

This process, however, is facilitated as our perceptive faculties become more educated and acquired; and experience is ever at hand to correct our mistakes.

It is evident, then, that all knowledge must be obtained by either perception or reasoning, and from no other sources. Then, as all knowledge obtained by reasoning is derived from known conceptions or facts already existing in the mind, the primary source of all knowledge is pure perception, either external or internal. The only alternative then of acquiring knowledge, is to be able either to actually perceive the object itself or to evolve the fact inceptively from the known conceptions containing it already existing in the mind—that is, by reasoning.

The various processes of perception and reasoning are so fully set forth in the subsequent part of this book, that it is needless here to enlarge more on the subject, except to point out some differences in our views from those of others who have written on the same subject.

Some maintain, for example, that the fact that two straight lines cannot enclose space, is obtained in the absence of actual visual perception by an act of primary judgment. We assert, on the contrary, that we obtain it by an act of reasoning. We take (1) the conception of one straight line; and (2) the conception of another straight line, and putting them mentally in all possible relations to one another, inceive (3) in conclusion, that two straight lines cannot enclose space. We regard, then, what is called an act of judgment to be merely an act of reasoning, except in those cases where the term judgment is misapplied to what is properly a perception.

Mansel holds that conception (what we call inception or knowledge by reasoning), apart from perception, is possible only under the form of symbolical or verbal representation; that is, we cannot reason from purely ideal conceptions unrepresented by words, etc.

This we hold to be altogether incorrect. It is the purely ideal conception that keeps the representative words right, and not the representative words that keep the pure conception right. The mind always looks beyond the words to the idea or conception itself, else the garbage of words would continually lead astray. As illustrative of this, mark the following. The sun gives light; feathers are light: therefore the sun gives feathers.

Some philosophers insist that knowledge is possible only by relativity or comparison—that is, in order to know an object you must know it in relation or in comparison with other objects. We do not admit this, without some qualification, to be true. We affirm that a thing may be known both in and by itself, and also in relation or in comparison with others. They are two different kinds of knowledge; the first kind simple and confined to the object alone which we wish to know; the second, mutual and extending to the object with which it is to be compared. In regard to knowledge generally, if we know a thing itself, we need to know none of its surroundings. The surroundings are no part of the thing itself, but only its associated phenomena; and therefore the knowledge of its surroundings is no part of the knowledge of the thing.

If we wish, however, to know a thing in the relation of comparison with others, the knowledge which we acquire in this way is more definite only in the sense of mutual relation to the thing compared with it—not more definite in the sense of real absolute knowledge than that which we obtain of a thing independently of all comparison with other things.

That we can definitely know a thing without comparison with others at all is evident from the fact that in all comparison, two things being thought of, the mind has first to possess a known conception of each before it can mentally actually compare. The objects, or points in them, must first be perceived and known before they can be placed alongside one another in the mind in the act of comparison. Real actual knowledge of the objects must therefore exist in the mind before comparison is possible; and the knowledge arising from comparison differs in its character from the former only in being that of mutual comparative relation. It is in no sense more real.

Subjective Sensation, or Feeling; in other words, Subjective Senses, or Feelings.

We have already spoken freely of the nature of objective physical sensation—that particular mental affection due to the nervous organization in connection with the five senses: sight, touch, etc.—by which presentations of outward things flash up objectively in and before the mind as things to be perceived, but not as affecting the internal state of the mind or of the perceiving subject itself. We have also briefly referred to another kind of sensation, called subjective physical sensation, which is absolutely distinct from objective physical sensation, being felt or perceived as a state of the perceiving mind itself, and not as a mere picture or presentation exterior to it. This latter kind of sensation is but a branch of that kind of sensation of which we now intend mainly to speak, and which may in a general manner be called subjective sensation or feeling, because it is always perceived as a state of the perceiving subject itself. Subjective physical sensation, therefore, is but one class of the subjective senses or feelings, differing from the other classes chiefly in having a physical source.