

A New Dynamism for Philosophy.

Chapter One.

Perception and Reality.

Key Questions. *What are the central questions of philosophy? What are the main philosophical traditions? How do they address these questions and why have they failed?*

What is reality and of what does it comprise? How are living and conscious beings distinguishable from other material things there? Can we build knowledge of reality solely through sense experience? How does perception differ from sensation to give us access to reality? How do we reconcile the subjectivity of perception with an understanding of reality that is shared with others and the source of objective knowledge?

An important feature of the dynamic philosophy I propose involves a reappraisal of reality and the matter it contains. Much of the older philosophy up to the nineteenth century, and some beyond, seemed to regard matter essentially as discrete lumps of hard inert stuff. If it were not that already, in the form of rocks or metals, for instance, then it comprised parts which are so, in the form of molecules or atoms: stable, self-contained and detachable one from another. Rather like building blocks. Philosophy of this vintage assumes solidity as its paradigm for the material, with every phenomenon possessing definitely shaped boundaries or edges. Quite possibly this has encouraged speculation concerning the impenetrability of the material to the perceiving subject, and the proposal for a radical subject-object dichotomy.

Much experience-based philosophy, such as the work of the British empiricists, is also object-based in this sense. It conceives experience on an analogy with material objects and events, regarding each sensation or idea as separate and clearly delineated, self-contained, and existing in causal relationships with other experiences or events in the material universe.

Assumptions of this order continue a scientific set of beliefs stretching back to Aristotle, where there is an assumption of stability and inertia in the order of matter, and where instability or change is introduced by the reorganisation of stable components, or from forces acting from without and existing between material objects. Matter enjoys no inherent

impetus or direction, so the concept of change, and the introduction of forces are effected in order to make sense of a succession of different states or arrangements of matter.

The work of Einstein, Planck and others a century ago radically changed this perception of the material, and yet philosophy has only slowly grasped its significance. I have already located a dynamic thread in earlier philosophy. Such concept-based theories convey the insight that the approach we adopt towards reality will shape what we will discover there. My proposal is that we extend this dynamic net to cover reality itself. Physical science proposes a greater assimilation of energy and matter. I suggest that philosophy pursues this discovery more assiduously. It should distance itself from any tendency to conceive the fundamental components of reality as material particles in the old sense, exerting invisible forces upon one another. The particles of which matter is composed have no discernible shape or measurable dimensions. Sustaining the durability and inertia of the chairs and tables, that philosophers have contemplated so fondly, are pulses of **energy**. Defining their existence are the forces they exert. In our dynamic universe, the opposition of forces is enough to demarcate distinct objects. We should look upon domestic objects less as lumps of matter and more as pulsating bundles, exerting forces on each other and upon anything, such as the hand, that comes into contact with them.

As a part of the prevailing orthodoxy, the point scarcely needs to be laboured. We need to conceive particles in terms of the forces they exert. Boundaries or edges will be found at the points where they meet the opposition of forces exerted by other particles. To discover the extent and direction of these we apply our own powers to an object. In just touching a table, for instance, we can locate its border or edge where the pressure of our hand meets the suspended balance of forces exerted by those particles comprising the table. We meet resistance there and are sensitive to the pressure exerted by the table on our fingertips. In looking at an object we similarly engage the light rays bouncing off the object and reaching the retina. So much is primary school science. The stability or inertia of a material object is not something fundamental or assumed by dint of its existence. The persistence of properties characteristic of such stability is only conceivable as resulting from a balance of opposing forces, between those that would tend individually to bring about the collapse or diffusion of the object. Gravitational pull is a major influence on the stability or instability of matter throughout the Universe, but it exists not as an invisible force attached to every object, but rather as a defining property of matter itself. Gravitational pull is indicative of the quantity and

distribution of matter. Change or instability perhaps represents a more fitting characterisation of matter when viewed dynamically, with persistence and resistance the product of opposing influences. Conceived thus everything represents a force for change. Stability becomes a stabilising influence that the dynamic intervention of more matter may produce.

It may be neglected as a source of insights, but a dynamic approach to objects is not new. Aristotle proposed, for instance, that we identify an object not just with its present material state, but with some future state where we find its essence realised or fulfilled. The identity of an acorn, for example, doesn't reside exclusively in the material of which it is composed, but is inseparably linked to the oak tree it has the potential to become. Viewed in this way, it has direction as well as substance. Without becoming too metaphysical, we can say that an acorn so conceived possesses direction as well as substance. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, possessing power and direction which it exerts as a whole. My own dynamic approach sits quite happily with this view, though I would want to distance myself from the belief that matter be conceived as a succession of linked states. I am much happier with the idea of a continuous process, which may be interrupted to form states or conditions.

If reality fundamentally comprises energy pulses, then how do we locate human beings and other life forms within it? I do not suggest that we are made from a different sort of stuff from atoms and molecules. We have no ethereal souls floating around our insides, nor are our organs impregnated with a mysterious life force. Living creatures possess a complex biology distinguishing them from inanimate matter because they are made up of cells which divide and grow in genetically coded patterns. Biological functions are also indispensable to life and help us pick out living organisms without difficulty. Typical functions include respiration, growth and reproduction. Crystals are often complex and can grow, petrol engines draw in oxygen, and rivers can divide and expand, but it is only when we seek metaphors that we are tempted to group these phenomena with living things. From a dynamic point of view the recognition of biological functions is more fundamental than the composition of cell structures in identifying life, because the essential feature of a living organism is that it has an **agenda**. This includes survival, reproduction and so on. The complexity of any biological structure is important, but only as a means that enables an organism towards its objectives.

Living organisms are composed of nothing more than biological structures consisting of physical and chemical components, and yet I propose that marking them out from inanimate things is the implementation of an agenda. How so? It might seem that a living organism is entirely understandable and its future movements and development consequently predictable in exclusively scientific terms. Moreover it is quite normal for us to attribute an agenda to objects that are not alive. Does not a river seek the ocean and a mountain withstand the elements? Both Materialism and Idealism overlap a dynamic position on this distinction.

