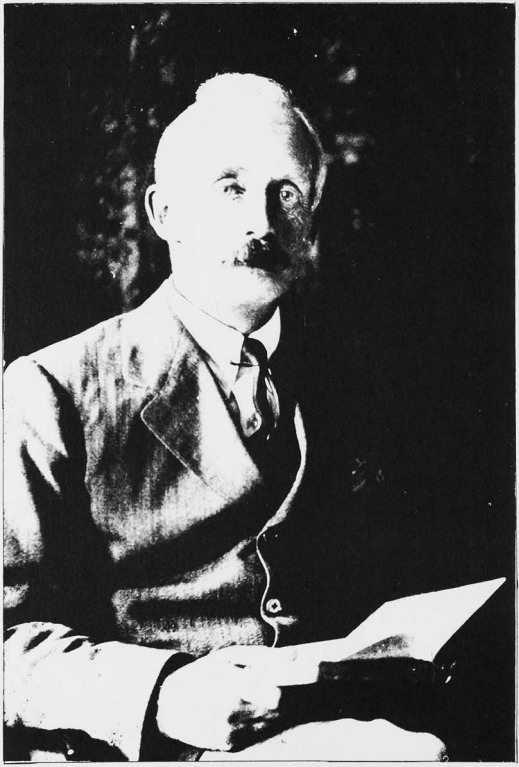

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HAROLD ARTHUR PRICHARD

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1871–1947

HAROLD ARTHUR PRICHARD was born on 30 October 1871. He was the son of W. S. Prichard, who was a solicitor, a partner in the firm of Collisson & Prichard, of Bedford Row, London. He was educated at Clifton and New College, Oxford. He came up to New College with a mathematical scholarship in 1890, and had the rare distinction of taking first classes both in Mathematical Moderations and in Literae Humaniores. It was originally intended that he should follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, and in 1894, after taking his degree, he was articled to a firm of solicitors in the City of London. But a few months later he was offered, and accepted, a fellowship at Hertford College, which he held for three years. In 1898 he was elected to a fellowship at Trinity. In the following year he married Miss Mabel H. Ross, who was later an Alderman of the City of Oxford. They had three children, two sons and a daughter. For some years the Prichards lived at 43 Broad Street, a house which was eventually pulled down to make room for the New Bodleian Library. In 1911 they moved to 6 Linton Road. Many generations of Oxford men were familiar with that house, and remember with gratitude the kind hospitality they received there. In 1923, after twenty-four years' devoted service to his college, Prichard's health broke down, and in 1924 he was obliged to retire from his fellowship. Four years later he was elected White's Professor of Moral Philosophy; the chair carried with it a fellowship at Corpus Christi. He held the chair until 1937, when he retired on reaching the age of sixty-five. He was subsequently elected to an honorary fellowship at Corpus. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1932, and received the degree of LL.D. from Aberdeen University in 1934. He died at the end of December 1947 after a short illness, at the age of seventy-six.

Prichard's name, an abbreviated form of ap Richard, shows that he was of Welsh descent, though I do not know whether he was aware of it himself; and the physical type to which he belonged, short, wiry, fair-skinned and sandy-haired, is not uncommon in the valleys of South Wales. There have not been many Welsh philosophers. But his fellow countrymen may claim him, if they please, as the worthy successor of the philosophical theologian Pelagius and the moralist Richard Price.

He was athletic in his youth; as an undergraduate he played tennis for the University. His physical vigour continued into his old age. In the late war, in his early seventies, he was an air-raid warden, and appeared to enjoy his duties. Like many academic persons, he was a lifelong and enthusiastic golfer. It has been said that his golf was like his philosophy: his shots were sometimes short, but they were always straight.

Prichard was a philosopher by nature and not merely by profession. The ruling passion of his life was the desire to discover the truth about ultimate questions. This gave him a certain admirable simplicity and integrity which impressed all who knew him. It is popularly supposed that a moralist should practise what he preaches. It would be misleading to say that Prichard practised what he preached, because he never preached at all, and disliked every form of 'uplift'. But he certainly illustrated in his life the moral excellences which he analysed in his writings. His conscientiousness was almost proverbial in Oxford. In philosophy, and in practical matters, too, he always stuck to his principles, whatever opposition there might be. However heated he might sometimes become in philosophical controversies (and he always apologized for it afterwards) in daily life he was the kindest and most considerate of men. Many disagreed with him, but everybody liked him.

The Oxford tutorial system is perhaps one of the best methods of higher education yet devised. But however beneficial to the pupil, it makes great demands on the teacher. Probably no Oxford tutor was ever more devoted than Prichard. The traditional 'one hour a week' was often extended to two or three. The pupil's essay was discussed line by line, and almost word by word. By the end of the hour it often happened that only the first page or two had been read; and no matter how full Prichard's time-table might be, he would contrive to find another hour later in the week to continue the discussion, and sometimes another after that. It is not surprising that his health eventually broke down, and in 1924 he had to retire from his fellowship at Trinity.

