# Appendix

# On Idealism

## Introduction

This essay was written at the same time as the thesis on Heidegger's ethics to develop some of my own ideas about ethics more fully than is done in the thesis proper. However it does approach the issues from a slightly different, perhaps more religious, perspective. Rather than seek to incorporate it into the body of the thesis, I have chosen to append it below.

## 1. What is idealism?

The main thesis of idealism is that philosophy accords priority to spirit over matter by using language to talk about ideas. My theme here is that adherence to the idealist scheme of priorities is correct and justified, while attempts to refute it are fundamentally flawed. The major thesis presented in this paper is that the only philosophy worthy of the venerable title "the love of wisdom" is idealism.

The goal of wisdom is to understand the meaning of life, and efforts to find meaning can only properly begin from the perspective of the human mind. The mind can only comprehend things through the medium of ideas, so the nature of philosophy as human comprehension is inherently idealistic in character. The idealism inherent in philosophy flows from the fact that human understanding deals only with ideas and with their relations to other ideas and to the world. Matter can be apprehended, but only ideas can be comprehended. Comprehension deals only with ideas because things must be interpreted and represented through language if meaning is to be discovered, understood and communicated. The centrality of language implies that definition is the soul of philosophy, because definition is the search for universals, and universals are the abstract concepts fundamental to all philosophical interpretation, coming into operation whenever things are considered in terms of ideas or represented through language.

## 2. Alternatives

Attempts at refutation have blamed idealism, together with metaphysics, for the ills of traditional philosophy, but such alternative ways of thought have usually ignored their own debt to idealism and at the same time falsely suggested that idealism leads to all sorts of absurd beliefs. Materialist philosophers such as Engels and Marx argued that matter, understood in terms of natural evolution, is

philosophically prior to thought. They identified idealism with spiritual creationism, and saw in this distinction between nature and spirit the whole struggle between the progressive future and the reactionary past, thereby condemning idealism as a stagnant priest-ridden dogma. Other modern secular ideologies, including scientific positivism, feminism and economic rationalism, have in common with Marxism the secular view that spirit must be subordinated to matter, on the premise that anyone who advocates the primacy of spirit has torn loose from their moorings in physical reality.

Although the political worth of these various ways of thought should not be disparaged, given their well founded critiques of prevailing social practices, secular thought is wrong in its materialistic critique of idealism. A major advantage of idealism over these alternative world views is its ability to achieve a coherent understanding of the world that begins from human experience, while at the same time maintaining a connection with a vision of ultimate reality. The limitation common to all secular thought is that it denies that human life can meaningfully relate to the transcendent and the infinite and the eternal. As a result of this denial it fails to coherently answer profound questions of philosophy, including whether the origin of values can be understood, and how systematic understanding can be absolute or fundamental.

## 3. Perspective and focus of idealism - ethics

To answer such questions, which appear rather extravagant and impossible from the relativistic perspective of secular science, we must begin by determining a starting point and direction, so the argument presented here in defence of idealism is mainly about priorities of focus for philosophy. The reason idealism must provide philosophy with its point of departure is that it is the only method able to speak from the distinctive situated perspective of the human soul. This means idealism is the only philosophical method that can establish a necessary relation with the linguistic and ethical foundations of our being, and it does so by focussing on the primacy of transcendent ideals from a truly human perspective. The point here is to show that the philosophy of idealism operates in normal human experience, and is not removed to some mysterious transcendental plane. All considered judgement effectively regards things primarily as ideas, as it is only when a thing is represented by an idea that it can mean something to a person. When a person says, "My family, my work, my ideals, mean something to me", it is only as the meaning is conceptualised in thought that it acquires content. Meaning emerges in the context of reference and significance, when we discern relationships between things in the world, and

it is only when philosophy begins with what is closest to us, our personal experience of mind and spirit, that anything relevant to human life can be understood as meaningful.

The philosophy of idealism poses more genuine and serious questions than any Berkeleyan denial of existence to matter. This has been recognised by the more weighty idealist thinkers, who I take to include Plato, Parmenides, Kant, Hegel and in some ways Heidegger. Certainly idealism contradicts materialism, but the question at issue is not the absolute existence of matter, as Berkeley had it, but what the primary focus of philosophy should be. When ethics is made the starting point of philosophy, as idealism demands, matter becomes a peripheral concern, because the effort to understand and practice ethics must of necessity deal with non-material ideas like justice, holiness and courage as the focus of its energy. Spirit is the active principle in human life, while matter is merely passive, so philosophy condemns itself to passivity when it gives matter priority over spirit.

## 4. Matter

I am not trying to deny any absolute reality to matter, but only questioning its priority for philosophy. Certainly natural disasters like fire and earthquake and famine can intervene to make any wishful thinking irrelevant, and the reality of human suffering should never be minimised, but a direct focus on material assistance is not the only thing ethics and morality require of us. The foundations of ethics are transcendent and universal, and can only be clarified by the definition of the key terms, such as justice, love and the good, which constitute the ethos towards which philosophy seeks to move society. Definition of these foundations is more help in the long term than any single act of charity, so putting effort into this task of definition requires us to take time away from our obsessions about material survival to contemplate the eternal truths of philosophy.

## 5. Definition

The thoughts of many of the greatest minds of history have been understood in terms of idealism. So much so that the label "idealism" suffers from a looseness of definition, as it has been used to describe everything from Plato's theory of ideas to Hegel's spiritual system of rational realism, and from Saint Augustine's contrast between the city of God and the city of man to Bishop Berkeley's theories of vision and knowledge. The passionate commitment of those who believe in a cause and struggle for change is also classed as idealism, whether it be Jesus Christ and his Sermon on the Mount, or Ben Chifley and his

light on the hill, or Nelson Mandela saying "the struggle is my life", or any of the millions of people who have struggled for ideas such as human dignity and equality. The common factor shared by all these idealist philosophies is that they give priority to spirit over matter.

## 6. Essence and Existence

One of the first principles which must be established is how such a relation between spirit and matter can be justified. This can be explained most satisfactorily by considering it in terms of the priority of essence over existence, because essence is to spirit as existence is to matter. Whenever we seek to know what a thing really is, we invariably look for the definition of its essence. Philosophy is intrinsic to this process, because it provides the method whereby we abstract from the specific case in order to explain it as an instance of a concept, and so define its essence.

