

# Mentalism

An early essay

(excerpts)

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## **Perception**

What are the elements involved in every act of knowing an object? A simple analysis reveals they are three, the object, the awareness which enables us to distinguish one thing from another, the thought which has itself come into existence only because it has an object as its content, and the knower. When a table is seen, you are aware that it is you who see it, and that it exists for you. Hence we say that in every act of knowing, in every sensation that reports the world there must be a mind present. The bodily senses could not report independently of the mind what they see hear taste or smell or touch, nor could there be any other mind to which to report. They testify to the apparent existence of a material world only because they interact with mind. The body itself is a mental sensation. It is an object the same as any other. Mind is more generalised than our finite intellects, but is essentially related and continuous with them.

We can trace the communication of the sense report from organ to nerve, and from nerve to brain, but what of its passage from brain to consciousness. The brain is just as physical as the eye and ear. When we come to consider the final process of knowing the existence of things we face a startling fact. A nervous function, a structural process suddenly ceases to be such and literally changes into psychological experience. How has the gap from matter to mind been crossed? How can a contradictory activity, this physical disturbance, suddenly change its nature and appear as idea? How can material substance - an antagonistic element - enter into union with intangible mind? Do what it will, expend its utmost ingenuity as it has already done, physiological science is unable to fill in satisfactorily the hiatus between the physical vibration and the conscious perception. The movement of certain molecules in the gray matter of a man's brain can never be brought into the same order as his imaged thoughts or logical reflections. The two belong to totally different worlds of experience. Those who ascribe the thoughts to the kernel of the skull instead of to Thought itself, who would make mental experience solely a product of the physical brain as bile is a product of the liver, fail to grasp this fact. The problem of constructing a bridge over the gap between the end of the physical series and the beginning of the mental series solves itself easily when it is reconstructed in this way, by denying any difference in the character of both series. This links both ends neatly together by placing them both in mind. It does not start with any distinction between them.

But after we have done this what becomes of the impression on the eyes, the eyes themselves, the sensory nerves and the brain? What else can become of them except to be turned into ideas themselves. The gap never has existed save in the self deception of thought. Science has viewed a single unity under two different aspects and in setting up such a strange problem for solution, science set up a problem which was utterly irrational and wholly unintelligible.

Those who would set up the body as a standard of reality who would make the knowledge of matter the knowledge of truth, set up a definition whose terms exclude both reality and truth. For they leave no room for mind, which cannot be felt with the palm of one's hand as one can feel the body.

All things are mental things, this alone do we know indubitably yet nobody will repudiate realism and accept such doctrine with confidence until he has previously prepared himself for it by enquiry and reflection, and unless he has been led to it by the sheer rational force of what he has thus ascertained. For the innermost beliefs of the masses will always be outraged by such a fact because their primary instinct is impulsively and prematurely to take things as they appear to be, whereas the philosopher can only arrive at his truth as the final step in a long journey.

That the percept is an idea we know; that a material thing is the basis of this idea is mere conjecture. That there is a material object apart from and outside of the perceived mental image of it or corresponding to the idea formed of it, is only inference. Its independent existence cannot be proved and cannot be established.

We may search through every part of space, even the most distant stars of the universe and still find no trace of this impalpable and ghost like matter. No one through any of the five senses, has seen or felt, tasted smelt or heard this mysterious substance called matter which is supposed to be stuffed somehow into the wall. If this substance is so imperceptible are we not justified in denying its existence? If by matter people mean only the direct experience and conscious sensation aroused by any object one could not criticise their acceptance, but we know that they do not mean this. They mean always that there is a separate and independent substance quite apart from the experience and the sensation of an object. Matter - in itself possesses neither colour nor shape nor size nor feel nor visibility, nor tangibility. The credulous masses did not even know whether it is a solid or a liquid or a gas. The truth is nobody has ever seen matter and hence the total ignorance concerning it of those who use the word. To deny matter is one thing but to deny the feeling and perception of external objects is another and would be a totally unreasonable and inexcusable act. The ideality of objects, which is supposed to be contrary to commonsense, turns out to be a false and delusive belief about them.