There are two distinctive ways in which we ordinarily recognise a purpose or an agenda in an organism. Neither requires the application of investigative scientific analysis. Firstly the organism is able to pursue the agenda in a variety of ways. Plants starved of sunlight, for instance, strive to extend their growth in new directions in order to locate a new light source. Complex organisms have of course developed more resourceful and flexible means of overcoming or circumventing the obstacles that threaten their growth or survival. Whatever their complexity however, each has a range of responses at their disposal, and all are compatible with the pursuit of the same agenda. Secondly the agenda of a living thing can be understood in general terms. The need for water, for instance, cannot be comprehended readily in physical terms that relate exclusively to the causal influence of a specified number of individually identified water molecules. This is stating the need too specifically. A plant is indifferent to which water molecules will serve its purpose, and only the water specifications that are compatible with the health of the plant, such as its acidity or temperature, will be of any significance. All that is important for an understanding of the plant is the recognition of its need for water, light etc.. I don't wish to understate the importance of biology in locating the function of organs, or parts of an organism. Nor overlook the influence of genetic coding on cell formation and growth. The main point is that the generality that inheres in the notion of the purposes or agenda of an organism does not translate neatly to the molecular and atomic levels of chemistry and physics. At some point a rigorous scientific investigation and analysis of a living thing abandons the general in pursuit of the specific and the sense of function is then left behind.

Underpinning the responses we elicit from an organism will be its biological structure, but we require no understanding of this structure in order to recognise the agenda an organism pursues. All conscious life forms have evolved to recognise other organisms and their intentions, sometimes on cursory examination. It might be urgent that they do so.

A training in particle physics will scarcely make our recognition of a friend or foe any more swift or effective. The necessary recognition is made at the level of agenda or purpose, containing a level of generality that reflects our own agenda as much as that of the organism we recognise. A detailed knowledge of the body's structure is clearly useful in other circumstances however. Medical science has enabled us to explore the relationship between the structure and function of body parts to improve or restore the lives of humans and animals. Nonetheless the application of medical science is a sophisticated skill and of secondary importance in this discussion. It has emerged late in evolutionary terms, has a limited application, and is subordinate to an understanding of the agenda of a healthy organism.

There is another important point to make about recognising an agenda or function, although I shall explore its implications more fully later. The generality that characterises perceptions corresponds to the way we use concepts to characterise their objects. Looking for food will not be a search for some specified set of atomic particles with a unique location. There are of course limits that the concept places on what is perceived to be edible, but there is still a wide range of things that will satisfy the concept and facilitate a perception of food. The generality represents limits or bands of tolerance for possible foodstuffs and can be applied repeatedly whenever the appetite demands. There is nothing inadequate or inaccurate in a perception allowing this. Again it represents the best policy to adopt in an environment where the pursuit of our agenda is the greatest priority.

With regard to the personification of nature, the assimilation is metaphorical, because rivers and rocks have no agenda. They do not adapt or modify their attitude in response to changes in their circumstances or environment. Water drawn from a river and kept in a tank makes no effort to escape to rejoin the watercourse and pursue its destiny seaward. Demarcating living things is a predisposition to strive for objectives by different means and to find success in a range of outcomes. The flow of water molecules in a river simply follows the forces acting upon them. Rather more likely to achieve personification are the tools or machines we make in pursuit of our agenda, such as the parking machine that refuses our coins, or the computer that checks our spelling for us. Because we create and adapt things to serve a purpose, it is appropriate and useful that we characterise them in ways that begin to assimilate them to humans. We do this kind of thing so often that it is scarcely worth mentioning that the exercise is metaphorical. But however we regard such attributions, they fall far short of the recognition

of the richness and variety of endeavour necessary for true personification.

Before moving on to a fuller exposition of the theory, it is worth pointing out a few immediate advantages of a dynamic perspective. The first is that we no longer need to overcome an impenetrable barrier in experience in order to acquire knowledge of reality. We exert our own influence on reality and from the moment of our births we engage the forces representing reality directly, unmediated by any such obstacles. Second, reality is independent of our conceptualising powers to the extent that the forces it exerts are outside or beyond the scope of our influence. Although our engagement is direct, it remains independent of us and resists our efforts at influencing it. As we shall also see, we come to recognise ourselves through these efforts as autonomous sources of influence. In reaching out to catch the falling apple, we are not subverting the power of gravity, but harnessing our own powers to a situation in order to influence its course. Third, the important recognition of significance from concept-based theories can be accommodated from the outset. Perceptions and other experiences primarily represent an inquisitive engagement with reality, where an agenda is pursued, producing encounters that are necessarily of significance and interest by virtue of the direction and focus of their aim. The idea of the perception as a passive and receptive state is subordinated within this dynamic model. So here is another barricade we need no longer dismantle. The search for something that links a perceptual state with a corresponding state in reality can be called off immediately, since the act of perception is fundamentally one of direct engagement. Showing how this engagement can produce knowledge of reality rather than degenerate into a voyage of merely self-discovery will of course have to form a substantial part of the argument that follows.

Before examining the perception, I will make a broader examination of experiences, which include sensations, feelings and so on. I have already rejected the view that experiences are passive mental states analogous to material objects. This has an origin in a redundant view of matter. Viewed dynamically, I suggest that an experience is primarily an impulse exerting a force in the direction of reality. It is never disinterested and always pursues an aim or objective. Human consciousness is of necessity active and inquisitive. Objects cannot simply appear in consciousness, and will only feature there if we are attentive or alert to some degree to their appearance.

The inquisitive aspect of experience I am highlighting is clearly distinguished in language even though much philosophy of mind

overlooks its significance. Looking, listening and feeling are activities that tend to represent the attentive faculty at work, whereas seeing, hearing and touching signify that a successful encounter or discovery has resulted. Attentiveness is not enough to produce a perception. A night angler can focus all his faculties upon the water in the hope of detecting a bite but, until something happens, it is possible he experiences very little, and may report experiencing nothing at all. So attentiveness is not sufficient for perception, but is certainly necessary if anything is going to be noticed. A perception needs to combine the faculty of seeking an object with an encounter that locates it. Not that we need be specific in our objective, or that we always locate what we expect to find there. A certain preparedness is all that is required. Even whilst asleep we are to some extent conscious and can be aroused. Idealist philosophy overlooks the relationship with reality that produces the perception. It translates the perceived object into consciousness, and once it is a content of consciousness, it can only reside there so long as one is conscious of its presence. Little wonder then that the problem of perception remained a priority for philosophers of this school.