In general, his teaching methods followed the Socratic tradition of the School of Literae Humaniores, but he added some peculiar features of his own. The most original was his use of silence. The pupil would make some statement and pause, expecting a comment. Prichard would say nothing. He would just sit there, looking very puzzled, puffing at his pipe and

relighting it when it went out. This continued sometimes for several minutes. Perhaps the statement had sounded rather good at first, but its defects became more and more painfully apparent as the seconds passed. At last Prichard would say 'Do you mind repeating that?' By this time it was perfectly obvious that it was not worth repeating, and indeed was so confused that it should never have been uttered at all. He sometimes used the same method in philosophical discussions with his colleagues.

He enjoyed philosophical argument, and was almost always to be seen at the meetings of an informal discussion group known as 'The Philosophers' Tea' which occurred every Thursday afternoon during term. The host for the afternoon provided the tea and read a short paper to introduce the discussion. The tea, in those happy days, was always forthcoming. Sometimes the paper was not; the host had been too busy to write it. But Prichard often saved the situation by producing one from his pocket, or by propounding what he called 'a new heresy' on the spot. Sometimes a paper was read which seemed to him so radically mistaken that he did not know where to begin criticizing it, and he would sit through three-quarters of the meeting without saying a word. I remember hearing a senior colleague of his expounding the rather curious view that the notion of cause plays no part whatever in historical inquiries. Prichard bore it for a long time in silence. At last he could bear it no longer, and exploded into speech. 'Did Brutus *kill* Caesar?' he said, and relapsed into silence. But more often than not he was the life and soul of the discussion; and somehow or other it would generally resolve itself into an argumentative duel between Prichard and Joseph. They were close friends, and each had the greatest respect for the other, both as a man and as a thinker. But in philosophy, particularly in moral philosophy, they always differed. And their ways of expressing themselves differed as much as their philosophical principles. Joseph talked 'like a book'—like one of his own books—in long and astonishingly complicated sentences, full of dependent clauses. (How he kept his head through them one never knew, but they always came out right in the end.) Prichard replied in short staccato sentences, often in ejaculations, and sometimes in old-fashioned slang: 'Isn't it the other way on?' 'Personally, I should go bald-headed for the view that. . . .' But, different as they were, somehow one always thought of them together. In the twenties and thirties, when people outside Oxford talked of 'The Oxford

Philosophers', with approval or not, Joseph and Prichard were the two names which came inseparably to mind. They were indeed *the* Oxford philosophers of their generation.

Prichard sometimes conducted his philosophical discussions by letter. From time to time he would send two or three pages of somewhat crabbed handwriting to a colleague, stating some problem which was worrying him. For example, can duties be hypothetical? What does one mean by saying 'I promise to do *A* if you promise to do *B*?' Prichard would state all the obvious answers himself, with ingenious arguments showing that none of them would do, and the recipient was asked to produce a better one. When he had done his best, there would be a rejoinder twice as long; and when he had replied to that, there would be another. The interchange of replies and counter-replies might go on for several weeks. Prichard's correspondent would be sure to learn a good deal from this process, but he would also find it something of a strain. It was not only that the problems themselves were subtle and perplexing. In suggesting solutions for them, it was essential to use Prichard's own peculiar philosophical language. This language was not easy to learn, and it was very easily forgotten again when one had learned it. The difficulty was not that it contained a lot of unfamiliar technical terms. Prichard disliked technical terms, and seldom or never invented any new ones. To all outward appearance the Prichardian philosophical language was just ordinary, everyday English. But it was a technical language all the same, because the words had to be used according to rules far more rigid than those of ordinary discourse; and an awkward one, just because the ordinary technical terms—even such familiar ones as 'cognition' and 'introspection'—had to be avoided, and must be replaced by elaborate circumlocutions. Nor would he admit that two philosophers who used very different terminologies might after all be saying the same thing. He thought that there was just one right way of formulating any philosophical proposition.

I think that this was the source of the low opinion he had of much contemporary philosophy. In his Inaugural Lecture 'Duty and Interest', delivered in 1928, he complains that 'the most obvious feature of current books on philosophy is language so loose that it is usually difficult, and often impossible, to make out what their authors are trying to maintain'. This was an odd judgement to make in the palmy days of the Cambridge Analytical School. It is rendered still odder by the tribute

which he pays in the same passage to T. H. Green, on the ground that 'the more you study any particular sentence, the more you are convinced that every word of it has been weighed, and that, whether or not it is true, it expresses exactly what he meant to say'; though certainly this would be a very just comment on Prichard's own writings.

Whatever the reason may have been, Prichard certainly thought that most contemporary philosophical movements were moving in the wrong direction; and he did his utmost to resist them, in the last ditch if necessary. He could see little good in the logic of Russell and Whitehead, and still less in the 'Logical Empiricism' which eventually developed out of it. The gradual influx of the Cam into the Isis, which began in the 1920's and in the end became a flood, appeared to him disastrous. Contemporary developments in physics shocked him, too. He thought that both the Theory and the Quantum Theory contained fundamental philosophical errors.