We 'think' our object. All external objects are known only as mental objects. Mankind naturally and normally assumes that it possesses a first hand knowledge of an outward non mental object. But that this is mere assumption is quickly proved. For we know a thing by knowing our own perception of it. All that we know at first hand of a thing is the thought of it. All that we know at firsthand of an event is its occurrence in our own mind. Our direct awareness is of our percept of the outward thing, not of the physical thing itself. The thing is not to be confounded with our personal perception of it. The latter is indubitable, but the former is established by an act of inference.

The act of knowing and the thing that is known are identical, and the thought that your mind holds is nothing less and nothing else than the thing itself. So that the thing and

the percept is identical. All that we need to grasp this is to re-interpret our experience of things by the light of mentalism. As all sensations are known to some mind, the ultimate reference involved in the existence of everything is mind. Even when we think a thing is outside the mind the very act of thinking makes it mental. The sensory process itself can be no less an idea than the things which exist and the events which occur outside it. We must not only make mind the stuff of all experience but we must also make it prior to the first sensation of the first thing in experience.

### **Sensations**

It is impossible to eliminate the mental reference in our world experience. Indeed no experience can arise for us unless it arises in our mind. We cannot estrange ourselves from thought and yet remain within the confines of conscious objective experience.

We only know what the senses tell us. The senses can tell us only what the mind can bring into consciousness. The mind can bring only its own creations into our consciousness. Our experienced world is a mental one. Hence it is written in the first verse of "Dhammapada" - "In everything mind is the first, mind is pre-eminent, by mind all things are made."

The green colour, rolling surface, and noisy waves of yonder ocean are actually present within our consciousness, although we blindly believe them to be outside it. They are known by the senses, through eye and ear, which means that they are really known by the mind.

When we denude a thing of all its qualities, the thing itself disappears. For we know nothing more of it than as a bundle of qualities. Take any other thing you like and you will find it susceptible of exactly the same analytical treatment: your knowledge of it is confined to your sensations of it, nothing more.

The retina reports only different patches of light, shade and colour. Actually we behold the things themselves. Therefore, something more than the retinal image is the basis of our experience. That "something more" is the mind's subconscious working. The retina is unable to report depth but only distance. Yet we certainly see things as possessing depth. Here again mind has been subconsciously at work in making the percept.

We see a fountain pen when we are aware of the light image which it evokes on the retina of the eye, not before.

The retina will always show a coin as elliptical in shape whereas we perceive it as circular. Whence the difference? The answer is that mind at its subconscious level has corrected the retinal impression and thus actually manufactured part at least of what we

behold. Not only that, but we are able to behold externally what has been created internally.

We have to isolate and pick out the separate sensations for the purpose of theoretical examination, but let us not forget to form finished percepts. For us, therefore, a conception is only a conceptual aid.

That the mind does not directly become aware of the retinal image is easily proved for the latter is inverted so that the lower part of the thing seen appears in the upper part of the image whilst its left side appears on the right side of the image. But such inversion of the external object is something which nobody is aware of, consequently the image in the retina cannot have been transmitted directly. The image fulfills its part by supplying the data to the mind which constructs its own image upon this data.

Not only do we never see a material object but we do not even see the retinal image of the image. Sight is entirely subjective.

Why is it that we do not see things as pictures upon the retinal screen but projected and extended in space. This is because of the mind's own creative activity. Why is it that we did not see them as inverted but standing erect. This again is caused by the mind's own creative working.

The hot steam presses again and again through the whistle and escapes to the accompaniment of loud shrieks. Where is the sensation of this piercing sound? Is it in the engine? Were it there you would never have been able to hear it. It is where you alone can become aware of it - in your mind. And not only is the noise of the whistle heard there but the massive outline of the engine itself and its painted colour are perceived there - indeed your entire recognition of the engine is a mental product and the idea you form of it is all you know about it. The noise, smoke, steam, shape and movement of the engine are not really independent of you, nor even independent of your sensations of them.

The smell of a fragrant rose as experienced by you becomes your sensation. Thus the personal element forms part of the sensation. The smell is referred to you and thus gives meaning for you. But what is this personal reference? It is the becoming aware on your part of the sensation.