When trying to understand a sophisticated experience, such as appreciating a portrait painting, an idealist conception of a mental replica of the picture suspended in consciousness is unhelpful in any event. A dynamic interpretation is more fitting. Parts of the picture engage our attention in turn, and our eye selectively roves over the surface of the painting, singling out features of the face or elements of the technique that arouse interest. Perhaps we consider the effect of light or other conditions upon the appearance of the picture. Or the influence of our perception of one colour from those juxtaposed to it. The experience is not simply the presence of an object. It is the fruit of an active engagement with an object, and reflects the attentiveness and acuteness of our faculties we are applying, together with the knowledge we have cultivated that informs them. Theories that import an object into consciousness to await dissection from more specialised inner faculties, either beg the question of what the perception is, or fail to do justice to the richness of the experience in the worldly domain.

The few pages of this chapter so far offer some idea of a dynamically conceived reality, and the accommodation of living things within it. It is no place for supernatural entities or forces, is a theory conducive to rigorous scientific investigation and compatible with the conclusions this reaches. Nonetheless it will be resisting materialist alternatives, by pursuing the idea that life persists at a different level from the sub-atomic, offering us scope for authentic freedom of choice and a genuinely subjective sense of our individuality.

Before examining free will and personal identity however, we need to locate sense experience and understand its place in our dynamic engagement in reality. This will demand an examination of different types of experience with a view to appraising the adequacy of different theories aimed at understanding them.

Not all experiences are perceptions of course. Some are mental images for instance, and hardly afford secure access to reality, whilst others such as sensations need the support of perceptions to confirm an origin in reality. It is with sensations that I shall begin, as they are considered the simplest form of experience, and in consequence the most basic by idealist philosophies seeking a foundation for the perception and our knowledge of reality.

Idealist theories often maintain that perception is reducible to sensation and that we are primarily acquainted in experience with private and internal sense experiences. These might include, as they do for Empiricism, sounds, feelings, and visual impressions of colour. These occurrences in consciousness will be separate from reality and therefore only indirectly related to it. In order to transcend these experiences, Idealists require us to apply our reason or intellectual powers to their appearance, organising and interpreting them into true perceptions. In perception then we receive sensations, examine them and arrive at judgements about reality. In some respects this is a familiar pattern. Many experiences seem to fit this model, if perhaps a little clumsily. It is the painful sensation in my toe that leads to the realisation that I have stubbed it against a rock on the footpath. Or the characteristic pattering sound that informs me that it has begun to rain outside.

If we look more closely at even simple sensations however, they possess a character more complex than that of being the presence of a painful feeling or pattering sound in consciousness. Take a headache as an example. It might be a constant and irksome accompaniment to my reading efforts, vary its sharpness or intensity at different times, and perhaps shift its position within my head throughout the day. Such a sensation is a more subtle experience than simply the variation of a range of pain qualities. A headache is an experience we can adopt different attitudes towards, and these can influence the qualities of the pain that is felt. If I am feeling depressed and disinclined to continue with my work, it is more likely that I will feel the sharpness or intensity of the pain, and its effects will be more debilitating. Fired with enthusiasm however, I will strive to suppress or ignore the headache, work through it and remain fixed on my objective to complete my task. The strength of

my resolve allows me scope to suppress a headache and focus my attention on other things.

This and other examples suggest there is a distinction between a sensation and our experience of it. The sensation is more like a simpler perception than the idealist distinction would imply, and recognising this helps us understand the experience and its variations more readily. It is well known how differently people respond to toothache for instance. So what should we make of two people with similar looking symptoms, but with one making a good deal more fuss about his condition than his more stoical neighbour? Are they feeling different pains, or have they different pain thresholds, one finding it far more difficult than the other to cope with or control a similar level of pain? An idealist theory is unable to consider these alternatives, because it doesn't have the means to accommodate different attitudes to the same sensation. A new attitude could only produce a new sensation. A dynamic theory however recognises the indispensability of such an attitude in defining the resulting experience.

Attitudes apart, sensations themselves share characteristics with perceived objects. They can stand up to a probing scrutiny, nearly all possess spatial position inside or on the surface of the body, and can change under different conditions and in different parts of the body. There is no doubt that sensations represent a simpler class of experience than the perception. But the idealist view strays too far towards an oversimplification.

So if we cannot make a fundamental distinction between sensations and perceptions, then they must be distinguishable in other ways. A materialist-inclined alternative might suggest that sensations have internal bodily causes, whereas perceptions emanate from outside the body, making the two distinguishable in terms of their different sources. But this is nowhere near satisfactory, since the source of many sensations lies outside the body, such as the hot plate that burns our fingers, and also because many perceptions are strongly influenced by the state of our bodies. The taste of food, for instance will be influenced by the size of our appetite, so both stomach and food could claim to be sources of the experience.

I believe that a dynamic distinction can be made by recognising a more practical dimension to the perception. We all discover in early childhood a world in which objects interact or exert influence on each other. Instinctively curious, we try to exert our own influence on a new situation. A rattle is held out and shaken above a cot, and the baby tries

to get between mother and rattle in an effort to take control of it. A dynamic theory is all about directly experiencing the forces exerted by objects such as a rattle, but when we strive to exert our own influence on the relationships **between** objects, then we discover a new dimension to the experience and enter the world of perception. Allied with our efforts to intervene in the world is the discovery that some objects exert a force independent of us and form part of a network of relationships with others that comprises the perceived world.

There is no scope for a comparable practical involvement with our sensations. We cannot bring any direct practical influence to bear upon them. We may struggle with the distracting power of a headache. We may aggravate it by overwork or lessen its impact with drugs, but we cannot place our bodies *between* our experience and the sensation it is experiencing. Our influence is only indirect insofar as we might try to move ourselves to become more comfortable. Allied to this realisation is the recognition and understanding of our own bodies as sources of some experiences. Having sensations tells us much about the state of our own bodies, and contributes to our knowledge of ourselves.

The distinction, although an important one, is not sufficient to separate sensation and perception however. Often we find it blurred. Music played increasingly loudly turns by imperceptible degrees into an unbearable noise. A pleasing perception has become a painful sensation in the ears. Knowing the thorns on a rose to be sharp, I will handle the stems with care and only gently touch the tips. If I am careless and prick myself, then my perception of the stem degenerates into a painful sensation in the finger, and one caused by the thorn. These are examples where the intensity of the experience is important in defining it, but this will still not help us make the required distinction. Suppose I now walk over to the curtains in my drawing room. I might choose to feel the silkiness of the material with my fingers. This is a perception of the curtains. Alternatively I might self-indulgently enjoy their silky feel, a sensation in the fingers. The differences are subtle, and not to do with intensity, and yet they represent different sides of the perception/sensation divide.