When I look at a spark plug I see firstly that it is an engine part made of ceramic and metal in this particular car. However, to know what it is I must recognise its essential function as a mechanism for igniting petrol, and to tune the engine properly I must know precisely why and how the gap must be made exact. The point of this example from a context of practical concern is that we are not just interested in its existence, the fact that the spark plug is, we need to know the definition of its essence, so we can understand precisely what it is. And even knowing what something is does not always suffice, because for understanding to be complete the question why the plug exists must be answered. To answer this question we must understand the idea 'behind' the thing, in order to know its context, where it came from and what it does. In coming to understand something we discover that it is, what it is, and why it is. Knowledge that something is gives us only the raw fact of its existence, while the more important knowledge of what and why it is point us towards the fundamental idea which is its essence.

All classification is based on the principle that we can only know what anything actually is through knowledge of the whole of which it is a part. For example a fork is an instance of the concept 'cutlery', a ghost gum is an instance of the concept 'eucalyptus', and a gift could be an instance of the concept 'love'. Now while there are definite differences between these examples of part-whole analysis (the first is a collective noun, the second is a botanical genus, and the third is something of a mystery), what they have in common is that the particular thing in question partakes of, or is a sign of, a whole or a totality, and this whole can be understood as a universal concept or essence. Even when we deal with

a particular object, we can only understand it when we consider it as an instance of a concept which has more generality than the individual thing alone. Such reasoning led ancient philosophy to the conclusion that the primary concern of philosophy must be with essence rather than with existence, and this insight was the genesis of the classification of all things into categories, families, orders, genera and species.

## 7. Plato

Plato provided much of the conceptual framework within which idealist philosophy has dealt with the what and the why of reality, so I would like to proceed now by summarising some salient features of Plato's teachings about the meaning of ideas. Plato is the great original source for idealist philosophy, so to understand what is meant by idealism it is wise to go back to his writings and investigate his ideas as he presents them himself. As a student of Socrates, Plato believed that knowledge is virtue and that no one does evil willingly. His focus was on ethical and aesthetic ideals such as beauty and the good. Concepts such as these are at the heart of idealism; not epistemological notions like 'whiteness', which Aristotle concentrated on in his criticisms of Plato's ideas.

So to go to the centre of Plato's thought, let us now turn to the Phaedo, a classic statement of the philosophy of idealism which brings out clearly the ideas "at the top of the line" that are most important for philosophy. The Phaedo is Plato's account of Socrates' final conversation before death, and the subject of the dialogue is the problem of life after death and how people can find absolute truth and immortality through cultivation of the soul. One passage which illuminates the central themes of Platonic idealism is the discussion of the nature of equality.

Socrates argues, "before we began to see and hear and use our other senses, we must somewhere have acquired the knowledge that there is such a thing as absolute equality; otherwise we could never have realised, by using it as a standard for comparison, that all equal objects of sense are only imperfect copies" (75). We can only know that two sticks, or three boxes of apples, or two philosophy essays, are equal in quality or quantity by reference to an ideal standard, and knowledge of this standard cannot be derived from the things themselves, but must be a priori, from reason alone, because physical things never completely measure up to it. Plato maintains that this "applies no more to equality than it does to absolute beauty, goodness, uprightness, holiness, and all those characteristics which we designate by the term 'absolute'."

The insistence that these characteristics can be known as absolute is distasteful to the pragmatic outlook which places beauty in the eye of the beholder, so it has been rejected by the relativistic ethos of modern thought. Plato again enters into controversy with his thesis that the ability to apprehend the absolute depends on the priority of spirit over matter, a major Platonic doctrine clearly expressed in the Phaedo. Acceptance of the priority of spirit involves a thorough renunciation of materialism, and, as mentioned above, it has been central to the spirit of idealism. Where materialism holds that the essence of humanity is found in our physical existence, for Plato the essence of the self is found in our eternal soul.

Plato established this doctrine with the argument that "so long as we keep to the body and our soul is contaminated with this imperfection, there is no chance of our ever attaining satisfactorily to our object, which we assert to be Truth" (66). He maintains that the only person likely to apprehend the absolute, whether it be absolute beauty, goodness, equality, integrity, or some other basic ideal that is sought, "is the one who approaches each object, as far as possible, with the unaided intellect, without taking account of any sense of sight in his thinking, or dragging any other sense into his reckoning - the person who pursues the truth by applying his pure and unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object, cutting himself off as much as possible from his eyes and ears and virtually all the rest of his body, as an impediment which by its presence prevents the soul from attaining to truth and clear thinking" (65). Purification is thought to "consist in separating the soul as much as possible from the body" (67), because the true moral ideal is a kind of purgation from all illusory and emotional values (69). Clarity of thought is impossible while the mind is limited to the merely physical, because true understanding only comes with the realisation that thought must transcend its empirical worldly surrounds in order to find wisdom, and it is wisdom alone that makes all the virtues possible.

This transcendental metaphysic of the Phaedo accepts the Parmenidian idea of being as a static unity, where moral forms such as the just and the good can be timelessly contemplated, but in Plato's later dialogue the Sophist, the suggestion that reality can be something not subject to change is brought into question. The departure in the Sophist from orthodox Platonism arises from the argument that when existence is taken as the starting point for investigation about the formal and the essential, the reality of being is seen to partake of and blend with both motion and rest, to confront not only identity, but also difference. Plato's true dialectical genius emerges here, because he argues that if we follow Parmenides by saying that being must be an indissoluble whole, it is impossible

to ascribe any reality to opposites such as hot and cold, given that both partake of being but are completely incompatible with the other (243d).

Transcendence enables the vision of the formal ideas of "independent entities which really exist" (78), real ideas which Plato understood as absolute, constant and invariable, and as never admitting change of any kind. Ideas are eternally the same: hot can never become cold, good can never become evil, and motion can never become rest (Sophist 252). When things possessing these characteristics appear to change, as in the case of ice being melted by flame, it is not a case of the idea itself changing, but merely of the idea, in this case of cold, 'retreating' from that location and being replaced by its opposite. So the nature of any moral ideal is an eternal constant, whether it be the idea of justice, love, truth, goodness, or some other. The purpose of education is therefore to drag people away from their beliefs in the false idols of material existence in order to incline them towards knowledge and practice of the ideals of virtue.

