SOME MAIN PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

GEORGE EDWARD MOORE
O.M., LITT.D., HON.LL.D., F.B.A.
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
and Fellow of Trinity College
in the University of Cambridge

LONDON - GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD.
NEW YORK - THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1953

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, 1911, no portion may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Inquiry should be made to the publishers.
Foreword

When I urged Professor Moore to publish these lectures which he gave some forty years ago he said to me 'But surely they are out of date.' Certainly they are out of date. Moore's own work in philosophy over these forty years is by itself enough to render them out of date. Anyone hearing these lectures at the time they were given might have guessed that they would soon be out of date. For in these lectures philosophy is done with a directness and honesty and incisiveness which at once gives hope that we may, working with Moore, soon cut a way out of the jungle into the light. It is the same hope we felt when we read what we still read—Moore's *Principia Ethica* and his *Philosophical Studies*. That hope was justified.

Amongst the problems which agitate philosophers there are two which, I think, strike the non-philosopher as especially remote, as typically frivolous. They are the problem of the external world and the problem of general ideas.

When the philosopher asks 'Do we really know what things are good and what are bad?', when he asks 'What is goodness?' the plain man sympathizes. When the philosopher asks 'Do we really know of the existence of mind?' 'How do we know the past?' 'What do we mean when we speak of consciousness or of what no longer exists?' the plain man may still manage to sympathize. But when the philosopher asks 'Do we really know that there is bread here and now in our mouths?' 'What do we mean when we speak of chairs and tables?' then the whole thing is apt to seem ridiculous to the plain man.

And when the philosopher then asks 'What is it to mean anything?' 'What is it to have a general idea of anything?' 'What is it to have a universal before the mind, to notice its presence in something before one?' 'What is it for a quality to be present in this and also in that?' then to the plain man it seems that the philosopher is getting himself into a difficulty by asking for the reduction to something more simple of what couldn't be simpler.

Moore manages to present these central, limiting, typical problems in such a way that the reader in spite of himself begins to feel them. And without this feeling of the difficulty there can be no full understanding of what it is to remove it. The idea that there is nothing much to make a fuss about is as fatal as the idea that nothing
much can be done about it. For this reason alone Moore’s introduction to philosophical difficulties can help us to judge and to understand the most modern attempts to resolve them. But further the ruthless clarity with which Moore shows us the pathless jungle before us helps us to realize what must be done to get through. There is no path. We must cut a way from tree to tree.

It often happens of course that one cannot tell where one wishes to go until one starts. But there are times when it is timely to ask ‘Now where am I trying to go?’ Moore has always reminded us of this. One thing he has always sought to keep before us is the difference between questions as to what is actually the case and questions as to what it is logically possible should be the case, the meanings of our words being what they are. In him too we find a habit of thought which, carried further by Wittgenstein, led to enormous advances—the study of the meaning of general terms by consideration of concrete cases.

JOHN WISDOM
Preface

I hope Professor Wisdom was right in thinking that this book was worth publishing. It consists of twenty lectures which I delivered at Morley College in London in the winter of 1910-11, the first ten being given before Christmas, and the second ten after. And I think I should have had less hope that they were worth publishing had I not thought (perhaps mistakenly) that, though much of them is no doubt ‘out of date,’ yet they also contain much which is as yet by no means out of date.

My audience were invited after each lecture to raise questions about what I had said in it, and it is to one of the resulting discussions that the first sentence of Chapter XV refers.

The lectures are now printed substantially in the form in which they were delivered. I have made a good many verbal changes, substituting for an expression which I used in the lectures another expression which I now think expresses my meaning better. But I could not make such changes everywhere: my old terminology still appears in many places; and I have therefore added footnotes explaining where I now think it to be incorrect. In Chapters XIX and XX, however, I have made more extensive alterations, though only by omission—omission of several pages, which seem to me now both confused and confusing and not to make any substantial addition to what I was saying. I have, therefore, I believe, retained the substance even of these two chapters, and have added an Appendix to explain what seem to me to be the chief defects in what I have retained.

I am well aware that there are a good many positive mistakes in what is here printed; and there is besides a good deal of repetition, since I often repeated at the beginning of a lecture part of what I had said in the preceding one, hoping, in some cases, to make my meaning clearer.