I have suggested that a practical involvement with objects signals the perception, and propose that the sought for distinction will be found in the purpose with which I approach the curtains, or the particular interest they hold for me. The type of experience reflects my agenda. If I want to learn more about them, and what material they are made from perhaps, then my experience will be a perception, and its object the curtain I touch. If my aim is simply the pleasure of touching the curtains,

for the sake of luxuriating in the feel of the finely woven material, then I enjoy a sensation in my fingers that the curtains bring about. My fingers will linger longer than is necessary in order to ascertain the quality and weave of the cotton. Similarly, if another object is as repellent as the curtains are alluring, then a sensation results. The finger prick is an involuntary and unpleasant experience removed from the controlled inquisitive approach that guides a perception. So it is a sensation, with its object on the point of my finger, with the thorn as its cause.

Many other experiences, such as the aesthetic, sexual or gastronomic, offer us pleasure, and there are subtle differences in the way we enjoy these experiences that idealist and materialist theories fail to recognise. Requiring there to be a sharp distinction between sensation and perception is unrealistic, as they sometimes represent very similar experiences. The taste of a fine wine, and the feel of a loving caress seem to combine both the pleasure of the sensation and the interest of the perception. In trying to distinguish them we find only slight shifts of emphasis in the direction of our interest, and our experience moving seamlessly from sensation to perception and back again. Imperceptibly so in fact. A sensation signifies a loss or relaxation in the control typical of the perception, and when pursued voluntarily, is an experience pursued for its own sake. Unless it is allied to perception, it teaches us only about ourselves and our bodies, and confirms nothing about the reality beyond where its causes may lie.

An inquisitive, discriminating and sometimes deferential approach is needed for perception to take place. One that is indiscriminate and destructive merely produces sensations, and would not be the effective instrument of the interest that promotes it. A certain care and restraint are necessary in handling most objects if we are going to recognise and exploit any of the qualities they can reveal in our efforts to know and understand them. The success of any venture depends on the knowledge that the controlled perception produces and the effective influence it will enable us to exert.

Although a degree of inquisitiveness is an important feature of perception, it is not always sufficient to make the distinction from sensation clear. An inquisitive interest in one's own sensations for example will not convert them into perceptions. A doctor will often ask for a description of a pain, requiring the patient to focus on the sensation whilst he or she gently presses or manipulates the affected area. The patient's attempts to comply have an investigative quality suggestive of

an inner perception, but the inability to manipulate the pain itself will mean that the experience remains in the realm of sensation. The patient may perform some body manipulation himself, and probably more with the help of the doctor, but the influence brought to bear on the pain itself is limited. Shifting the body might reduce the intensity of the pain, or induce more throbbing but it will not shift the pain. Sensation alone cannot lend its objects spatial position. We are instinctively aware we have been pricked and immediately know where to seek the puncture, but we need to be witness to the thorn or the blood it has drawn to verify the fact. Manipulating or rubbing the finger may also supply the required confirmation. We have spent a lot of our lives getting to know our bodies and learning to locate experiences there, but perception has been a necessary and final arbiter in the process. We are not born with the **knowledge** that hunger is a sensation specific to an area of the stomach and that feeding will alleviate.

There are examples of experiences where we can manipulate something felt inside the body, such as that of the pregnant woman who feels the baby move inside the womb. Here the object of the experience is shifting, so unless the experience is especially painful, it may qualify as a perception. There is no necessity for the body to be the exclusive reserve of the sensation as a materialist theory might suggest.

As with most distinctions, sensation and perception are sometimes confused. A young child distressed at being stung by nettles might believe that they are “hurtful” plants, effectively attributing to them a perceptible quality of malicious “hurtfulness” that is accessible to anyone who touches them. But this is not a view normally retained into adulthood. Perception takes place within the controlled exploration of an object, and most encounters with stinging nettles are involuntary and prompt an immediate evasive reaction. The sharpness and intensity of the experience suspend temporarily our powers of discrimination and control, and so confine the experience to the realm of sensation.

In pursuing a dynamic understanding of perception, I am highlighting the observation that objects in reality form the focus of the perception, but may act as causes that produce the experience in sensation. This opposes the materialist understanding of experience, which sees causal connections producing all experiences, with sensation and perception distinguishable with respect to the locations of their objects. Perceptions on this view are those originating in events occurring outside the body. There is no doubt that a complex sequence of neural and other events must occur for the simplest perception to be possible, but a dynamic view resists the idea that perceptions can be defined and distinguished

exclusively with reference to these. In common with much neural science, we look for the causes of an experience when a perception fails or a normal sequence of events breaks down. The effect of drugs or neural damage may be cited as a cause for hallucination, and perceptions degenerate into sensations where delusion is strong and persistent. The search for causes is pertinent and natural when an experience and its object become misaligned. But it cannot furnish the comprehensive understanding we seek from a definition.

An important role for philosophy has been to furnish definitions for the fundamental concepts within which we all work. Cause and effect are much discussed in this connection. The materialist model of a causal explanation requires cause and effect to be separately identified events, and this separation will no longer be possible within a dynamic framework. The perception is an event embracing both the body and its relationship with its surroundings, and is characterised by the purpose of the encounter and the scope available for controlling and changing it. Highly complex chains of events are taking place as you peruse this page. Researching these scientifically will greatly inform your understanding of the workings human body. But if your desire is to extend your understanding to what your perception is, and how it opens a window on to the reality you are witness to, then a different order of explanation is called for.