It is not surprising, therefore, that his philosophical reading was deep rather than wide. He thought that few philosophical books deserved 'close reading', a favourite phrase of his. With many, he got stuck after the first page or two. But there were a few which he read again and again with the most minute attention. Among them were the ethical writings of Hume.

He himself did not write easily. He was as conscientious in his writing as in his conduct; and his standards were very high, as the remark about Green shows. He would sometimes say that a single short paragraph had taken him a whole morning's work. As often as not, he would tear it up again later and start afresh. His style of writing reflects his style of thinking. There are no 'frills' in it, no metaphors, no witticisms or epigrams. A classical tutor in Oxford, who had been a pupil of Prichard's, was once reproached by a colleague for encouraging undergraduates to waste their time writing poetry. He replied indignantly that he had never encouraged them to write anything but 'the plainest and most Prichardian prose'. Certainly there was nothing of the poet in Prichard, as there has been in some eminent philosophers. He did write plain prose, and it is plain in both senses of the word: it is devoid of adornments, and it is unambiguous. It is not always easy; 'close reading' is sometimes needed. But the reader is assisted from time to time by quaint and homely illustrations. For example, suppose you find a man lying by the roadside. You think, but do not know, that he has fainted; he may merely be asleep. Would you be

doing your duty if you shouted loudly in his ear with the intention of reviving him?

In his general conception of what philosophy is, as well as in many of his specific philosophical views, Prichard was a disciple of Cook Wilson, one of the most influential Oxford teachers of this century, for whom he always had the warmest affection and respect. It has been said of Cook Wilson that 'he distrusted mere cleverness'. It was true of Prichard, too. This was because they both believed that philosophical questions are in a way questions of fact; not of empirical fact, but of what one might call intelligible fact. If you had not bothered to inspect the facts, what was the good of talking, however clever you might be? According to this view, there are certain objective necessary connexions and disconnexions between universals. They are to be known by reflection; and a philosopher's principal business is to fix his attention on them, and record what he finds. They could not, of course, be known *in vacuo*. Connexions between universals, like the universals themselves, exist only *in rebus*. They are to be known by reflecting upon instances, real or imaginary. To philosophize without instances would be merely a waste of time. (Perhaps that was one way in which the 'merely clever' went wrong.) But still what we know through or in the instances is known by direct inspection. It is not a matter for argument, but for immediate or non-inferential apprehension. One of Prichard's favourite phrases was 'as we see when we reflect'. On the other hand, great and often painful effort might be needed to divert one's attention from irrelevances, and to discard deep-rooted preconceptions. How painful it might be is shown by another favourite phrase, 'as we have to allow in the end'. Before the end was reached, much agony of soul might have to be endured. In the concluding paragraph of *Duty and Ignorance of Fact* Prichard formulates this conception of philosophical method as follows: 'There is no way of discovering whether some general doctrine is true except by discovering the general fact to which the doctrine relates; and there is no way of apprehending some general fact except by apprehending particular instances of it.' This method, as he saw, is precisely the 'Dogmatic Method' which Kant rejected. Prichard thought it none the worse for that. As Joseph once put it: ' "Dogmatic" is an ugly word; but what better reason can one have for making a statement than that one sees it to be true?'

The two branches of philosophy to which Prichard gave most attention were moral philosophy and the theory of knowledge. In moral philosophy he was one of the leaders of the school of thought which is sometimes called 'Oxford Intuitionism'. Indeed, he might fairly be called its founder. In his article 'Does Moral Philosophy rest on a mistake?', published in *Mind* as long ago as 1912, all the main doctrines of that school are clearly and forcibly stated. His published ethical writings are not very numerous (so far as I know they amount to four articles in all), but they have had a great influence on students of moral philosophy all over the English-speaking world. The comprehensive book on the subject, to which he devoted the last ten years of his life, would have had a greater influence still. Unfortunately his conscientiousness was so exacting, and his standards of accuracy so high, that the book was never finished. But the legend that he spent every evening tearing up the pages he had written during the day seems happily to be false. I believe that nine chapters were completed, and that they are to be published in the near future.

The central and most striking contention of Prichard's moral philosophy is that the notion of obligation is ultimate and unanalysable. Any attempt (Naturalistic or otherwise) to *define* obligation would only result in substituting something else in its place. He held that we become conscious of this notion by reflecting on particular situations which are instances of it. We know directly and immediately that in circumstances of such and such a kind, such and such an action ought to be done. And what we then know, he maintained, is self-evident. It is not a matter of proof or argument. Argument may indeed be necessary to establish what the circumstances are; to convince us, for example, that this man is in need and that we have the means of helping him. But when or if those questions of fact have been settled, we must simply *see* directly that such and such an action would be the right one in the circumstances, and that we are morally obliged to do it. And there, no argument is possible. We must simply exercise the capacity for direct moral apprehension which all of us possess. In particular, it would be useless to appeal—as so many moralists have—to the good consequences of the proposed action. Such a doctrine, to use a phrase of Prichard's own, 'will not stand the test of instances'. For example, it cannot explain why we have an obligation to keep promises or to make recompense for past wrongdoing. We have these obligations because of what *has*

been, not because of what will be in the future. Moreover, there is no one type of action which is always our duty. Duties differ with differences in the situation; and the situation includes the fact that the agent has done certain actions in the past. If I have made a promise, it is my duty to keep it. If I encounter someone who is in need, it is my duty to help him. And neither of these duties can be deduced from any wider or more fundamental one. The ordinary moral rules, 'Always tell the truth', &c., are generalizations of what we see to be our duty in such and such specific sorts of situation. The process of generalizing can be carried a certain way, but after that it can be carried no farther.