Education is one of Plato's major concerns in the Republic. He presents the path to enlightenment in terms of an analogy with a divided line (510), in which the pursuit of truth involves the ascent from illusion through belief and reason to pure intelligence. The simile of the cave, which develops this framework further, culminates in the vision of the idea of the good, a vision which "once seen, is inferred to be responsible for whatever is right and valuable in anything", and which "is the controlling source of truth and intelligence" (517c). Knowledge is an innate capacity, but to realise our potential "the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good" (518d).

In the Sophist, Plato compares the effort to make sense of the world to a battle between giants and Gods, in which the difficulties of philosophy are discussed in terms of the quarrel between materialism and idealism. The giants "define reality as the same thing as body, and as soon as one of the opposite party asserts that anything without a body is real, they are utterly contemptuous and will not listen to another word", while on the other side the Gods "are very wary in defending their position somewhere in the heights of the unseen, maintaining with all their force that true reality consists in certain intelligible and bodiless Ideas" (246b). What the giants "allege to be true reality, the Gods do not call real being, but a sort of moving process of becoming" (246c).

Plato believed that both these ways of thought had something important to offer, but he attacked the materialists for being violent and uncivilised (246d) and for thinking that "whatever they cannot squeeze between their hands is just nothing at all" (247c). He says, "it is quite enough for our purposes if they

consent to admit that even a small part of reality is bodiless", arguing that this must be admitted in the case of qualities of the soul like "justice and wisdom or any other sort of goodness or badness" (247b).

The Sophist is a very important dialogue for understanding Plato's mature philosophy, because it presents the five Platonic elements of existence, identity, difference, motion and rest as the central foundational concepts of systematic ontology. In his mature view the ideas retain their importance as the transcendent object of language and understanding, but the earlier view of them as completely separate from their real instances is discarded, even while their independent reality and absolute existence is affirmed. "It would be a strange doctrine to accept" if "change, life, soul and understanding had no place in that which is perfectly real" (249). So for example Plato would say that justice is revealed in just acts, but the formal idea of justice also has an eternally transcendent and objective existence. The recognition, and ultimately the recollection, of this basic truth is for Plato a decisive mark of philosophical wisdom.

Another dialogue worth mentioning briefly here is the Phaedrus, and its allegory of the charioteer with its imagery of the wings of the soul, as it contains a supremely succinct and beautiful presentation of Plato's ideas. The metaphor of ascent is always present in Plato's mind, because he believed that only the eternal Gods above can attain to the vision of the whole which is the real ideal towards which philosophy should strive. So it is only in so far as our soul is akin to the divine nature that we have the capacity to behold the truth.

Asserting that "our argument will carry conviction with the wise, though not with the merely clever" (245), Plato maintains that the ontological ideal of the apprehension and recollection of reality as a whole is the "perfect mystic vision through which a man can become perfect in the true sense of the word" (249). The ideal of human perfection is defined in the Phaedrus as the ability "to understand by the use of universals, and to collect out of the multiplicity of sense-impressions a unity arrived at by a process of reason" (249). The part of us that has this ability is the soul, which Plato describes as "uncreated, immortal and self-moving" (245), and he calls it the "ruling power" (246) that enables us to approach and mirror the divine. Just as the ontology of the Republic presents a bifurcated horizon with reason above and sense below, the Phaedrus continues this imagery by comparing the soul to a charioteer led by two horses. "One of these horses is fine and good and of noble stock, and the other the opposite in every way" (246). "the teams of the Gods, which are well matched and tractable, go easily, but the rest with difficulty; for the horse with the vicious nature, if he

has not been well broken in, drags his driver down by throwing all his weight in the direction of the earth; supreme then is the agony of the struggle which awaits the soul" (247).

One unifying feature of all Plato's ideas is that their origin is in the idealist philosophy which was later called transcendental metaphysics. Although the word 'metaphysics' originated with Aristotle's book of that name, which was so called because it came after his book on physics, the term has come to refer to any philosophy that focusses on spiritual idealism. Classical metaphysics teaches that there are two classes of things, the lower being the visible, which is discovered via the instrumentality of the body, and the higher being the invisible, the class of real substances which can only be discovered when the soul "investigates by itself, and passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, . . . a condition of the soul we call wisdom" (Phaedo 80). Just as the truth of mathematical theorems is independent of time and place, so the truths of metaphysics, the ideas of the one, the good and the true, remain constant yesterday, today and forever. Ideas are necessarily eternal because their essential meaning transcends their historical application. A feature of such eternal truths is that they are able to persist for ever through time because their content is independent of time. So metaphysics holds that eternal ideas function as a higher truth able to condition and shape the reality of the temporal things we encounter.

## 8. Parmenides

The thought of Parmenides of Elea is one of the foundation stones of this philosophy. Parmenides believed he could uncover the identity of being and truth by means of the pure logical apprehension of "that which is, and cannot not-be". In revealing this identity he presented a classical articulation of the nature and purpose of idealist metaphysics in the original formative period of Western civilization. Parmenides took the axiomatic tautology that "whatever exists really does exist" to be a necessary first principle of rigorous logic. He used this observation, together with the negative truth that whatever does not exist is nothing, as the basis for the idealist maxim that the same reality is given to us both for thinking and for being. He took this to mean that thinking and being are the same, and so to think is to be. As a consequence of this insight, Parmenides held that the one true being can only be identified through the reflective understanding, whereas the truth of claims derived from intuition by the senses is always dubious.

These ideas, which have influenced numerous thinkers through the centuries, mark Parmenides as one of the profoundly original thinkers in the history of philosophy. The heart of his method was the attempt to establish the foundations of correct reason by counterpoising the "way of truth", grounded in the contemplation of the necessary truths of the logic of being, against the "way of seeming", or reliance on empirical appearance, which despite its unreliability is accepted by most people as the common sense method for learning about truth. Parmenides rejected the common sense view in favour of reason by asserting a diametric difference between being, which he understood as the "unshaken heart of well rounded truth", and both appearance and becoming, realms of experience in which continuous change destroys any possibility of certainty.