When you eat a piece of sweetened chocolate you get a sensation of sweetness, i.e., of a taste. It is of great importance to enquire at this point where the sensation is actually located. Is it in the chocolate? How can that be? Then it can only be in your mouth, for if you had no tongue and no palate you could never know the taste of anything at all. Therefore, the sensation of taste is in you.

Pain, particularly is easily and scientifically proved as being an experience which is wholly mental and which has nothing physical in it. It is the way in which the mind

interprets to waking consciousness the vibrations received from maladjustments of the body. It is a valuable message, i.e., an idea, whereby man is informed of such maladjustments so that he can endeavour to correct them.

The five senses are but mirrors to the mind which is the real sensing agent. In the end the only world we know is the world which is given in our sense experience, and all our knowledge of this immense world is ultimately resolvable into our sensations of it. The groups and series of these sensations make up the picture of the world that we see.

It was reserved for the effort of our scientific age to put the first part of this ancient truth into greater detail gathered from the hospital ward and the dissection laboratory but the final and fundamental part can be got from no hospital.

The individual mind subconsciously tries to understand its sensations in the light of its previous experiences and thus to recognize or judge them.

We know by the simple test of closing each eye alternately that the picture of our surroundings which each one receives is different from the other. We know too that the picture which both receive when open at the same time is not only different from the other two, but is fuller because it is built up out of both. Now what is the agency in us which constructs it. It is something which has the intelligence to coordinate the impressions received through the eyes and to discriminate between them, which means that it is something mental.

People suffering from the curious and rare malady of Transposition of the senses have been known to smell their skin, see with their fingers, and so on. Professor Cesare Lombroso many years ago collected and described many such cases in one of his books. They evidence the existence of some other agent which possesses sensations apart from the physical sense organ itself. That agent can only be the mind.

### ***The world as idea***

We have only to reflect a little to discover what experience itself testifies that we have no awareness of two separate things, i.e. a mental construction and a separate object to which it refers. What we perceive involves a single and immediate act. When we perceive it a single experience alone is involved. The notion of a duality involving external cause and internal idea is experientially unnecessary and theoretically unsound, for we can have no intelligible idea of a fountain pen which is not a particular pen, with a particular form and colour. We can shape no percept in the mind of a fountain pen in general; it must always be an image of one particular pen or else it remains a meaningless word. This is because our thinking always refers to sensations, always builds itself up out of the experience possible within the range of the five senses.

The separate existence which we feel the pen has for us is merely an idea in our consciousness. The act of seeing it and the pen itself are not two facts but one. The pen itself is a deliverance of consciousness and as such cannot exist outside it. The moment of pure sensation gives us the actual pen, the thing in itself: there is no other.

For we can shut our eyes and let the thought of this pen pass into non existence whereas we may shut our eyes a hundred times and yet the pen which produces the thought refuses to pass away. It is still there confronting us and demanding that we recognise its existence as something real.

The critic who says that to be is not the same as to be known and that to assert otherwise is to fall into an insane solipsism, is right so far as he goes but he does not go far. He makes the mistake of thinking of things in terms only of being known to us, to finite minds. He forgets the universal mind to which both individual minds and individual things are objects.

The content of a percept cannot be separated from the percept itself any more than a cartwheel can be separated from its spokes and yet remain a proper wheel.

Whether we accept the materialistic statement that the percept is built upon observation of a real and separate material object or the mentalistic statement that it is itself the so-called material object, both agree the percept is a mental thing. Here lies our hope. As a mental construction it is alterable and improveable.

We cannot escape from the position that all we know of the world, all we know of another human being, or even that there is a world or another human being at all, is only what our mind tells us, that is to say is only our own idea. The mind which sees and the thing which is seen are, when traced back, one and the same. Nothing ever makes its appearance apart from the thought of it. This is so and must be so because the two are really one and the same. Even when we infer that a thing existed prior to our perception of it, the inference itself is something made by the mind and therefore as much a mental creation as the thing is claimed to be.