The 'mistake' on which almost all traditional moral philosophy was founded arose, in Prichard's view, from failing to notice the immediate and intuitive character of our apprehension of duties. It was supposed that the ordinarily admitted duties were in need of some kind of 'justification'. *Why* ought I to do these things, many of which are manifestly to my own disadvantage? Many moralists accordingly tried to prove that they were to my advantage after all—in the very long run, and when all the facts of human nature had been considered. Prichard maintained that, even if they succeeded in proving this (and it is doubtful whether they did), the conclusion would be irrelevant to the issue. For they would not have shown why I *ought*, am morally obliged, to do the actions in question. They would only have shown why it is to my advantage to do them. From premisses concerning advantage, even 'ultimate' and 'long-run' advantage, no conclusions concerning obligation can follow. And it only seems that they can, because the hypothetical 'ought' ('if you want to catch the train, you ought to take a taxi') is confused with the categorical 'ought' of duty. Other moralists had tried to solve the problem in another way, superficially more plausible but equally erroneous. They tried to explain 'ought' in terms of 'good'. The obligatoriness of an action, they said, is derived either from the good which it produces or from the intrinsic goodness of the action itself. But here again, Prichard pointed out, a conclusion containing the word 'ought' cannot follow from premisses which do not contain it. The argument would only be cogent if one inserted an additional premiss: that what is good *ought* to exist. And this premiss, Prichard thought, is either false, or perhaps even nonsensical.

Nevertheless, Prichard was aware that it is natural to offer

one or other of these answers to the question 'Why ought I to do my duty?' However mistaken they are, we shall continue to be attracted by them, until we see that there is something wrong with the question itself. In point of fact, he maintains, it is an absurd question. For in asking it, I am admitting that I *know* I have duties. And it is senseless to ask for a proof of something one already knows. If one merely believed it, one could properly ask for a 'justification' of one's belief. But that is not the situation in which we find ourselves. We do already know, in particular situations, that we have duties and what those duties are. And to ask for a 'justification' of knowledge is nonsensical. 'But *do* I really know that these actions are duties?' According to Prichard, this is like asking 'Do I really know that $7+5=12$?' You did know it when you last did the sum. If you no longer know it, you must simply do the sum again. So likewise with the ethical doubt. Put yourself in one of the ethically relevant situations; for example, put yourself in the presence of a man who needs help, or imagine yourself to be in his presence, and allow your capacity for direct moral apprehension to do its work.

Two further features of Prichard's ethical theory must be mentioned. The first is that the rightness or wrongness of an action has nothing to do with the motive from which it is done. My duty is just to do a certain action. If I pay my debt from a bad motive—say, from fear of punishment, or because I wish to annoy somebody else—I have still done what is right. The right action was to pay my creditor, and I have done it. When critics objected that an action taken in abstraction from its motive is no longer an action at all, the answer was that they had confused motive with intention. An action considered apart from its intention *would* no longer be an action at all. But what one intentionally brings about can still be distinguished from the motive—the desire or feeling—which moves one to bring it about. We have also to distinguish between rightness or wrongness, which does not depend on motive, and goodness or badness, which does. And we have then to distinguish further between two varieties of goodness: conscientiousness on the one hand, and 'virtue' on the other. If a man does an action because he believes it to be right and desires to do what is right, he has the first sort of goodness. If he does it from some intrinsically good desire or disposition, such as pity or courage, he has the second sort. Many actions are, of course, done from a combination of both sorts of motive, and so they have both

sorts of goodness at once; nevertheless, the two sorts are different. The ancient Greek moralists, Prichard thought, had much to say about virtue, but little or nothing about conscientiousness. Modern moralists, on the contrary, have much to say about conscientiousness, but little about virtue. He added the interesting observation that great imaginative writers, such as Shakespeare, resemble the ancient moralists in this respect, and that is why their writings often seem so remote from what we read in modern text-books of moral philosophy. I cannot help wishing that Prichard had said more about virtue himself.