So from the earliest times Greek logic understood being as an eternally static unity, no more subject to change than are the mathematical theorems of geometry and arithmetic. For Plato, whose idealistic rationalism owed much to the logic of Parmenides, it made as much sense to think true being is to be found in the changing multiplicity of empirical belief as to suggest that two plus two might not always equal four, because truth is found by definition rather than by observation. Because the ultimate unity of true being is abstract rather than tangible, it can only be comprehended by pure intelligence, and not by sensual intuition. The suggestion that it could involve motion and change, or that it must be sought in the unfolding process of becoming, was thought to assume a mistaken belief about what being actually is. Plato expressed this idea with classical simplicity in the dictum of the Timaeus that "being is to becoming as truth is to belief". Being and truth, the ultimate objects of correct knowledge, stand together in contrast to becoming and belief, which are linked to each other as the respective shadows of their real counterparts.

For Parmenides, the idea that the world of change cannot be a source of true knowledge is an explicit consequence of this philosophy. Parmenides devalued what is learnt through sense perception because he believed it to be impossible that any secure knowledge could be found in the changing flux of the world. Wild variations in historical fortune and the primitive development of science made it impossible to predict the future or even know for certain what was happening at the time, so he confined the acceptable truth of ontology to ideas logically derivable from axiomatic tautologies. These ideas were similar, at least in their role as logical foundations, to what Immanuel Kant was later to call the abstract a priori ideas of pure reason. The austere simplicity of his philosophy enabled Parmenides to point the way towards a vision of the total and eternal definition of reality, well summarised in the following famous fragment:

'"What is' is uncreated and imperishable, for it is entire, immovable and without end. It was not in the past, nor shall it be, since it is now, all at once, one, continuous; nor is it divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there more here and less there, which would prevent it from cleaving together, but it is all full of what is."

Being, that which truly is, is an indivisible and eternal whole, quite separate from any human experience except as it is imaginable in abstract reflection. The saying "it is now" does not confine the one being to the present moment alone, because as 'uncreated' it transcends time. Being includes history and potentiality as much as the actual moment, and because "what is" is outside time or eternal, Parmenides rules out the possibility that it might have been in the past or future. Parmenides held the contemplation of this unchanging universal truth of being to be the highest possible goal for philosophy, with his dichotomous logical argument that the way of truth is concerned with 'what is' while the way of seeming is satisfied with 'what is not'.

As Platonic idealism evolved from its roots in Parmenides and Socrates through its articulation by Plato into the neo-Platonism of Plotinus, physical objects continued to be regarded as mere copies or unstable images of actual ideal reality, because the dichotomy drawn between being and appearance involved the characterisation of being in terms of a totally static and eternally transcendent doctrine of truth. The devaluation of appearance is a necessary concomitant of Parmenides' idea of the unity of truth, because, so the argument went, appearances are obviously multiple and not unified, so if truth is one, appearances cannot assist us to understand it. The evolving process of change in the world was therefore regarded as the source of illusion and untruth, because the early Greek logicians thought it was impossible to discern any certainty or continuity in the data given to us by sense perception.

The immutable verities of formal philosophy alone were thought to provide certain knowledge. The theory first suggested by Parmenides and then developed to its full flowering in Platonic idealism was that we can only define the true nature of anything by contemplating how particular acts or things we may come across participate in a universal truth. Empirical objects only provide a fleeting instance, so opinions about them are always fallible, but the abstract universal idea can be the true object of certain knowledge. Plato condemned the habit of accepting what is given to sense perception as the path of illusion and mere belief (doxa), because the idealist method is the only guarantee of knowledge (episteme). This doctrine found expression in the metaphysical idea of substance (ousia), which held that the only real substances are universals, so only eternal essences can be known. For example Aristotle believed that the only

real substance is mind (cf. Collingwood, The Idea of History p.42) because ultimately nothing else can persist through time.

## 9. The Heritage of Ideas

I have dwelt on these ideas from the origin of philosophy at some length because they are central to the intellectual foundations of western civilization and are a major part of the heritage shared by all thought today. Classical idealism influences modern cultural mores and standards in ways that often go unrecognised, so contemporary philosophy needs to remember these roots if it is to understand its identity. The thoughts of the classical thinkers of antiquity remain one of the great sources of ideas for the present, even if not everything they say translates intelligibly across the millennia. Only by examining and recollecting their insights can we ensure that life is breathed again into the great ideas which are undeniably present in ancient philosophy. The method that can do this, and so derive most understanding for the present from the ideas of the great thinkers of history, is idealism.

The philosophy of idealism has a continuity of purpose with traditions of learning which are fundamental to the principles, values and achievements of our society. In fact, idealism has been instrumental to the creation of the institutions of the modern world, because imperfect as they are, our institutions owe much that is good about them to the fact that the people who created them believed in the primacy of ideas. Certainly there is need for criticism of the errors and distortions idealism has caused when it has been taken to extremes, especially in the case of some religious attitudes towards the body and the earth, but if we abandon the original insight of the primacy of spirit we risk undermining social values that are fundamental to our culture. Such values as human rights, equality before the law and freedom of speech owe their foundation to shared beliefs in spiritual ideals that originated in philosophy. Like a well of living water that will never dry up, the heritage of philosophy can sustain and invigorate life today if it is properly maintained, but if it is thoughtlessly destroyed or neglected, our culture will be put at risk.

But why, you may ask, is this word 'idealism' so crucial to the essence of philosophy? One reason arises out of the nature of philosophy as linguistic analysis. All the beliefs that were recorded and that have survived the centuries of history have been transmitted through language, and language is a human faculty whose common currency is the idea. Analysis of the ideas and concepts of language, especially those found in texts, is a central task for philosophy, so to contribute effectively to the living heritage of human consciousness, philosophy

must study the writings of past philosophers assiduously, because the development of thought is more reliable and worthwhile when it builds upon the foundation of those who have examined the same problems before.

But why must linguistic analysis involve philosophical idealism? The reason is that if the words themselves of the great thinkers must be studied first before informed discussion can take place, then direct investigation of the material objects to which the ideas refer is only of secondary importance. Empirical research may be a useful preliminary or adjunct to philosophy, but it can never replace the central task of thinking about the meaning of ideas, which is the only method able to place empirical facts within the context of human priorities and values. And if ideas have priority over things as the primary focus of philosophical investigation, then the label 'idealism' is a valid description of the method and content of philosophy.

But more than this, idealism is the only way of thought that enables us to consider things in the true depth of their historical context and meaning. Only when a thing is considered as idea, as the manifestation of a universal essence, can we understand why it is what it is. We understand each thing as part of a whole complex horizon, not as a discrete entity without any connection to past and future, as positivist methods tend to do. Knowing where something came from and where it is going - its place in time - is the only basis upon which we can genuinely respect or value it, but considered as matter alone it loses this relation to its context and thereby becomes isolated from the source of its meaning and value.