A dynamic theory can help us understand some of the richness we have located in perceptions, sensations and the relationship between them. In having any experience our attention meets and engages forces exerted by our bodies and surroundings. In meeting these we are deploying our own powers of mind and body in pursuit of an agenda, representing our aims, purpose or objectives. A dynamic understanding of perception is able to accommodate a more practical involvement with its objects, and use this to make a fundamental distinction between perceptions and sensations. It also allows shifts of emphasis and focus to refine the distinction further. Dynamism frees up the experience from both idealist solipsism and materialist determinism. No longer locked away inside a realm of consciousness removed from reality, the experience is able to rove in a continuous and direct interaction with events inside the body and out. Nor is it constrained to follow or identify with the paths of neural or other material events occurring inside the body. Conscious subjects have the power to influence the direction and scope of their attentive powers in accordance with the agenda they adopt. Since this represents a necessary contribution towards characterising or defining the experiences and actions that result,

dynamism appears to hold out the possibility for genuine freedom of choice.

A dynamic theory of freedom is a few chapters away at present. Before we approach this subject we need to explore further our relationship with reality and gain a first person understanding of our conscious lives.

One of the most familiar philosophical problems associated with the subject and the perception of reality is that of the independent existence of objects, and their persistence when not being perceived. The problem belongs to the experienced based philosophy of Idealism and Empiricism and emerges whenever the occurrence of experiences is offered as the guarantee for the existence of an object. The idea of an unseen object, or one with unseen sides, becomes self-contradictory. And so a paradox ensues. Dynamism avoids the paradox by proposing that the perception involves intervening, with a purpose, between the conflicting forces generated by objects. These relationships are not created by consciousness, and so are not bound to dissolve when the perception is withdrawn, or diverted elsewhere. The persistence of an object depends upon the durability of the relationships it sustains with other objects. In a dynamic universe the persistence of a force can be presumed until and unless one has good reason to suppose that it has been superseded. The energy representing matter does not need to be sustained in the way that old substance theories, with their assumptions of inertia, required. Energy is a sustaining power in its own right.

A dynamic theory can also help us explain how an object can extend beyond the scope or range of each perception we have of it. However we view a three-dimensional object, for instance, it always has unseen sides. Again there is a problem for experience-based philosophy. With what justification do we extrapolate from the partial experience of an object in experience to a fully rounded judgement concerning its full range of attributes? Much experience-based philosophy has never overcome this problem because it is locked into an idea of perceiving as a succession of static snapshots of an object. The sum total of these reveals the object in its entirety, but the search for sound theoretical grounds for reuniting them has been unsuccessful. Why so? Because that is not the way in which experience works. Such theoretical efforts seem set upon smashing the vase in order to recreate it out of its shattered fragments. From a dynamic standpoint, perception emerges from a shifting viewpoint, and its relationship with objects is primarily continuous and changing. The snapshot idea is a refinement of this fundamental relationship with objects and the encounters it produces.

It cannot serve as a prototype for all perception, nor help us draw conclusions concerning its central features.

The dynamic view of perception as a continuous shifting process of enquiry permits the possibility for the perception to include the object entirely within its scope or range. There is no theoretical barrier to the idea that a perception can represent a thorough and exhaustive exploration of its object. For practical reasons of course this is unlikely to happen, since our interest in anything eventually becomes exhausted, interrupted or directed elsewhere. Material objects extend beyond the range of our perception of them simply because we cut short the process of perceptual enquiry. Much concept-based philosophy lends great philosophical significance to the distinction, but I maintain the issue is merely a practical one. Indeed it is a failure to pursue the process of perceptual inquiry that often leads to error and produces examples of the sort of illusions that have baffled philosophers for generations. A straight stick placed in a glass half filled with water, for example, looks bent, but it isn't. The illusion persists unless we revise our premature judgement and complete our inquiry. We need to walk around the glass, remove the stick for inspection and so on. Then we can locate the conditions, such as the refracting quality of water, which explain the phenomenon. The philosophical method which looks for clues to the true state of the stick by comparing the perception of the stick in the water, with another when it is removed, embarks on a fruitless quest. The process producing both is a single exercise in perception.

Experience based philosophies are forced to adopt an even-handed approach to all experiences, and generate unnecessary problems by relegating genuine perceptions to the status of appearances, alongside hallucinations, dreams and so on. Experience is thereby segregated from reality with no way back. A dynamic philosophy never severs the ties. The appearance of the bent stick is an illusion simply because of shortcomings in the standpoint or approach we adopt in relation to the stick, and because of a failure to bring the process of perceptual inquiry to a satisfactory conclusion.

It is worth remarking that even our own understanding of perception does not conform to the experience-based model. Young children new to drawing, for instance, will try to include everything they know about a house and garden in a single picture, showing walls on all four sides and including the gardens in their entirety. The experience-based model is far closer to the conventional adult perspective, and includes only that which is visible from a single fixed viewpoint. The experience of children tends to run counter to the idea that we build a fully formed three-

dimensional view of reality from piecing together partial and two-dimensional perspectives derived from it. From birth we discover the nature of things in a full and direct manner, and only later do we learn as adults how to refine our knowledge into two-dimensional representations in experience.

I am anxious to defend the subjectivity of experience in the face of the reality promoted by Materialism. Yet I am equally keen to resist the idea that we can locate an objective reality through the subjectivity of experience that Idealism champions. Further explanation is clearly called for. All will become much clearer, I suggest, if we recognise at least two distinct senses of the term “subjectivity” and the tendency of traditional philosophies to assimilate them. In a general sense we are all subjective beings. As human beings we possess a subjectivity shared with all conscious creatures. In a second sense we distinguish the objectivity of a fact from the subjectivity of our evaluation of it. Distinct from our general subjectivity is this second sense of “personal” subjectivity. It is an objective matter of fact that well roasted coffee imparts a bitter aroma and flavour, but a subjective matter of opinion whether one likes it or not. Partiality and emotions are hallmarks of personal subjectivity.

Experience-based theories are steeped in our subjectivity, but tend to overlook the distinction between the two types, resulting in confusion or assimilation. According to these theories, our outlook on reality is characterised in terms of our experiences, feelings and preferences, but always conceived in a personal or individual form. All this to effect a contrast with an unknowable reality: objective, impartial and impenetrable to our conscious powers. Since we cannot break out of our subjectivity, Idealism and solipsism are the stultifying and inevitable results.

Dynamism recognises our general subjectivity as an ever-present component of consciousness, often manifest as an inquisitive impulse directed towards reality and initiating encounters with what it finds there. I have already characterised this as the purposeful pursuit of an agenda. Our personal subjectivity is not so fundamental, and represents, I will suggest, an individual response to a reality whose objectivity has already been acknowledged. Our general does not entail our personal subjectivity, and can proceed without it.