Prichard's moral philosophy has the enormous merit of keeping close to the facts of the ordinary moral consciousness. If the task of the moralist is to analyse, or clarify, the moral experiences of the ordinary decent man (and that is certainly one of his most important tasks), this 'intuitionist' theory comes much closer to success than the Rational Egoism and the Utilitarianism—Agathistic or Hedonistic—which it criticizes. But it has its difficulties, too. What happens when two obligations conflict, for example the obligation to tell the truth and the obligation to keep a secret with which one has been entrusted? To this Prichard answers that different obligations have different degrees of stringency. Our duty is to carry out the more stringent one, though, as he characteristically added, 'we still feel uncomfortable' when we have done so. Again, if we know directly and immediately what our duties are, how is it that different men so often differ about what ought to be done in a particular case? Sometimes, of course, it is merely a difference about matters of fact. The conscientious inquisitor thinks that burning heretics is the only way to save souls, and others do not think so. But sometimes men agree about the facts, and still differ about what ought to be done. In this case, Prichard holds, we simply have to say that the capacity for direct moral apprehension may be developed in different degrees in different people, like the capacity for apprehending mathematical truths. I do not know whether he thought it possible that the capacity for moral apprehension might be entirely undeveloped in some individuals, so that they would be, as it were, morally blind.

Other difficulties came into view later. I shall mention two which worried him greatly. Perhaps the one which worried him most was the problem of 'duty and ignorance of fact'. This was the subject of his Hertz Lecture in 1932, perhaps the best of all his published ethical writings. As we have seen, he

thought that the duty we have at a given moment depends on the situation in which we are. But what is meant by 'the situation'? Does it mean the circumstances in which we *in fact* are ('the Objective View')? Or does it mean that we *believe* them, perhaps erroneously, to be ('the Subjective View')? If the Objective View is right, it follows that we never know what our duty is or whether we have done it. We are always more or less ignorant of our circumstances. Indeed, according to Prichard's theory of knowledge, as we shall see, we never know any of them in a strict sense of the word 'know'. We only at best have more or less probable opinions. These consequences are so paradoxical that we are driven to the Subjective View. The word 'subjective' must not be misunderstood. Prichard was far from maintaining the absurd theory that because you believe a certain action to be your duty, it therefore *is* your duty. No proposition, about duty or anything else, can be made true merely by the fact that someone believes it. What he is saying is that our duty depends, not on our beliefs about our duty, but on our beliefs about the circumstances. For instance, if I believe that this man has fainted it is my duty to try to revive him, even though in fact he is not in a faint at all, but merely asleep, or dead. Now we *can* know what our duty is, because we can know what our beliefs are. To discover what they are, we have merely to reflect upon our present state of mind.

But that is not the whole story. There is an assumption which is common to both views alike, namely, that our duty is to do some *action*. Obvious as it seems, even platitudinous, Prichard came to think that this assumption is false. To do an action is to originate some change in the physical world, and strictly speaking this is not in our power. The occurrence or non-occurrence of this change always depends in part on circumstances which are not in our control (on the state of our own nervous sytem, to begin with). Our duty therefore is to *set ourselves* to bring about such a change and not actually to bring it about. That, and that alone, is always in our power. Moralists have failed to see this, Prichard thought, because we are prone to suppose there is an attribute called 'ought-to-be-doneness' which characterizes actions, just as rightness characterizes them. Indeed, the two expressions 'right' and 'ought to be done' are often used as if they were synonyms. But the truth is that there is no such attribute as 'ought-to-be-doneness' at all. And if there were, Prichard argued, there would be no subject whose attribute it could be. For at the time when we say that an

action ought to be done, the action does not yet exist, and therefore can have no attributes. The right way to put it is to say that *we* have the attribute of being obliged. And since this is an attribute of *us*, it is not after all so very surprising that it should depend upon certain beliefs of ours, and not on the objective facts of the situation.

Another problem which puzzled Prichard greatly, especially in his later years, was the nature of promising. The duty of keeping a promise has been a favourite illustration with all the writers of the Oxford Intuitionist School. It has provided them with a strong argument against Utilitarianism and other forms of teleological ethics, since it is obvious that in this case our duty arises from something which has happened in the past, and not from the good consequences which our actions may be expected to have in the future. But what exactly *is* a promise? There is the difficulty that it may be tacit or, as we say, 'implied'. But let us suppose that it is explicitly formulated in words. Someone utters the sentence 'I promise to do so and so'. What kind of a sentence is it, and what does it mean? (Or rather, perhaps, in what way does it mean?) It looks like a statement. And 'I promised', in the past tense, certainly is a statement; so is 'he promises'. But 'I promise' cannot really be a statement, giving the information that a promise is now being made by the speaker. For the uttering of these words is itself the act of promising. Similarly, as Prichard used to point out, 'I request you to do so and so' is not a statement, though 'I requested . . .' and 'he requests . . .' are: and the same applies to 'I order . . .', 'I command . . .'. It seems, then, that 'I promise . . .' is just a formula, a kind of incantation as it were, which *alters* the situation in a certain way, instead of informing us what the situation is. It is not true or false; it is a linguistic device by which the speaker *imposes an obligation* on himself (and also, of course, arouses expectations in others).