## 10. The Part and the Whole

In music it is not enough to know that a certain note in a melody is produced by the resonance of a column of air, and nor is it adequate to describe the note just as A440hz. To comprehend the essence of a musical note it must be heard in its context in the melody, because it will not really be understood anywhere else. By placing the note before our mind's ear within the melody as a whole, we treat it as a pure concept, an idea.

So with philosophy, when we comprehend anything as a part of a whole we consider it as pure idea. As Hegel taught in the Phenomenology of Spirit, the bud, flower and fruit of a plant are "moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole" (p.2). In order to comprehend the 'totality' of the plant, Hegel considered its changes as ideas, as 'mutually necessary' stages in the development of a reason that is immanent to

the life of the plant. The question here is whether this need to understand the meaning of things in terms of the idea of the totality of which they are a part requires philosophy to call itself idealism.

By raising these problems, which all revolve around the initial difficulty of the definition and scope of idealism, I am trying to 'dust off' a word which these days is falling into disrepute and even taking on a rather shabby appearance, despite its venerable ancestry and its possibilities as a force for inspiration and development. Although some people regard any efforts to rehabilitate idealism as no more than worthless speculation, it is a necessary task if philosophy is to retain any integrity. Defining the essence of reality is the main task of philosophy, and the only philosophy able to define essences is idealism.

## 11. Potential

Only in idealism can we look towards the future with any hope or faith, for the simple reason that idealism is the only philosophy with any confidence about the meaning of life and any ability to understand human potential. From the time of Plato's theory of ideas, potential has been understood in terms of essence, as the ideal standard on which material objects are modelled and the goal towards which creatures graced with free will can aspire. When we say somebody or something has potential, we always refer implicitly to an ideal possibility, an essence which may have been achieved in other instances but not yet in this case. The ideal dimensions of reality are contrasted against actual existence, which is identified with the immediate material appearance, and the ideal is viewed as the source of meaning that inspires actual activity.

Recognition of potential is a key goal of the understanding, and to do this we must look deeper than the superficial appearance given in actuality, toward the essence of the thing. The conclusion we must draw from this identification of essence and potential is that idealism is the only way of thinking that has any grasp on the meaning of potential. In so far as any other philosophies depart from the mundane world of actuality to think about potential they will be engaging in idealism, and not only in a semantic sense, but because thought about possibilities is the only foundation of the idealistic hope that people can have the power to transform a situation by virtue of free will.

## 12. Science - Idealism, Realism and Nominalism

So why, given its distinguished history, is the philosophy of idealism so often condemned as mere sentiment devoid of reason? One partial answer I would like to explore here is the fact that ideas have only been viewed with the

suspicion we are used to in the modern world since the comparatively recent domination of the intellectual life achieved by the physical sciences and their methods. Science developed the prejudice in the seventeenth century, through Descartes and Galileo, of excluding from consideration any attitudes which lacked mathematical rigour. This tendency consolidated itself to the status of dogma with the rise of positivism.

David Hume's discovery and refutation of what Moore was to call the naturalistic fallacy, the derivation of an 'ought' from an 'is', or of a value from a fact, entrenched the positivistic separation of science from metaphysics and of logic from ethics. The main content of idealism is ethics, so as science came to regard ethics as something for personal emotion rather than objective reason, the philosophy of idealism appeared as increasingly irrelevant to progressive science. This prejudice against idealism has often meant that wholistic ideas have been neglected as unscientific, not because of any lack of truth but because they use different methods to the rigorous scientific observation and experiment demanded by positivism. Any acceptance of a role for ethical idealism in philosophy limits the explanatory power of scientific positivism, because idealism begins with words and ideas rather than with numbers or things, and so it requires a qualitatively different method of learning.

In mediæval times, by contrast, the study of ideas was the main activity of scholarship, and the philosophy now known as idealism was able to call itself realism, because it asserted the reality of abstract entities or ideas. The philosophy now known as realism was then disparaged with the title 'nominalism', and is especially associated with the fourteenth century teaching of William of Ockham that an idea is no more than the name of a thing. So Ockham's Razor, or the principle of economy of thought, is used to say that conceptual 'entities' have no reality apart from their function of naming real things. Nominalism retained Plato's distinction between knowledge and belief, but moved the moral ideals, which Plato had placed at the apex of his system, from the realm of episteme to that of doxa.

Nominalism won the struggle against realism, and its victory is reflected in the sceptical opposition of contemporary calculative thought to any speculation not founded on mathematics. The hegemony over realism now exercised by scientific method originated in this period of transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, and to give modern thought its due, it must be admitted that the transition was one from the stagnation of feudalism to the dynamism of capitalism, and from a backward looking geocentric philosophy to the outward looking mathematics of heliocentric science. Scientific realism prospered both by

virtue of its explanatory achievements and because of its affinity with the emerging capitalist philosophy of individualist materialism.

The problem was that in advancing from the material deficiencies of feudalism, scientific capitalism also abandoned the old realist insights into the meaning of life, and as a result impoverished its own spirit. As Hegel put it, "it has taken a long time before the lucidity which only heavenly things used to have could penetrate the dullness and confusion in which the sense of worldly things was enveloped . . . . Now we seem to need just the opposite: sense is so fast rooted in earthly things that it requires just as much force to raise it" (P.o.S.:8).

The point is that Ockham's Razor may be attractive and useful, but the question which should be more important is whether it is correct; whether its subordination of truth to usefulness has the result of pruning our conceptual baggage so far that ideas of real worth are squeezed out of consideration. The feudal worldview, although it was factually wrong, politically barbaric and economically stagnant, did have the virtue of giving the individual a place within a meaningful cosmos evolving according to a definite purpose in harmony with the will of God. This sense of meaning and purpose has been abandoned by modern thought, often to our short term advantage, but also to our long term detriment. We should not hold to modern views for the sole reason that they provide material benefits: all their implications, spiritual and emotional as well as material, should be considered in determining their worth.