Since every experience seems to belong to some person or other, this distinction must still appear confused. To try to clarify things, I would say that it is not so much our individuality, but rather our understanding of

ourselves as individual persons, which I believe has been over-emphasised. It is our self-**image** that I am concerned with. My suggestion is that we have no notion of our personal subjectivity as babies. It is our inclination for some time into infancy to attribute all we encounter in experience to our surroundings. Everything pleasing to a young mind is nice, and everything else is deemed horrid. We don't as yet have an idea of ourselves imposing demands and expressing desires at this earliest stage. Once a range of such attributions has been made, it then becomes possible for a process of reappraisal to begin. We start to recognise a persistent and systematic influence on the way in which we experience reality. We learn to recognise ourselves in terms of the powers exerted and the success achieved in those worldly endeavours. Appraising our experience as personal begins here, when we acknowledge that there are limits to what can be achieved. The discovery that we are not omnipotent is the birth of our mortal personal selves. In responding to that recognition we progress towards maturity. We start to take account of our strengths and limitations in modifying our ambitions and adapting the means of attaining them.

If the distinction is sustainable, then knowledge of reality is attainable without personal self-knowledge. No longer is it necessary to work within the polarised framework of personal subjective experience and impersonal reality in order to fashion a model of the perception. A dynamic encounter enables us to produce the perception first, and then apportion subjective and objective components where appropriate. Without the traditional polarisation, there is no discomforting incompatibility between a perception of reality being interesting or attractive, for instance, and reality itself possessing these same attributes. There is no reason why they should not represent objective and discoverable features of our surroundings.

With the polarity of objective and subjective no longer fundamental components of the perception, we should not feel obliged to allocate everything we encounter into one or other of its pigeonholes. I wouldn't want to suggest that dynamism celebrates the ambivalent or the indeterminate. After all, reality is always there independently of our often feeble efforts to comprehend it. It is simply that there is no longer the same urgency to resolve uncertainty when it arises. If we don't possess the means to decide an issue, or are disinclined to pursue it, the matter can be left open for further consideration. The verdicts or judgements we reach on a wide range of historical, aesthetic or ethical questions, for instance, often require a decision resulting from lengthy deliberation. From a dynamic point of view however, any failure to reach a verdict should not be seen as a demonstration that the issue is merely

subjective, and one best left to personal preference. Recognising a distinction between general and personal subjectivity does not allow such an easy dismissal of complex and often important questions.

An important part of the process by which we discover the objectivity of reality, and the subjectivity of ourselves operating within it, lies in the distinction between the object of perception and the conditions under which it is perceived. Objects present themselves to us in a variety of guises. Lighting affects the appearance of objects, for instance, according to its intensity, composition or the objects it passes through. We have already considered the bent stick illusion in this connection. If objects exerted no influence upon each other, perception would not be possible, because our understanding of an object only emerges from a developing ability to influence these relationships. A dynamic theory differs from the experience-based theories we have considered because the examination of an object is not translated into the inner contemplation of an experience of the object. The examination involves changing and exploring the relationship with an object and the conditions under which it is perceived in its surroundings.

Gazing at the flow of a river from the bank provides a useful contrast to the dynamic approach. This passive attitude offers the onlooker a vicarious experience and indirect knowledge. To know the current dynamically it will be necessary to immerse yourself, or perhaps a stick, into the river, and feel the current pressing against your limbs. The resistance you feel to your efforts to move represents knowledge obtained directly and dynamically. This I suggest is a model for all perception. Gazing idly from a distance is of course a perfectly adequate means of perceiving the river, but the brain and eyes are manipulating light waves in the same dynamic fashion to produce this less obvious engagement with the water flow. In each case we are intervening directly in the path of objects and the forces they exert, generating encounters that lead to discoveries. In this connection I would suggest that all the senses are variations of the sense of touch, insofar as each interacts directly with an object and the energy it reflects or emits.

An important part of learning to perceive involves recognising how objects influence each other, and discovering ways to control those influences. We don't simply confront objects in perception, but acquire an understanding of them by intervening in their relationships with each other. In a dynamic universe, an object is not separable from the influence it exerts. At the commencement of the learning process we attribute all we perceive in an object to that object. We have no

conception of any alternative. As we explore further we discover other objects exerting an influence upon what we perceive. Discovering the source and extent of such influence is a matter of intervening between the objects in order to try to isolate, remove enhance or inhibit its impact. In the bent stick example, we might remove the stick from the water, and the refracting influence it exerts, and so reveal the stick in its true undeviating form. It is not long before we also recognise ourselves and our bodies as providing other conditions of perception. Our body temperature affects our perception of the temperature outside, and poor health makes us see everything in a different way. But more of this later.

We are all very familiar with how a change in the conditions under which we perceive objects will affect their appearance. So much so that it can become easy for us to lose all sense of what is real in a diverse and bewildering array of appearances. Presented to experience they are similar in all fundamental respects. Slightly differing mutations of the stick present themselves when the stick is gently lowered into the water, but none is accompanied by any announcement of its authenticity, promising us a privileged access to the heart of its true and objective state. So how do we determine what is real and objective, and what is merely appearance?

Dynamism avoids the problems implied by this question because it eschews the experience-based position that requires an object to be constructed out of the appearances it makes in consciousness. Indeed the dynamic tendency is to resist any idea that appearances are a fundamental feature either of consciousness or the reality from which they emanate. Appearances cannot be distinguished from objects themselves unless the reality of the object has been acknowledged. Appearances have to be of something, and the appearance of an object simply makes reference to the qualities it is perceived to possess under certain conditions. The recognition of appearances begins as we revise our perception of an object through the discovery of conditions influencing our perception. In discarding the effects of such influence we acknowledge the emergence of conditions of perception. We subordinate the experiences they produce and label them as such.

Appearances are consequently perceptions with a downgraded status. This is an important point of distinction for the dynamic approach. It proposes that the building blocks of experience-based theories cannot be isolated from the reality they strive to locate. The very idea of an isolated experience presumes an acknowledged reality from which it has been severed and distilled. Experience-based theories have tried to create reality out of jigsaw pieces. But a jigsaw is not made in this way.

It starts with a complete picture and is sawn into pieces with the aim of giving pleasure in the reconstruction. Philosophers who have looked to experiences for enlightenment have been guilty of turning philosophy into a source of idle amusement!