Now Prichard, if I understand him rightly, found two difficulties in this. First, it puzzled him that we can impose obligations on ourselves at all. One would expect that our obligations would be entirely independent of our own will and pleasure, and would arise either from the objective situation in which we are, or at any rate from our beliefs about that situation. But here, it seems, the obligation does arise precisely from our own will and pleasure, namely, from our choosing to utter certain words. The second difficulty is this. If we ask how the words 'I promise' have come to have this morally binding character,

we have to admit that their binding force is derived from a linguistic convention accepted both by the speaker and the hearer. But what is the acceptance of a convention? Is it not itself the making of a promise, or something essentially similar? It is as if one had said, 'I promise that whenever I say "I promise . . ." I shall be morally bound to do the action whose description follows those words.' And this looks like a vicious infinite regress. How Prichard solved these difficulties about promising, I do not know. I mention them partly for their intrinsic interest, and partly to illustrate the course his reflections were taking in the last ten years of his life, when he was at work on his unfinished book.

Something must now be said about Prichard's theory of knowledge. In this he was greatly influenced by Cook Wilson (much more, I think, than in his moral philosophy). But he developed Cook Wilson's principles in a highly original way of his own; and the eventual results, though very strange to contemporary ears, deserve to be better known than they are. Outside his own university, and even to some extent within it, Prichard came to be thought of mainly as a moralist. This was because nearly all his published work after 1918 was concerned with moral philosophy. It came to be forgotten that he had been one of the founders of the epistemological school known as 'Realism'. His book *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* (1909), once so shocking and exciting, is now read by few; and his excellent paper 'A criticism of the Psychologists' treatment of knowledge' (*Mind*, 1907) seems to be quite unknown to the present generation of philosophical students and philosophical teachers. But epistemological problems continued to occupy him right up to the end of his life, and his theory of knowledge, especially in its later developments, is as interesting as his moral philosophy; indeed, his moral philosophy cannot be completely understood apart from his theory of knowledge. It is a great pity that he published almost nothing on the subject after 1910. But he certainly wrote a number of short papers about it, some of which were read to philosophical gatherings in Oxford (not to speak of numerous letters to his colleagues). It is to be hoped that some of these have been preserved and will one day be printed.

It used to be said that *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* was a very good book about Prichard's theory of knowledge, but not such a good one about Kant's. There is truth in both comments: in the second, because one cannot do full justice to the writings of

a great philosopher if one is in fundamental disagreement with him on almost every major point; in the first, because the central thesis of Prichard's theory of knowledge is very clearly stated in the book, even though he came to be dissatisfied later with some of the ways in which he had applied it. That thesis, which he had learned from Cook Wilson, concerns the nature of knowledge itself. Knowledge, Prichard holds, is something *sui generis*. It can neither be defined in terms of anything else, as Kant, he thought, had tried to define it in terms of 'synthesis'; nor can it be explained genetically, as the psychologists, he thought, have tried to explain it by tracing its development out of some previous state—sensation or feeling—in which it is not yet present. Knowing is an activity of consciousness, certainly. But it is not any kind of doing, or making, or constructing. It is the discovery of what is. And what is known is independent of the knowing; to deny this (as all the Idealists, in one way or another, did deny it) was simply to contradict the nature of knowledge. Moreover, Prichard thought that all knowledge was direct. To speak of 'knowing indirectly' would be absurd. The indirectness was only in the manner of coming to know, not in the knowing itself. To put it metaphorically, knowledge is the direct confrontation of mind and reality.

Now this conception of knowledge compels us to draw a very sharp distinction between knowledge on the one hand, and belief or opinion on the other. To speak of 'false knowledge' or even of 'fallible knowledge' would be self-contradictory, and falseness and fallibility must be provided for somehow. Moreover, within what is traditionally called belief we must distinguish between rational opinion based on evidence, and non-rational taking for granted, what Prichard called 'thinking without question', and Cook Wilson 'being under an impression that'. (Of course a rational opinion may still be false, and what we think without question may still happen to be true.) These distinctions are characteristic of all Cook-Wilsonian philosophers, and must always be borne in mind if we are to understand their writings.

It follows also that much of what we commonly call knowledge in ordinary life, including a large part of natural science, has to be classed as probable opinion, since it is neither direct or infallible. Perception is a crucial instance. In *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* Prichard held that perception is, or at any rate contains, a direct knowledge of the material world. He got over the obvious difficulties of this view by drawing a distinction

between 'appears' and 'is'. If one may use terminology he disliked, he thought that the perceptual situation is an irreducibly three-term one, in which a certain material object *M* appears to a percipient *P* to have a certain characteristic *C*. Nevertheless, he thought, we are knowing that the material object does exist, and that it does have *some* determinate form of the determinable characteristic of which *C* is a determinate. Thus when railway lines appear convergent, we know that the railway lines exist, and that they are *either* convergent *or* divergent *or* parallel. Moreover, in favourable cases we can know the determinate characteristic which the object really does have. It then appears to be what it actually is. Thus from points of view directly above them the railway lines appear parallel, though from other points of view they appear convergent. But Prichard already admitted that no such distinction between 'appears' and 'is' can be drawn in the case of secondary qualities (even though the plain man does try to draw it). Colour, sound, smell, and other such qualities, he says, are dependent on us: not, of course, dependent on us in so far as we are *knowers*—for anything which is known is independent of the knowing of it—but dependent on us in so far as we are *sentient* beings.