What we actually experience are not mere inferences but the veritable objects themselves. And the latter are none other than mental constructions. The belief in matter contradicts itself and consequently remains unacceptable.

The mind alone is and nothing else. If our attitude on this point be deemed stubbornly uncompromising, it is not because we regard this as the highest truth, but because we regard it as the only truth.

When you become thoroughly convinced of mentalism the world does not disappear for you; only you see it in a new light and consequently with altered shades of value.



Whilst we refrain from considering the whole world around us in the same spirit of doubt and caution with which we approach minute fragments of the world in the laboratory, we cannot hope to discover the truth about it. We base our belief in matter on the clear evidence of our five senses, but when we analyse this evidence more deeply we find that we base this belief on mere deductions made from this evidence. But such an inference is not entitled to the status of fact until it is itself examined in turn. If we make such an examination we shall find that it cannot stand.

What is the relation between the percept which arises in the mind and the thing which is supposed to exist outside? The ordinary man usually believes that the idea is a copy of it, that the thought exactly represents the thing. The more reflective man, however, will be more cautious and say that the percept only corresponds to the thing. The truth of the correspondence theory can never be established because we can never hold the thing before our mind as it is in itself. But the truly reflective man will be bold and admit that we perceive things directly, that they are the percepts themselves, and that consequently there is no relationship at all. What we directly experience is the actual world itself, not a mental copy of it.

Mind alone adequately explains the world. We must read the facts of the universe with a fresh eye, with a mentalist instead of a materialist one, but the knowledge of mentalist doctrine will not alter the nature of things for us. Table surfaces will still be hard and solid, smooth and brown, just as they still were when science found the atom to be but invisible incessantly moving waves of energy.

Consciousness is consequently an active energy displayed by Mind. Thus at the very moment when a materialist becomes aware of what he deems to be a material and external world, he is unwittingly manifesting the ultimate immaterial principle of existence.

The error of every materialist is to ignore the mind for which a world must exist and from which it cannot be separated. It is a common criticism with those who style themselves "realists" to demand that we separate awareness from the object of awareness, mind from its contents. But since the contents of the mind are all mental, have all originated in mind itself, we can see that the separation demanded is not based on fact. As substance the mind's contents are indistinguishable from it they are in fact indivisibly one with it. Whatever was a thought before and will be one after is also a thought even now, however prolonged the present may be. Therefore the world is but our thought of it.

It took Immanuel Kant many years of his life to find out, and hundreds of pages of tortuous phraseology to record this truth that the mind contributes largely to the making of its own world.

## **Consciousness and experience**

Matter can be properly understood only as it is understood in terms of abstract thought. Then it acquires meaning only as an aspect of consciousness. It becomes real only as a part of the reality of mind. Whereas the materialist would translate mind as a physical reaction alone, the mentalist would translate matter as a mental reaction alone. The teaching of mentalism is that our awareness of experienced things is only an awareness of constructs of mind, but not of anything else. Thoughts indeed are the only materials with which it deals, and anything beyond them is only inference, which is again - thought. Matter as a concept is useful when we think about the world from a practical standpoint, but useless from a philosophic one.

Physical processes in the brain stand on one side of a chasm and conscious thoughts, feelings and sensations stand on the other side. Reasoning based on the materialist hypothesis has never yet leaped successfully across this chasm, and never can do so. Whatever else is involved in the act of knowing, the thing which is known can be known only because it is similar in kind to that which makes it known. And as the latter is consciousness - the essential background of all experience - so the former must be conscious thought.

How can mind submit itself to an alien and inferior thing such as matter is supposed to be? How can mind which is so utterly different from what that matter is supposed to be, come into intimate knowing relation with it. Matter is a belief in our minds, not a substance outside our bodies. But materialism cannot keep pace with modern knowledge and is dropping by the wayside.

Even materialists who have carefully analysed the processes of sense perception have to confess that we come into touch with our knowledge of the external things alone. That is to say although they believe these things to exist separately and apart from the ideas which we form of them, our actual experience of them can only occur at the moment when we consciously experience the idea themselves and is limited to that too. Our perception of an external object becomes possible only because the percept itself is the object concerned. It is not a mental copy of a material thing. The ideational experience and the external thing perceived are one and the same. What we habitually believe to be an experience of material things is actually an experience in the realm of constructive imagination.