There are two matters about which I should have added footnotes, had I noticed them earlier; and I should like to mention them briefly here. The first is the view which I express on p. 128, that it is possible that some material objects occupy merely points or lines or areas. This now seems to me to be a complete mistake: nothing, I should say, can be properly called either a material thing or a part of a material thing, unless it occupies a volume—though, of course, the volume may be extremely small. This point is, of course,
connected with my mistake (pointed out on p. 34, note 2) in supposing that a surface can be properly called a "part" of a material thing. The second point about which I ought to have added a footnote concerns the relation between what I say about propositions in Chapter III and what I say about them in Chapter XIV, pp. 265-6, and again in XVII, p. 309. In III, p. 56, I say "There certainly are in the Universe such things as propositions", whereas in XIV (p. 256) I say that I am recommending a view about the analysis of belief which may be expressed by saying "There simply are no such things as propositions", and in XVII (p. 309) I say "I don't now believe that there are such things as propositions at all". Now this looks as if, when I wrote XIV and XVII, I had abandoned the very view which in III I had declared to be certainly true; and certainly I had, if in III I had been using the expression 'There are such things as propositions' in the same sense in which I was using it in XIV and XVII. But I now feel doubtful whether in III I had been using that expression merely in that sense. I think it is possible that in III I was using it, partly at least, in such a sense that the truth of what it expresses would follow from the mere fact that such expressions as 'I believe the proposition that the sun is larger than the moon' are perfectly correct ways of expressing something which is often true—as they certainly are; whereas in XIV and XVII I was using 'There are such things as propositions' in a way which is perhaps more doubtfully correct, namely in such a way that it would not express a truth unless such expressions as 'I believe the proposition that the sun is larger than the moon' can be correctly analysed in a certain way—which is a very different usage.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that Chapters I-X are the 'unpublished writings' of mine, to which Lord Russell refers in the Preface to The Problems of Philosophy.

I should like finally to acknowledge very gratefully my obligations to the Editor of the Muirhead Library, Professor H. D. Lewis. He not only took upon himself the labour of suggesting titles for my Chapters—titles which I was only too glad to adopt, with one or two slight alterations; he also made such alterations at the beginning of each lecture as were necessary to adapt it for book-form; and, finally, by taking the trouble to read through the whole of the page-proofs, he discovered misprints which had escaped my notice and which would have disfigured the book.

G. E. MOORE
Contents

FOREWORD page ix
PREFACE xi
I What is Philosophy? 1
II Sense-Data 28
III Propositions 52
IV Ways of Knowing 72
V Hume's Theory 89
VI Hume's Theory Examined 108
VII Material Things 127
VIII Existence in Space 145
IX Existence in Time 164
X The Notion of Infinity 182
XI Is Time Real? 201
XII The Meaning of 'Real' 216
XIII Imagination and Memory 234
XIV Beliefs and Propositions 252
XV True and False Beliefs 270
XVI Being, Fact and Existence 288
XVII Truths and Universals 306
XVIII Relations, Properties and Resemblance 321
XIX Disjunctive and Other Properties 336
XX Abstractions and Being 353
APPENDIX 374
INDEX 379
Chapter I
WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

I want, as a start, to try to give you a general idea of what philosophy is: or, in other words, what sort of questions it is that philosophers are constantly engaged in discussing and trying to answer. I want to begin in this way for two reasons. In the first place, by doing this, I shall be giving you some idea of what the problems are which I myself mean to discuss in the rest of this course. And, in the second place, I think it is the best way of beginning any discussion of the main problems of philosophy. By attempting to give, first of all, a general sketch or outline of the whole subject, you point out how the different separate problems are connected with one another and can give a better idea of their relative importance.

I am going, then, first of all to try to give a description of the whole range of philosophy. But this is not at all an easy thing to do. It is not easy, because, when you come to look into the matter, you find that philosophers have in fact discussed an immense variety of different sorts of questions; and it is very difficult to give any general description, which will embrace all of these questions, and also very difficult to arrange them properly in relation to one another. I cannot hope really to do more than to indicate roughly the main sorts of questions with which philosophers are concerned, and to point out some of the most important connections between these questions. I will try to begin by describing those questions which seem to me to be the most important and the most generally interesting, and will then go on to those which are subordinate.