This theory did not satisfy Prichard for very long. The objection 'how can a thing appear what it is not?', which he had already stated and tried to answer in the book, eventually seemed to him unanswerable. But dissatisfaction with this Appearing Theory did not lead him, as it led Russell and Moore, to accept a sense-datum theory in its place. On the contrary, the very use of the term 'sense-datum' seemed to him to involve a fundamental error, the error of supposing that sensation is a form of knowledge.[1] As to the nature of sensation (or 'perceiving' as he insisted on calling it) he held that Berkeley was right, that the *esse* of sensibles involves *percipi*. Thus to ask, as some philosophers have, whether colours exist unseen or sounds unheard is absurd. The fact that most of those who have asked the question answer 'No' does not make matters any better. The question itself, so Prichard thought, is nonsensical and cannot be asked at all. For, strictly speaking, there *are* no colours or sounds; there is only someone-seeing-a-colour, someone-hearing-a-sound, &c. The colour, of course, is not *the same*

[1] This was the theme of his inaugural address to the joint session of the Mind Association and Aristotelean Society, held in Oxford in 1938. ('The Sense-datum Fallacy:' Aristotelean Society *Proceedings*, Supplementary Volume xvii.)

as the seeing. So far, he would have admitted that Professor G. E. Moore's 'Refutation of Idealism' is right; but the colour, he held, is nevertheless dependent on the seeing (i.e. on the visual sensing) and cannot be conceived to exist apart from it. It follows that sensation cannot be a form of knowing: for in that case it would be at least conceivable that colours, &c., might exist unsensed, even though in fact they might be dependent on physiological or psychological processes which accompany the sensing.

Prichard offered no argument in favour of this 'internal accusative' theory of sensation. He maintained that it was self-evident. (I must confess that I do not find it so, though I do not deny that it may be true.) But he also thought that in our everyday perceptual consciousness we systematically ignored this self-evident truth. As he quaintly said, the ordinary man when he sees a colour 'straight off mistakes it for a body'. What a strange mistake to make! One of Prichard's colleagues, when he first heard this theory propounded, suggested as a parallel: 'I got into a noise, but I thought it was a train.' It is difficult to think that anyone could mistake a brown colour for a tea-tray. What he might do, I suppose, is to mistake it for the upper surface of a tea-tray; and this, I believe, is what Prichard meant. In any case, he certainly thought that in our ordinary perceptual consciousness we were in a state of permanent illusion. He ought to have admitted, I think, that within this Great Illusion there were minor illusions (as when we are deceived by a mirror image) and, moreover, that the ordinary percipient knows how to detect them and correct them, even though the Great Illusion itself can only be detected and corrected by philosophical reflection. At any rate, some account ought to be given of what we *ordinarily* call the distinction between illusory and veridical perception. If one may put words into his mouth which he would have abhorred, he ought surely to have distinguished, within the Great Illusion, between the 'phenomenally true' and the 'phenomenally false'; and he ought to have examined the criteria by which we decide whether a given perceptual experience falls under the one head or the other. But the further analysis of the ordinary perceptual consciousness (for that is what it would amount to) did not appear to interest him greatly. It was sufficient for him that this form of consciousness was radically erroneous.

He did, however, draw one interesting and curious consequence from this theory. It followed, he said, that the idea of

'bodiness' (material substance) must be an *innate* or unacquired idea. We could not make the mistake of confusing sensation-contents with bodies unless we had the idea of 'bodiness' already. We could not have acquired it from a knowledge of its instances, because we never had known any instances of it. And yet we certainly possess it, because we constantly find ourselves misapplying it to something which is *not* an instance of it.

'What had become of Prichard's "Realism"?' the reader may ask, as his colleagues also did. It was still there, however. Though its details had altered, its main principles had not, and they enabled him to build up again with one hand what he had so ruthlessly knocked down with the other. Despite the illusory character of the ordinary perceptual consciousness, he maintained that there are still some things which we *know* when perceptual experiences occur. Sensation itself is not knowing. But we do know (or can, if we attend) that we are having sensations, and what sensations they are. Again, to take a colour for a body is an error, but even in making this mistake we are knowing a region of physical space; not just a region of sensible space, as some philosophers might suppose, for according to Prichard there is only one space, Space with a capital S, and to speak of 'many spaces' is absurd, unless you mean many regions within the one space. We know also, or can if we reflect, that every event has a cause. This proposition, too, Prichard thought to be self-evident. Finally, he held, we knew that causes are always substances. A cause, as he once strikingly said, is a *substance acting*; causation is activity, not necessitation (still less mere regularity of sequence), and only substances can act.