The question which must be asked of the scientific subordination of truth to usefulness is whether it is the only worthwhile method of instruction. In the context of philosophy, where truth is the main goal, it is always important to step back from the practical applications of learning and ponder some of the larger questions that inevitably arise. This obligation can create tensions within philosophy, because when modern views about how thought should proceed are used to investigate the history of ideas, a reappraisal of common negative attitudes towards the idealistic thought of pre-modern times will be warranted.

Modern methods of thought demand that philosophy should be rational, critical, systematic and fundamental. To be rational, thought must be constructed according to logical reason; to be critical it must continually examine itself and past philosophy for errors; to be systematic it must include all things in the ambit of its study; to be fundamental it must base itself on the foundation of true reality. Descartes' method of 'clear and distinct ideas', Hume's empirical theories of primary and secondary qualities, and Kant's critical philosophy are systems of thought which share these methodological guidelines.

Problems arise however, when we seek to put these methodological rules into practice. If they are to cohere with each other, then they will require a more open attitude towards the positive elements of pre-modern thought than was originally allowed. So for example David Hume attacked the innate idea of substance as mediæval superstition, but then contradicted his principle by treating 'human nature' as just such an unchanging fixed notion (cf. Collingwood, p.81). If even such a resolute opponent of idealism as Hume could not completely escape from substantialist metaphysics in his attempts to understand the world, how can anyone say now that we have nothing to learn from the philosophy of antiquity and the Middle Ages?

## 13. Metaphysics - Kant

There are perennial ideas that arise and must be confronted whenever philosophy makes ideas rather than things the object of study. By virtue of its essential nature as the discipline that seeks to critically and rationally explore the fundamental system of reality as a whole, philosophy must inevitably move in the spaces occupied by such difficult words as metaphysics, transcendence, and the absolute. Perhaps because of the inherent difficulty of these concepts, but also because of the real defects in the thought of those who have used them, especially Christian theologians, people dislike even thinking about such words. Such language conjures up a picture of a relation to the infinite which leaves people treading on thin air. It cannot be fitted into the finite practicality required by modern education, so any talk of transcendence or absolute truth is dismissed as obsolete and speculative.

This negative estimation of the value of metaphysics is based more on prejudice than on rational consideration of the questions metaphysics seeks to answer, because metaphysics is the core discipline of the philosophy of idealism, and idealism is ultimately the only coherent and realistic world view. The best evidence for this, apart perhaps from Plato, is found in the philosophy of Kant, who taught that the only way philosophy can be rational and systematic is by laying a foundation for thought in the recognition of the unity of the mind. Only from this basis are the priority and value of all things potentially comprehensible. Laying the foundation of metaphysics means investigating the connections between abstract concepts, what Kant called the transcendental schematism of the categories of the pure understanding. The idealist recognition that spirit has priority over matter for human understanding is based on the fact that intelligence is the capability of mind to grasp connections between different ideas. It is in perceiving connections that rational understanding is most in evidence, but the

point of idealism is that connections are only ever perceived when the things in question are represented conceptually.

Kant's "inevitable problems of pure reason", which arise as soon as this task of defining conceptual relations is attempted, are the existence of God, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the soul. "The science which with all its apparatus is really intended for the solution of these problems is called metaphysics" (Critique of Pure Reason A:3). With his doctrine that we can only know things as they appear to us (phenomena) and not as they are in themselves (noumena), Kant retained and developed the idealist maxim that connections between things are intrinsically conceptual. He inferred from this that the laws of nature must conform to our minds rather than the reverse, because the known world is a construct of thought.

Kant also maintained that facts, which he identified with scientifically known phenomena, must be strictly separated from values, whose source, whether it be divine command or the categorical imperative to do one's duty, is in the noumenal reality of things in themselves. But if things in themselves cannot be known as facts by reason, and the authority of values derives from their basis in absolute reality in itself, then values cannot be grounded in reason. So the human faculty of reason is concerned only with phenomenal facts, while the basis for noumenal values is in faith. Although this teaching earned Kant the title of the "all-destroyer" among the pious for its demolition of St Thomas Aquinas' proofs of the existence of God, his critical philosophy clearly recognised the necessity and validity of the traditional concerns of metaphysics, but parted from scholasticism with its requirement that proofs of reason be confirmed by sense experience. This is impossible for metaphysical beliefs such as the existence of God, so Kant held metaphysical truths to be objects of faith rather than reason and disparaged the view that metaphysical truths can be proved by reason as 'subjective idealism'.

## 14. Fact and Value

The underlying distinction between fact and value means that while science is certainly valuable as a source of quantitative knowledge, it can provide us with no guidance when the issues at hand are qualitative, in the aesthetic and moral sense of the word 'quality'. The necessity of metaphysics, and so of idealism, arises from the fact that we must make ethical and aesthetic judgements using qualitative rather than quantitative criteria, and it is precisely such judgements that are central to philosophy.

Ludwig Wittgenstein actually sought to show this in his Tractatus, when he wrote " about that which we cannot speak, we must remain silent".[1] His argument was that "the unsayable" alone has genuine moral or aesthetic value (221), so he was saying something very different from the logical positivist insult, "metaphysicians shut your traps", which was how his words were widely interpreted. Wittgenstein sought to show that the meaning of qualitative values is "higher" than that of quantitative facts, although this higher truth cannot be expressed in normal language because it can only be indicated rather than demonstrated.

The qualitative questions of what values we should endorse stand equally alongside, and perhaps above, the quantitative problems of collection of facts, despite the fact that we are often told that only quantitative research is useful. The greatest philosophers, including Plato, Kant and Hegel, as well as Jesus Christ, Confucius and the Buddha, all agreed that the qualitative questions to which idealism alone can give any coherent answer, such as the quality of mercy, the quality of justice, and the quality of love, are of much more lasting importance than the collection of information, because they alone treat the fundamental questions of human existence. Perhaps this helps explain why the philosopher Wittgenstein insisted on reciting the poetry of the Indian mystic Tagore to the positivist Rudolf Carnap when they met to discuss mathematical logic (ibid 215).

Idealism, which is the only philosophy that can make the qualitative issues of human values central, maintains that spirit alone is truly real, despite appearances to the contrary. This is not at all to suggest that material things do not exist, but rather that their real meaning and essence, and hence their existence, can only be understood as spiritual. Reflection on the context in which philosophy operates will show why this must be so.

