist he refused to honour them with the title 'ideas'. He called them 'empirical concepts' and said that 'experience is always available for the proof of their objective reality' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A84/B116). But the concepts which had proved such an embarrassment to the empiricists came in for very different treatment. Kant called such concepts as those of cause and substance '*a priori* concepts', and sought to show that the very possibility of there being a world as an object of knowledge for someone, as distinct from his being affected with a meaningless buzz of sensations, is conditional on his actively 'synthesizing' his sensations according to principles corresponding to these *a priori* concepts. He called 'knowledge which has to do not so much with objects as with how we know objects, in so far as this may be possible *a priori*', 'transcendental knowledge' (B25) and he called a

proof of our right to employ some concept, a 'deduction' (A84/B116). The concepts embarrassing to the empiricists are accordingly said to have a 'transcendental deduction' (A85/B117), as opposed to the 'empirical deduction' of the empirical concepts.

Kant is like Berkeley in not admitting knowledge of something lying wholly outside our sensations, but unlike him in operating with a distinction between sensations as they occur in us, and an empirical world we actively construct out of them and set up as an object for our knowledge. The point of dissimilarity between Berkeley and Kant may be described by saying that Berkeley is an empirical idealist whereas Kant is an empirical realist. To go on to describe the point of similarity by saying, without qualification, that both are idealists could be confusing. In the light of his definition of 'transcendental knowledge', and of the objects so known not being things-in-themselves, Kant's brand of idealism can be characterized as 'transcendental idealism'.

I said at the beginning of this foreword that I would avoid covering the same ground as that covered by contributors to the volume. I can see that I am in danger of doing so. Kant and the post-Kantian idealists, Fichte, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Bradley, all receive their fair share of attention from the contributors. I think my best remaining service to the reader may be to try to relate the question that is taken up at the end of the volume, the question whether Wittgenstein was an idealist, to what I have been saying about 'ideas' in Plato and Descartes, and 'concepts' in Kant.

I shall confine myself to three questions. First, does the later Wittgenstein hold the Cartesian theory that thinking is mental vision of image-ideas in some sort of relation, the theory that is conducive to Berkeley's empirical idealism? Second, does he hold the theory that was held in one form or another by Plato and Locke, and that may be described as a kind of realism, the theory that language, if it is to be correctly used and not to be merely 'a portion of the human voice which men agree to use' (*Crat.*, 383a), must conform to some extra-linguistic reality? Third, does he hold the reverse of this, the theory that instead of language conforming to reality, reality conforms to language, a theory that might be described as a linguistic version of Kant's transcendental idealism?

Without a shadow of doubt the answer to the first question is 'No'. Wittgenstein may not have read Bradley (*Principles of Logic*, Bk I, Ch. I), but he had certainly read Frege, and Frege, like Bradley, put the notion of an image-idea in its psychological place. For Wittgenstein it was what Frege called the sense (*Sinn*) of a sign which mattered for an understanding of how language works, not an associated idea.[7] To get at the sense one

[7] *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, P. Geach and M. Black (eds) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), 58–59. On Bradley, see the papers in this volume by Professor Manser and Mr Palmer.

has to consider the *use* of the sign, the use being something which is essentially public. The old notion, of Hobbes and Locke, that to understand thinking one has to attend to something essentially private, 'mental discourse', had been replaced by a new notion, that to understand thinking one has to attend to something essentially public, saying. Thinking is conceptually parasitic on saying; not saying, on thinking (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 327–341). To understand different kinds of thoughts (imagining, remembering, hoping, fearing, doubting, believing, etc.) one needs to consider the grammar, in an extended sense of 'grammar', of the corresponding expression. 'One ought to ask, not what images are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word "imagination" is used . . . *Essence* is expressed by grammar' (*PI*, I, 370–371). To understand what remembering is we might suppose that we should introspect and catch ourselves in the act, whereas what we should attend to is the grammar of the expression 'I remember': such facts of language as that someone who claims to remember having been at a certain place at a certain time is corrected if he was known not to be there at that time. This is what gives 'remember' its sense, not 'a peculiar act of thinking, independent of the act of expressing our thoughts, and stowed away in some peculiar medium' (*Blue and Brown Books*, 43; cf. *PI*, I, 316ff.; II, xiii).

The answer to the second question, likewise, is 'No'. There is, of course, that conformity which consists in what we say being true (*PI*, I, 429). But any other supposed conformity is a metaphysical myth (see *Zettel*, 331, and *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, I, 4). Instead of saying that understanding a sentence points to a reality outside the sentence we should say 'Understanding a sentence means getting hold of its content; and the content of the sentence is *in* the sentence' (*BB*, 167). Take the sentence 'This flower is white'. According to Locke the word 'white' stands for a real idea, and according to Kant we have a right to use it, because of what Kant calls 'an empirical deduction': reality has impressed the idea or concept on us. But Wittgenstein says 'Do not believe that you have the concept of colour within you because you look at a coloured object—however you look. (Any more than you possess the concept of a negative number by having debts)' (*Z*, 332). Having a concept is not a matter of having an experience. This is as true of words for bodily sensations as it is of words for sensible qualities of things. Having the concept of pain means knowing the grammar of 'pain' (*PI*, I, 384; *Z*, 548). The word 'pain' is a word for a bodily sensation because of its grammar, but 'if someone says "If our language had not this grammar, it could not express these facts"—it should be asked what "*could*" means here' (*PI*, I, 497). 'The *aim* of the grammar is nothing but that of the language' (ibid.). Hence it makes no sense to talk of being wrong, or unjustified, in using a language-game, such as the language-game in which we talk of the existence of hands. 'A doubt about existence only works *in* a language-game' (*On Certainty*, 24, my italics; cf. 105, 370).

'The use of language is in a certain sense autonomous . . . if you follow rules other than those of chess you are *playing another game*; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such-and-such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else' (*Z*, 320). In short, 'the harmony between thought and reality is to be found in the grammar of the language' (*Z*, 55), and not in some sort of causal relationship. Both Plato's 'Forms' (the causes of the characteristics of sensible things) and Locke's 'ideas' (the effects in us of powers in physical things) belong with the myth that there is some other conformity of language and reality than that which consists in what we say being true.

Finally, does Wittgenstein hold the theory that instead of language conforming to reality, reality conforms to language, a theory that might be described as a linguistic version of Kant's transcendental idealism? In an earlier volume of Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures Bernard Williams concluded a paper on 'Wittgenstein and Idealism'[8] by quoting *Zettel*, 357, and remarking that Wittgenstein's new theory of meaning 'points in the direction of a transcendental idealism'. That it does so is hotly disputed by some contributors to the present volume. I shall exercise a self-denying ordinance and leave it to the reader to decide for himself whether or not Williams is right.

This is the eleventh, and last, volume of Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures I shall edit. I have held the office of Director of the Institute for fourteen years, and I think that is long enough. The Council of the Institute has elected me a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, a unique honour of which I am proud. My best wishes go to my successor, Professor A. Phillips Griffiths, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warwick, and my sincere thanks to my colleagues at the Institute, who have made the last fourteen years such happy ones.

The Open University

[8] In Godfrey Vesey (ed.), *Understanding Wittgenstein*, Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures Volume 7, 1972/73 (London: Macmillan, 1974; New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), 76–95.