Given these pieces of knowledge, the material world, which we seemed to have lost, may be restored to us. We can infer its existence by a causal argument, though we can no longer claim to perceive it. The argument, Prichard admitted, would not be demonstrative. So we could not *know*, in a strict sense, that there is a material world or what its constitution is, but we could attain to a highly probable opinion. Indeed, he once said, *sub rosa*, that the existence of a material world is 'almost certain'. He also remarked once, in an equally unofficial moment, that 'the truth, when it is found, will not be very unlike the philosophy of Locke'. I think he meant the truth about perception and the external world.

What exactly this causal argument was, I do not know, but it must have been an elaborate one. When challenged at philosophical meetings to produce it, he would ask to be

excused, on the ground that he would need at least half an hour to state it. But presumably some sketch of it, at any rate, exists among his papers. Meanwhile, the only clue I can offer is a remark he once made about Berkeley's argument for the existence of God. It was to the effect that Berkeley's God could only produce our sensations by acting as if He were a system of bodies in space.

Prichard's theory of self-consciousness was much less fully worked out than his theory of perception, perhaps because the subject seemed to him less difficult. He thought that in self-consciousness (he disliked the word 'introspection') we had a direct knowledge of our own mental state and activities, and a direct knowledge of the self whose states and activities they are. He also held that every self is a substance, and an immaterial substance. I think he saw nothing particularly puzzling in psycho-physical interaction. Both Parallelism and Epiphenomenalism seemed to him absurd; and he thought it equally absurd to try to explain memory by means of physiological traces. When asked about the difficulty which some have found in reconciling the principle of the Conservation of Energy with the possibility of psycho-physical interaction, he replied that if there were any incompatibility between them it was the Conservation Principle, and not the fact of psycho-physical interaction, which must be denied. His conviction that every self is a substance led him to accept a curious theory of immortality and pre-existence. His ground for this was that a substance could neither be produced nor destroyed. Indeed, he thought that strictly speaking any substance is a non-temporal entity; what was temporal was only its state and activities, not the substance itself. A self then, being a substance, could not have come into existence at the time when it began to interact with the collection of material substances known as its body, any more than it could cease to exist when that interaction ceased. It did not, however, follow that it was *conscious* of anything before bodily life began. That might or might not have been so. All we could be certain of was that it did exist, and did have the *capacities* which are constitutive of a psychical substance, for instance the capacities of knowing and feeling. It might be that before bodily life began these capacities were wholly unactualized.

Finally, a word must be said about Prichard's theory of thinking. He did not distinguish, as many philosophers now do, between logic on the one hand and the epistemology of

thinking on the other. If the distinction be made, I think we shall have to say that in logic he was not particularly original. He accepted, in the main, the logical views of Cook Wilson, though he was never satisfied with Cook Wilson's theory of hypothetical statements. But his theory of thinking, though it was also Cook Wilsonian in its principles, was original in its details; and not less interesting because it was so unfashionable. Thinking, he held, is essentially awareness of objective universals and of the relations between them. The capacity for apprehending universals is an ultimate and inexplicable capacity of the human mind, and it is actualized by reflecting upon the particulars which are their instances. (Our knowledge of the universal 'bodiness', mentioned above, would appear to be an exception to this rule.) All forms of Conceptualism, and *a fortiori* all forms of Nominalism, seemed to him to be fundamentally erroneous. The word 'concept', which he disliked, could only mean 'an objective universal which some mind apprehends'. One of the few points on which he agreed with Kant was in maintaining that there are truths which are at once necessary and synthetic. But Kant's answer to the question 'how are *a priori* synthetic judgements possible?' seemed to Prichard utterly mistaken. The right answer, he thought, was simply that we are directly aware of certain necessary and synthetic connexions between objective universals.

But though he was uncompromisingly 'realistic' about universals, Prichard would have nothing to do with 'realistic' theories about other objects of thought. It has been supposed by some that when we hold a belief there must be a special kind of intelligible entity, a subsistent proposition, which is the object of our belief (likewise when we doubt, or assume, or wonder). Prichard maintained, on the contrary, that there are no 'objects of belief' at all; and, for the same reason, that there are no 'objects of desire'. When confronted with the criticism that, if so, two people could not believe the same thing, he admitted that strictly speaking they could not. Nevertheless, the same universals could be present to the minds of both; and that, he thought, gave the critic all he had a right to ask. Prichard likewise rejected all 'realistic' theories of possibility and probability, on the ground that everything which exists is also necessary; therefore, when we say that it is possible that A is B, or probable to a certain degree that it is, we are only expressing our own mental attitude—an attitude of uncertainty, or of opinion, as the case may be. But unfortunately Prichard never

worked out this part of his philosophy in detail, and I do not know how he would have solved the difficulties to which any subjectivistic theory of probability seems to be exposed. (How is it, for example, that a probability-estimate can be mistaken?)

It will be seen that Prichard's theory of knowledge is not at all congruous with the prevailing climate of philosophical opinion. Even in his own university, the traditional home of lost causes, it appeared strange and even reactionary to many of his younger contemporaries. Nevertheless, I believe that his epistemological views are both interesting and important, not less so than his moral philosophy. Their paradoxical appearance is largely due to the old-fashioned terminology in which they were formulated. Whether we agree with them or not, we have much to learn from them.

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