## 15. Persistence to Eternity

The first thing we can observe about this context is the importance of philosophy avoiding preoccupation with the present moment alone. The search for truth requires a wider horizon than the instant gratification beloved by technocratic materialism, since the field of existence, which philosophy must recognise as relevant in its totality, stretches to the beginning and end of time. All eternity is potentially open to philosophical study, because the past exists as 'having been' and the future exists as 'coming to be'. So because all times are

[1] (Wittgenstein's Vienna by Janik and Toulmin, p. 219)

equally real, all times must be taken into account in thinking about the ultimate priorities of reality.

This leads to a logical argument: given that eternity is the ultimate context of philosophy, and given also that something which has existence and influence over thousands or millions of years obviously has more reality in the total scheme of things than a material object with a life span of ten or twenty years, it follows that real existence can be understood in terms of persistence through time. Therefore something intangible which has effects stretching over a long period of time, for instance a geological era such as the Jurassic, is more real than something tangible, like a particular dinosaur, which only affected a very small area for a short period of time. Similarly an intangible like love, which manifests itself in all ages, has more reality than one marriage, however loving that particular couple may be.

The point of these observations is that in the human context the ideas by which material objects are understood have greater capacity to persist through time than do the material things themselves, and in some cases, especially with moral values, ideas persist to the extent that they can be regarded as eternal truths. If ideas are actually more potent and creative forces for change in history than is any material thing, then we should conclude that from the genuinely human perspective ideas possess more reality than material objects. By 'genuinely human' I mean the perspective that seeks to understand things at the level of personal reflective experience by situating things in a whole context of meaning, as contrasted against the naive realism of immediate sense perception.

## 16. Concrete

To draw out some implications of these arguments, consider the case of concrete, a substance made of gravel and cement that has often been considered the epitome of the material. If the logic of the argument presented here is valid, especially in the case of the argument about 'persistence through time' being a criterion of reality, concrete has more real being as pure idea than as matter. The basis for this claim is the fact that human knowledge of the technology of concrete construction, which is the ultimate cause of the existence of all material concrete, has persisted through time longer than any single concrete object. Aqueducts and freeways eventually crumble, but the theoretical knowledge of how to create concrete has been a human possession since before the Roman Empire, and is likely to remain with us after most of the buildings now in use have fallen down, so this theoretical knowledge, which is the same as the universal idea of concrete, actually has more ultimate reality than any particular

concrete thing. Appearances would suggest that the material existence of buildings is the most real manifestation of concrete, but when we reflect on this in more depth it becomes clear that the essence of the technique of construction is the real basis of the existence of this substance. The technique is not simply physical, but is primarily a function of human memory and understanding, which are responsible for directing and causing the practical work. Because these intellectual faculties persist through time more than their material creations, the idea has more reality than the thing.

When I see a concrete building and think about what it means to say it exists, the first questions that usually come to mind include why and how it was built, and what it is used for. I do not ordinarily ask how it is that I perceive it, because answering this question will tell me nothing about the meaning of the fact that the building exists. However its existence is clearly mind dependent: it was created at the direction of human minds according to specific methods and for a definite purpose. So it appears that the existence of concrete does depend on the mind, but it is the mind of its creator rather than that of its perceiver. A result of these observations is that the question of what philosophy should recognise as real cannot be settled by mere empirical intuition alone, because excessive reliance on sense perception will give a distorted and even false understanding of the true nature of reality.

## 17. Berkeley

Far from supporting Bishop Berkeley's strange belief that matter does not exist, these arguments for idealism actually contradict his position. It is important to consider Berkeley's philosophy here, because for many people his ideas are synonymous with idealism and his errors condemn all idealism to irrelevance. Berkeley may have been correct in his claim that investigating the connections between ideas is the main task of philosophy, but he was mistaken in his conclusion from this that an idea can only be connected to another idea, and not to a thing. Most everyday ideas are connected to things, and they do represent and refer to real objects. While the idea has more reality than the matter, which is why idealism is true, it is ridiculous to suggest that matter has no reality.

Even if the only connections we can definitely discern are those between an idea and another idea, Berkeley is wrong to place such emphasis on the role of proof. The obsession with proof arises from within the framework of the scientific dichotomy between subject and object, but what is more important than such epistemological theorising is intuitive reflection about priorities and values, and the practice of ethics that follows from such reflection.

Neither being nor knowledge depend on perception, although both are essentially ideal in nature. The being of an object, like its idea, involves more than just matter, so being must be explained in idealist terms, but this does not mean that being is dependent on perception because it is an objective property of matter. Not even conscious knowledge in the mind of the subject is always dependent on perception. Much knowledge arises from the intelligent comprehension of words or numbers and has nothing to do with perception except as the eyes and ears are the media for ideas. For example in solving a mathematical problem, our knowledge is not of what we see, but of what the symbols before us represent.

So Berkeley's excessive regard for empirical perception led him to mistaken views about being and about knowledge. When it comes to meaning, which sits in the relation between subject and object and so cannot be satisfactorily explained within the dichotomous logic of science, Berkeley has no idea at all. The explanation that anything not perceived by a person must be perceived by God is no help, because it is no more than a statement of divine omniscience. His expedient use of God robs the original argument that to be is to be perceived of any significance, because if everything is perceived by God then this fact of being perceived can hardly be the distinguishing mark of existence, and Berkeley's claim that being is dependent on perception is absurd.

Difficulties arise however, when we go to the opposite extreme from Berkeley and say that ideas are only the names of things, which is the nominalist view. Many abstract concepts used in the formulation of ethical values and elsewhere in the history of ideas do not have a primary epistemological reference to a thing, because their meaning transcends their material use. Such ideas possess an independent universal significance, and as Plato saw, it is with ethical universals that the true importance of idealism emerges, because the content of the universal idea is more than the sum of its instances.

Berkeley's mistake was to confuse the relation between ideas and things by assuming a philosophical priority for epistemological speculation about the empirical nature of perception, and thereby assuming a perspective already completely dominated by the subject-object dichotomy of modern science. For example his work Principles of Human Knowledge seeks to rescue faith in God from within the scientific model of knowledge, and completely fails to realise that the real meaning of ethical qualities such as justice and love cannot be found by using this positivistic perspective, because I cannot have a relationship of mutuality with something I am trying to dissect. Berkeley completely missed the centrality of ethics to the genuine spirit of idealism when he made God the

guarantor of his epistemology: he abandoned the Biblical sense of the divine as grace and love and thereby lost the vision of holiness as a transformative power for ethical renewal.