The mental construct does not dwell in a separate world but in this very earth itself.

Mentalism whilst showing that our reaction to things takes the form of ideas, does not deny that these things exist outside the body. But it declares that they too are ideas like the body itself.

Experience is not an antithesis to thought but rather its very stuff is composed of thought. We are thunderstruck when we hear that all human beings without exception dwell only in a thought world. Yet we cannot cross the threshold of philosophy unless we are prepared to renounce the belief that we live in a world which is constructed out of material stuff and replace it by the belief that we live in a world which is constructed out of mental experience. It is not the world's existence which is negated but its materiality. As part of experience it is accepted as a fact but that fact is then investigated so that its proper significance may be seen.

It is because things have the appearance of being apart from our consciousness of them that we fail to recognise them as ideas. Just as there is no moon in the placid surface of a lake although its reflected image is there, so there is really no matter in an object but only a reflected mental image. Will men never believe that the things they see with their eyes and feel with their hands, and the sounds they hear are products of the mind's own making.

Experience is the activity of the mind in consciousness. All experience pre-supposes a duality of the subject of any experience and the experience itself, just as all knowledge pre-supposes a duality of the knower and the known.

Mind projects its ideas and then perceives them as if they were other than its own offspring.

Heraclitus of Ephesus had the true insight. He said "Homer was wrong in saying 'would that strife might perish from among gods and men', he did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for if his prayer were answered all things would pass away.

The moment we begin to examine experience we find that it splits itself up into an opposition of that which is experienced and that which is aware of the experience. But as we have already reduced the experience of things to an experience of thoughts, we can call the distinction one between thinking and that which is aware of thought. Whatever appears before the mind as an object of knowledge has to be clearly differentiated, therefore, from the mind itself as the WITNESS of it. Thus all experience is split into the panorama of what is seen or known and the mind which remains the untouched and unaffected Seer and Knower.

With the materialist we deny that it is possible to transcend experience. With the mentalist we deny that this is experience of a material world. With the hidden teaching we deny that ideas as such constitute reality.

We have found the universe to be a vast spectacle, a show put on for the benefit of our five senses, a spectacle which implies the existence of a spectator, a witness, for how can any object be known to exist unless there is some mind which experiences it and thus becomes aware of it.

All our experiences are but ideas, pleasant and unpleasant. To understand this is to understand that we dwell alongside the bank of a river of images which are forever passing.

Our experience is twofold, and we may draw a definite line between its aspects. First, the world which is apparently externally experienced; second the world which is obviously internally experienced. The first category comprises such things as chairs, houses, cities, mountains. The second comprises such thoughts as memories, fancies, desires, reasonings, feelings and abstract ideas. The two in combination comprise our experience.

The mental element is involved in experience without exception. Whatever exists, exists as an object of knowledge or experience to a perceiving or experiencing mind. Nobody can offer as a fact anything that is not known or experienced by him, for without such knowledge or experience its existence is only inferred. Thus there is always a relation between the thing and the mind that knows the thing.

Mind is the conscious subject of these experiences; without it they could never happen; to leave it out of reckoning is to render impossible any adequate explanation of the world. All experience pre-supposes mental experience.

The materialistic evaluation of mind - which would deny the independent existence of mind - is itself carried on under the light of the mind and could not be carried on without it. Even the materialist must admit that if we recognise physical things, we have to relate them by the non-physical operations of mind.

The actual perceived appearance of an ocean wave and the idea of it are two different things. Nevertheless both are mental in nature, both are facts of consciousness, as the very condition of their existence. Colours exist for us only as seen colours, sound exists only as heard sounds.

How can it be possible that objects perceived or contacted by the bodily senses are dependent upon a living conscious nature for their existence is a question which everyone without exception naturally asks. How can we classify as mental, as ideas, such tangible objects as hard, heavy, solid and large-shaped material things? Is it not contrary to all human reason to call material substance a mental appearance?