To begin with, then, it seems to me that the most important and interesting thing which philosophers have tried to do is no less than this; namely: To give a general description of the whole of the Universe, mentioning all the most important kinds of things which we know to be in it, considering how far it is likely that there are in it important kinds of things which we do not absolutely know to be in it, and also considering the most important ways in which these various kinds of things are related to one another. I will call all this; for short, 'Giving a general description of the whole Universe', and
hence will say that the first and most important problem of philosophy is: To give a general description of the whole Universe. Many philosophers (though by no means all) have, I think, certainly tried to give such a description: and the very different descriptions which different philosophers have given are, I think, among the most important differences between them. And the problem is, it seems to me, plainly one which is peculiar to philosophy. There is no other science which tries to say: Such and such kinds of things are the only kinds of things that there are in the Universe, or which we know to be in it. And I will now try to explain more clearly, by means of examples, exactly what I mean by this first problem—exactly what I mean by a general description of the whole Universe. I will try, that is, to mention the most important differences between the descriptions given by different philosophers. And I wish, for a particular reason, to begin in a particular way. There are, it seems to me, certain views about the nature of the Universe, which are held, now-a-days, by almost everybody. They are so universally held that they may, I think, fairly be called the views of Common Sense. I do not know that Common Sense can be said to have any views about the whole Universe: none of its views, perhaps, amount to this. But it has, I think, very definite views to the effect that certain kinds of things certainly are in the Universe, and as to some of the ways in which these kinds of things are related to one another. And I wish to begin by describing these views, because it seems to me that what is most amazing and most interesting about the views of many philosophers, is the way in which they go beyond or positively contradict the views of Common Sense: they profess to know that there are in the Universe most important kinds of things, which Common Sense does not profess to know of, and also they profess to know that there are not in the Universe (or, at least, that, if there are, we do not know it), things of the existence of which Common Sense is most sure. I think, therefore, you will best realise what these philosophical descriptions of the Universe really mean, by realising how very different they are from the views of Common Sense—how far, in some points, they go beyond Common Sense, and how absolutely, in others, they contradict it. I wish, therefore, to begin by describing what I take to be the most important views of Common Sense: things which we all commonly assume to be true about the Universe, and which we are sure that we know to be true about it.

To begin with, then, it seems to me we certainly believe that there are in the Universe enormous numbers of material objects, of one
WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

We know, for instance, that there are upon the surface of the earth, besides our own bodies, the bodies of millions of other men; we know that there are the bodies of millions of other animals; millions of plants too; and, besides all these, an even greater number of inanimate objects—mountains, and all the stones upon them, grains of sand, different sorts of minerals and soils, all the drops of water in rivers and in the sea, and moreover ever so many different objects manufactured by men; houses and chairs and tables and railway engines, etc., etc. But, besides all these things upon the surface of the earth, there is the earth itself—an enormous mass of matter. And we believe too, nowadays, that the earth itself, and all that is in it or upon it, huge as it seems to us, is absurdly small in comparison with the whole material Universe. We are accustomed to the idea that the sun and moon and all the immense number of visible stars, are each of them great masses of matter, and most of them many times larger than the earth. We are accustomed, too, to the idea that they are situated at such huge distances from us that any distance from point to point upon the surface of the earth is absurdly small in comparison. All this we now believe about the material Universe: it is surely Common Sense to believe it all. But, as you know, there was a time when it was by no means Common Sense to believe some of these things: there was a time when nobody believed some of them. There was a time when there were not nearly so many men upon the earth as there are now; and when those who were upon it did not know how many there were. They believed only in the existence of a comparatively small number of human bodies beside their own; of a comparatively small number of animals and plants; and they had no idea how large the surface of the earth was. They believed, too, that the heavenly bodies were small compared to the earth, and at comparatively short distances from the earth. But I think I am right in saying we now believe that these primitive views about the material Universe were certainly wrong. We should say that we know that they were wrong: we have discovered that they were wrong: and this discovery is part of our progress in knowledge. But though there are thus some things about which the views of Common Sense have changed: yet, so far as concerns the point that there are in the Universe a great number of material objects, it has, so far as we know, remained the same. So far as we know, men have believed this almost as long as they have believed anything: they have always believed in the existence of a great many material objects.
But, now, besides material objects, we believe also that there are in the Universe certain phenomena very different from material objects. In short, we believe that we men, besides having bodies, also have minds; and one of the chief things which we mean, by saying we have minds, is, I think, this: namely, that we perform certain mental acts or acts of consciousness. That is to say, we see and hear and feel and remember and imagine and think and believe and desire and like and dislike and will and love and are angry and afraid, etc. These things that we do are all of them mental acts—acts of mind or acts of consciousness: whenever we do any of them, we are conscious of something: each of them partly consists in our being conscious of something in some way or other: and it seems to me that the thing of which we are most certain, when we say we are certain that we have minds, is that we do these things—that we perform these acts of consciousness. At all events we are certain that we do perform them and that these acts are something very different from material objects. To hear is not itself a material object, however closely it may be related to certain material objects; and so on with all the rest—seeing, remembering, feeling, thinking, etc. These things, these acts of consciousness are certainly not themselves material objects. And yet we are quite certain that there are immense numbers of them in the Universe. Every one of us performs immense numbers of them every day and all day long: we are perpetually seeing different things, hearing different things, thinking of different things, remembering different things. We cease to perform them only while we are asleep, without dreaming; and even in sleep, so long as we dream, we are performing acts of consciousness. There are, therefore, in the Universe at any moment millions of different acts of consciousness being performed by millions of different men, and perhaps also by many kinds of animals. It is, I think, certainly Common Sense to believe all this.