If an object of perception is not constructed out of its appearances, then it becomes necessary to determine those conditions under which its true character is revealed. After all the conditions of perception are also possible objects of the senses. Pieces of stick and tumblers of water all belong to the real world. Decisions are necessary but they need not be arbitrary. Helping us to decide will be the direction of our interest. It may be the stick and its straightness, or the water and its colour that is the focal point of interest. Whatever the principal object of interest, this will supply the fixed starting point for the perceptual enquiry.

Our examination of our surroundings isn't exclusively concerned with refining or removing the conditions under which we perceive the objects of interest. We do not need to isolate an object in order to perceive its true state, but simply need to recognise the conditions under which its true state is revealed. Introducing new conditions can improve that access as well. A fine wine enhances the flavour of food, good lighting enables us to read better, and devices such as microscopes promote a closer examination of an object.

The dynamic approach requires us to nominate perceived objects and contrast them with the conditions that influence them. Our earliest and dominant interest in reality is always practical, so our explorations tend to be guided by the search for ways of influencing our surroundings, to obtain and secure food, warmth and so on. In doing so we learn to distinguish the object of perception from the conditions that influence its accessibility and enjoyment. We discover means of promoting these, striving also to suppress those conditions that impede our access. An understanding of reality requires us to learn how to influence it, and the relationships we discover there are a primary source of knowledge for us. It is a direct understanding because, through our engagement there, we become a part of the complex network it represents.

In order to locate the true colours of an object, or the real shape of a stick therefore, we need to recognise a pragmatic dimension to our relationship with reality. The true colours of an object are those viewed under those lighting conditions, and with unimpeded vision, where our effectiveness as agents of our interests is optimised. Reaching this position and understanding its import may be a slow process involving much experiment and revision. But this is a pragmatism with a

difference. Practical concerns guide our explorations, but it is because we acquire knowledge of an objective reality that we can effectively operate within it. It is not the other way about. Our pragmatic attitude does not define reality as it may have to in a concept-based theory. In a dynamic theory the relationships which are available for the pragmatic attitude to exploit are the stuff of reality itself.

A dynamic understanding can also help us to dispose of a problem that still triggers debate, even within the scientific community. It is a variation of the problem of solipsism and asks, when two people are looking at the same object, how anyone can be certain that the perception belonging to one is the same as that of the other. How do I know that my experience of its redness is going to be the same as yours, for instance? Even neuro-science sometimes appears reluctant to give up the notion of raw subjective sensations, experienced independently of the brain events producing them. The reluctance is understandable, because an unqualified Materialism seems to be the only alternative. But perception is not best understood as the scrutiny of inner, private sensations. The property of redness never leaves the perceived object, so you and I are both witnesses to a common object. If the conditions under which I perceive or you perceive are changed, then this will influence the resulting perceptions. If one of us put on sunglasses, then this would create a divergence. But unless and until we have located any such difference, or have good reason to suppose that we might, then there is no reason to suppose that the two perceptions are distinguishable in any respect. Dynamism is able to relax in the presumption that our perceptions converge unimpeded upon a common world until some discoverable condition emerges that suggests otherwise.

Appearances may delight the senses but represent a distraction from the true qualities of an object, and a departure from the perception. But it would be wrong to relegate all appearances to the realm of sensation in consequence. The appearance of the bent stick retains a certain objectivity. There is nothing unreal about the refracted light waves that produce the illusion. Anybody can see and photograph them. So some appearances at least retain a place in reality and statements about them remain objective. An appearance of an object remains with what we perceive of an object, but under conditions where the associated properties are removed from reality. We still perceive the stick, but our perception of some of its properties may be misleading. If we recognise the impact of the relevant conditions upon our perception, then we are not tempted into illusion. If suspicious or doubtful, then investigation should dispel our uncertainty and prevent error. Succumbing to illusions

makes us less effective instruments of our plans and inhibits our understanding of a dynamic reality.

The more we discover about our surroundings, the less often we experience illusions and consider appearances. Once we understand that water refracts light, we may not agree that the stick even appears bent. If pressed, we would concur that we perceive the stick, and under the influence of conditions where light waves reflected off the lower part are deflected from the path taken through the air. There is no retreat into subjectivity, and appearances are never mentioned. No more than when we notice that the rim of a circular cup appear oval when viewed from most angles, or that parallel railway lines appear to converge towards the horizon. Allowing appearances to enter into a discussion suggests an incomplete understanding, which exploration can remedy. There is certainly no need to remove all mention of experience and appearance from our discussions of what we perceive. I simply want to indicate the subordinate role that appearances have always played, and that a philosophy of perception built upon them is bound to fail.

The degeneration of perception towards sensation is gradual. Only when we are comprehensively fooled by appearances do we stray into delusion and subjectivity. The influence of drugs, for instance, changes the conditions of perception, and might induce the belief that a stick in the glass is a giant insect. A subject disinclined to investigate, or not proving amenable to persuasion, is having an experience sufficiently removed from reality to make it doubtful that he perceives anything at all. At some point he strays into delirium and the experiences become visual sensations, separate from the stick and causally influenced by it. In more extreme cases where there is nothing apparent such as the stick to trigger the illusion, then we reach the same verdict more readily. The perception is an experience engaging in a relationship with reality. Conditions of perception specify the extent and nature of this relationship, but improperly understood they weaken it to the point where the ties are severed completely.

A particular approach to reality is needed if perceptions are to result from our encounters there. One that is disorganised or indiscriminate for instance will mainly produce sensations. Sensations lack the spatial dimensions necessary to lend their objects a position beyond the body in perceived reality. These are a source of self-knowledge, but our personal subjectivity doesn't end with our capacity for sensation. Understanding appearances and the influence of conditions of perception also adds to self-knowledge. Many things may cause our personal experience to diverge from perceived reality. We have already

looked at illusions, but impairment of the senses, or the presence of unusual conditions inside the body can also undermine the perception we strive for.