The answer is an appeal to the results of scientific research in physiology. Men who are totally uninterested in metaphysics, whose chief interest lies wholly in the way the human body functions have been compelled to confess that the sensuous external world is known by us only through the mind.

We know the world through the colours, smells, tastes, sounds and feels of the objects and creatures therein, a cluster of some or all of them. This statement seems to

contradict the habitual belief in the externality of the world which is native to man's constitution. Very few have thought about this point, and most are ignorant that anyone has ever dare to call the externality of the world into question. Very few know the meaning of the problem. Why? We are born with an inherent conviction that the things we see, the sounds we hear, the odours we smell are all outside us. We grow up with this conviction quite undisturbed, because everyone we know, and almost every person we meet holds precisely this same notion, and holds it quite as firmly as we do. The root of the trouble is our lack of discrimination between mind and body. We have never bothered to make a penetrating analysis - with reality and not appearance as our watchword - of the way in which we become aware of the world.

Is it not astonishing that men are so deceived into taking the material objects which surround them as possessing characteristics of reality which are wanting in the mental phenomena. They do not know that the very qualities of solidity tangibility and hardness which make the figures of those objects themselves, are no less phenomena of the mind than the thoughts and ideas which are more readily recognised as being such. It is a natural prepossession of the naive popular attitude to take it for granted that a substance as hard as marble must therefore be utterly beyond the work of thought, and to assume that it dwells in a material world which could never melt down into mind save in the fantastic mind of a lunatic.

We rarely pause to reflect on the mysterious character of the simplest object. We do not realise that here is an illusory show that appears real, a transient existence that appears permanent, a something that is, yet is not at the same time.

Let us look at the sphere of the aesthetic illusions of art. The portrayal of a landscape by a painter with its suggestive imitation of depth and solidity gained by shading and perspective, is intended to create in the mind of the spectator the illusion that he is looking at the actual scene. The actors in a play at the theatre seek to influence the audience into the belief that they are witnessing a real life spectacle. For this purpose they train themselves into the perfect simulation of varied human emotions and actions. Both the painter and the actor succeed only when those for whom they work react completely to its seeming reality, i.e., let themselves fall fully into illusion, which means that they let themselves see what exists partly in their imagination and nowhere else. Are the creations of fancy and the images of memory any less real than perceptions?

Consciousness is involved in every one of its objects yet we never meet with the consciousness itself.

Mind is present in every thought but is something over and above a thought. For mind has a double function; it makes facts things known to us and it also interprets them to us. We must learn to distinguish between the transient forms which mind takes and its immortal essence.

The so-called unconscious is really a graded series of consciousness, each of which has its own time and space orders; and each of which is the unconscious to the lower grade. The ordinary waking mind is not the only part of ourselves which knows things and possesses awareness, for the unconscious behind it knows infinitely more and is aware of immeasurably wider time and space ranges.

It was not Freud, as is commonly believed, who first put forward in our time the idea of the existence of mental states which lie beyond conscious apprehension. Carpenter wrote in his MENTAL PHYSIOLOGY pp 515 "The mind may undergo modifications, sometimes of a very considerable importance, without being itself conscious of the process, until the results present themselves to the consciousness in the new ideas or new combinations of ideas, which the process has evolved."

Thus the unconscious secretly takes the impression of all events and of all things. They are not lost.

All the dread of unconsciousness, all the clinging to individual existence, all the yearning to be awake, aware and active, ignores the plain fact that consciousness may become a veritable curse at certain times.

Reality reveals itself in us and around us as consciousness.

When we thoroughly accept the truth of the non-existence of matter; when we thoroughly understand that what manifests outside our body as the universe is not different from what manifests inside our ego as consciousness; when we thoroughly rest in the realization that this Universal Mind is the sole existence; then and not till then do we become fit recipients of those powers and faculties which are called supernormal. The fetters which bind us are merely our own fallacies of thinking. The mind is the innermost existence that we know. It is the fundamental experience, the essence of being and the deposit of all fact. We may find in our own experience of Mind sufficient resemblance to its work as the mysterious power which moves within the world's heart, to enable us to understand something of its hidden nature. Our minds possess the power to mirror the whole universe.