The subject-object dichotomy is necessary for quantitative research, but is inappropriate when the qualitative ideas which underpin social values are the topic of study. To understand the meaning of ideas it is necessary to be involved as a participant in the process of their realisation, and what this requires is dynamic concern rather than detached observation. But Berkeley accepted Descartes' method of scepticism about the existence of material things, and so he expended enormous energy on a false answer to a false problem, the age old exercise of explaining how to prove the reality of the external world.

It is only from within the subject-object dichotomy that this desire for a proof of external reality can be comprehended. It assumes that the theory of empirical knowledge is the only possible starting point of philosophy, and so destroys any religious confidence in the transcendent ethical values of love and justice, values whose acceptance would undermine the need for such a proof. In the contrasting context of ethical idealism, a person's identity is partly constituted by relationship to others and to the divine, and an intimate connection to the world of human concern is a basic assumption in no need of proof. Because Berkeley is so preoccupied with the problem of how detached observation is possible, he ignores this alternative point of departure for philosophy. Instead he articulates a significant moment of confusion in the history of thought. Berkeley's schizophrenia was to genuinely hold a relationship with God to be the origin of understanding, but to then describe this understanding in terms of a theory of knowledge in which the only real instructive part played by God is to guarantee facts, but never values. So, by a trick of logic, Berkeley gave up ethics as a major concern of philosophy.

Dr Johnson attempted to refute Berkeley's idea that reality is all in the mind when he proved the reality of the external world by kicking a stone. The significance of this 'kick test' is that it demonstrates the inadequacy and confusion of Berkeley's position, but the use to which it has been put is not so constructive. Because Berkeley has been identified in the eyes of some analytical thinkers with idealism in general, Dr Johnson's method has been used by so called "common sense" to support a general denigration of spiritual reflection, and in some contexts it has been extrapolated into a total cynicism about the importance of abstract ethical ideals.

The 'kick test' is very limited in its application however, because while you can kick a person in the head, you certainly cannot kick them in the mind, let

alone the soul. Rocks, cars, beds, footballs, perhaps even quasars and viruses, are all potentially kickable, but this method tells us virtually nothing about the nature of the reality we are confronting, let alone what the limits of the real are or why we should care about it. Such complex and profound issues requires a lot more thought and reflection before they can be adequately resolved. As I argued above, philosophy does not even begin until we get past realising that things exist and start asking what and why they are. The traditional view of idealism, which I am seeking to support here, is that reality must be understood in terms of a teleological purpose founded upon ethical ideals such as love and justice. The ideal qualities of the human soul, which include reason, imagination and will, are also fundamental to our world, and ultimately these manifestation of the spirit are more real than physical objects because it is through them that humanity comes into relation to the absolute.

## 18. Materialism

The conflicting argument, that matter alone is real, has often paraded itself as a refutation of idealism, but it does not stand up to critical analysis because of its incapacity to explain either the reality of human values or the nature of language. Materialism likes to call itself realism, and in this guise it has become the dominant ideology of modern secular society, but because its method degrades the value of the human mind and spirit to just another set of "masses in motion", it must be seriously doubted whether such a reductive philosophy is actually very realistic at all. Materialism is actually pernicious in its influence, because it sanctions the neglect of ethical values which ought to be at the centre of philosophy. These ethical values include not only the Platonic ideals of goodness, wisdom, justice, love, holiness, temperance, courage and truth, but also such varied modern ideals as ecology, progress, freedom, democracy, human rights and peace. None of these can be explained by materialism alone, because their meaning depends on an interconnectedness between things in which the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts, a paradox for materialism.

## 19. Christ

The refutation of materialism is the realisation that values which depend on the primacy of the human spirit are central to philosophy, and the great historic statement of these values is the Christian tradition of ethical idealism, a tradition that embodies some of the greatest achievements of the human spirit. The letters of Saint Paul are one such achievement, and they are a source well worth

studying if we want to gain some understanding of how humankind has encountered the truth of life. Like those in the dialogues of Plato, the insights into the foundations of the spiritual perspective on the universe contained in Paul's Epistles display a profound understanding of the real ideals of philosophy.

In Pauls' eyes, God definitely has the supremely instructive place within the human quest for understanding. At the same time, God casts light on the problems of ethics, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, in a way that completely destroys the possibility of understanding reality by means of the subject-object dichotomy of scientific materialism. Christian idealism demands a practice of justice and mercy in which the self is let go. The Christian outlook is oriented towards the possibility of an ideal transformation of the world from its current fallen state into a system where broken and alienated relationships will be restored by the love of God. This depends on the transcendent reality revealing itself by grace, rather than on the power of human beings to recover our lost harmony by our own unaided efforts. So Paul taught that in the Kingdom of Christ "God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians.15:28) when all things on earth are reconciled to God through the power of the cross (Colossians.1.20).

Immediately here we confront one of the most difficult notions at the centre of idealism, an idea anticipated by Plato and Parmenides, the monotheistic idea of God as all in all. "All in all" refers our thought to the vastest reality and the ultimate truth, whether this truth is within the history of time or beyond the universe in the eternal mind of God. In the human context, it indicates the hope for a situation where relationship with others becomes a universal reality and all artificial barriers between people are broken down. And so Paul teaches that the day will come when "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). This will only happen when people are turned from their ignorance and inspired by an understanding of truth, for "to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the spirit is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). The point of these teachings is that God cannot yet be perceived as all in all, but this is only because of the inability of humanity to set our minds on the spirit. Instead, human selfishness and materialism make people rely on their own vision of reality in isolation. The true meaning and hope of Paul's idealism is that while people are now alienated from their original divine nature, if God were known as all in all, each individual would have a meaningful place within the totality, because authentic spiritual relationships would be restored as the basis for human society.

The scientific method of complete dichotomy between subject and object is a symptom of this alienation, because science demands separation and

classification rather than reconciliation. Science is a wonderful source of knowledge, but it is not absolute because it cannot satisfy the needs of the human soul for spiritual fulfillment, and because it falsely teaches that matter comes before spirit. However as Saint John taught, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." (John 1: 1&14) And so we can remain with the vision of the centrality of Christ as the greatest statement of the philosophy of idealism. If all things begin with the Word, then the spirit is the heart of truth, and the idea is the origin of all nature.