As adults we recognise the stronger conditions associated with the perception and often retreat towards sensation if we cannot satisfy these. If no one agrees with me, for instance, that it is hot in the room we have just entered, then I might well revise my observation on how hot the room is into the weaker and safer “ Well, I feel hot anyway.” My initial observation sought acceptance as a perception, but the failure to obtain a consensus meant I had to settle for a statement about my sensations. Perhaps the cause was an excess of clothing, or the run from the car park. Many sensations are discovered through this route of claim and revision. As young children we start out in life boldly attributing most of our experiences to our surroundings and only slowly begin, by a process of withdrawal, to recognise the contribution played by sensations in shaping our experiences and helping to build an understanding of ourselves. The direction is quite the reverse from the one that experience-based philosophies urge us to believe. Our tendency to give prior claim to perceptions makes the idealist position, where perceptions are built on sensations, appear far less plausible.

The retreat from perception towards sensation is not wholesale however. I still perceive the room I have entered, but the revision has acknowledged that I do so under conditions unique to me; conditions which have a particular effect upon my perception of the temperature. By placing myself at a small distance from others and their perceptions, I affirm my individuality or personal subjectivity.

In more extreme cases the ties binding the perception to reality are broken and sensations take over. Shivering violently and in an obvious state of extreme shock, my experiences would comprise little more than sensations, divorced from my surroundings, and perhaps caused by illness or trauma. The occurrence of intense experiences, the suspension of the normal powers of discrimination and a temporary loss of control are all symptoms associated with the pre-eminence of the sensation. Dynamism rejects the view of experience-based theories that our perception of reality is built on a consensus which converging subjective sensations produce. Inter-subjectivity cannot supply this foundation. Dynamism promotes the inverse idea whereby our individual subjectivity is recognised and built in opposition to an acknowledged reality.

The issue of the objectivity or subjectivity of our experience of reality is clearly not as simple as experience-based theories suggest. A range of conditions influences our perception of objects. When these emanate from reality, and their impact is understood, then the objectivity of the judgements they produce is unimpaired. When their provenance is acknowledged to be within us, then the judgements become qualified. We affirm our personal subjectivity and recognise a subjective contribution to the experience. Where no acknowledgement is forthcoming, or when other conditions prevail, the perception is abandoned and becomes a sensation or other experience indicative of our subjective condition. Subjectivity and objectivity do not operate as fundamental alternative spheres, but characterise the rich, varied and complex interplay of our shared lives in a common environment. We have only just begun to explore this arena, but dynamism is far better equipped to accommodate the full range of our activities here than any theory effecting a crude and irreconcilable separation of objective and subjective. The emotions, imagination and different belief systems also influence our approach to reality and anticipate what we will find there. Later chapters will be exploring these.

We have to approach reality in order to make discoveries there. This much appears to be common sense, even if experience-based theories sometimes ignore the fact. Nonetheless it is an observation that has introduced the work of many philosophers and social theorists since Kant, and yet one from which they have drawn a different set of conclusions. Since certain interests must impel any investigative approach towards reality, many have concluded that objectivity here is unattainable. Our investigative powers, they argue, must be selectively employed in pursuit of an agenda and always produce incomplete or biased conclusions in consequence.

A dynamic approach sees no incompatibility between the subjectivity of the interests that guide us and the objectivity of the conclusions we reach. It does seem a cruel catch that an interest in discovering the truth should lead to automatic disqualification for anybody who finds it. Certainly where investigative bias issues from personal or economic motives, then error and a loss of effectiveness become increasingly likely. But if the direction of our interest consistently produces measured and successful outcomes then, for a dynamic theory, such success must amount to knowledge. Concept-based theories on the other hand do not progress so far as even to make a coherent statement of their position. The very idea of a guiding interest or approach that encapsulates our personal or socio-economic interests makes a fatal assumption. It is only understandable in terms of, and in opposition to, a presumed reality

whose objectivity has already been determined. Bias can only be detected within a pre-conceived arena. Kant's and later concept-based theories are unable to admit this, so the hope of gaining even a momentary glimpse of reality continues to elude them.

Much of this chapter has questioned the wisdom of opting for an experience-based approach to the problems of philosophy. It is an approach fraught with difficulties. The least of these is getting started and fashioning the sort of experience that will be capable of supporting the enormous edifices, such as the sum of scientific knowledge, on which it will depend. My approach has tended to play down the significance of the experience. I have so far allotted it a secure place only within a subordinated level of sensation, and extended only a qualified invitation towards the level of perception. A dynamic understanding of an independent and accessible reality has made this possible. In discussing experience the emphasis has been on its role in highlighting our subjectivity, and as a means of distancing us from the objectivity of the reality we seek to comprehend. Idealism expects too much from the experience alone. To have it is to possess a marvellous and complex faculty, and one necessary for any conscious being to acquire knowledge. I intend to feature it far more prominently in the discussions of the emotions, the imagination and the criticism of Materialism that will follow. But we should not be tempted by the immediacy of its presence and the certainty of its insights into the belief that contemplation alone can unlock the secrets of the Universe.

Summary of Conclusions.

Dynamism revives an age-old tradition of process philosophy and allies it with a modern scientific outlook. Much philosophy still relies too heavily upon an assumption of stability in the material world. Dynamism conceives the material as potential or actual discharges of energy that are recognisable and defined in terms of the scope of their influence.

Living beings possess an agenda they strive to impose on reality. They seek and tolerate a range of outcomes there. Concepts express these generalities, and offer a means of representing and understanding reality.

Conscious beings are distinguishable because of the adaptable influence they exert on the relationships between objects through a capacity for movement. Perception consequently has a spatial dimension. Reality is accessible to perception and consciousness is no longer confined within its own exclusive realm. Reality is accessible to consciousness, but has an independent existence.

Much philosophy places excessive reliance upon experience as the source of knowledge. Sensations are admittedly more complex than Empiricists and other experience-based philosophies have supposed. But they cannot furnish a foundation for perception. Perceptions are not separable from their objects as sensations can be, so dynamism rejects the materialist view that there are material causes for all perceptions. Sensations often have material causes, but knowledge obtained through perception alone is necessary to establish this. Dynamism does not seek to dispense with experience altogether, but recognises that the private inner experience is a notion extracted or derived from a direct perceived contact with reality.

The distinction between perception and the conditions of perception needs to be more emphatically asserted. The distinction between reality and its appearances is similarly has to be more central. Perception is possible and knowledge obtained under true conditions of perception. Locating these lends a pragmatic dimension to experience. In our efforts to optimise the effectiveness of our endeavours, we discover and exploit relationships within reality. In a dynamically conceived reality these coincide with its true nature.

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