So far, then, we have seen that Common Sense believes that there are in the Universe, at least two different kinds of things. There are, to begin with, enormous numbers of material objects; and there are also a very great number of mental acts or acts of Consciousness.

But Common Sense has also, I think, certain very definite views as to the way in which these two kinds of things are related to one another. But, before I explain what these views are, I must first mention something which we believe to be true of absolutely all the material objects which I have mentioned—and, indeed, not only of them but of all objects which we should commonly call material objects at all.
WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

We believe, in fact, of all material objects, that each of them is, at any given moment, situated somewhere or other in something which we call space. And by saying that they are all of them in space, we mean, I think, at least two things. We mean, in the first place, that each of them is, at any given moment, at some definite distance from all the rest. It may be impossible practically to measure all these distances, or indeed to measure any of them absolutely exactly: but we believe that all of them could theoretically be measured, and expressed as so many miles or feet or inches, or such and such a fraction of an inch, down to those objects which are absolutely touching one another, and between which therefore the distance is nothing at all. We believe, for instance, that the earth is (roughly speaking) so many millions of miles distant from the sun in one direction, and many more millions of miles distant from the pole-star in another; and that just as there is, at any given moment, a definite distance between the sun and the earth, and between the pole-star and the earth, so there is also a definite distance between the sun and the pole-star, and similarly between any one of the heavenly bodies and all the rest. And so too between all the bodies on the surface of the earth, or any parts of these bodies: any two of them are, at any given moment, either touching one another, or else at some definite distance from one another—a distance which can be roughly expressed as so many miles or feet or inches or fractions of an inch. We believe, then, that it is true of all material objects that each is, at any given moment, at some definite distance from all the rest. This is one of the things which we mean by saying that they are all in space. But we mean, I think, also that each is distant from all the rest in some direction or other: in some one or other of a quite definite set of directions. And what this definite set of directions is, can, I think, be easily explained. We all know the shape of the figure which is called a sphere—the shape of a perfectly round ball. Now from the centre of a sphere a straight line can be drawn to each of the points upon its surface. Each of these straight lines, we should say, led in a different direction from the centre: this is what we mean by a direction. And moreover there are, we should say, absolutely no directions in which it is possible to move from the centre in a straight line except along one or other of these straight lines; if you are to move in a straight line from the centre of a sphere at all, you must go towards one or other of the points on its surface; and this is what I meant by speaking of a quite definite set of directions: all the possible directions in which you can go in a straight line from any
given point form a quite definite set; namely, you must go along one or other of the straight lines leading from that point to some point on the surface of a sphere of which it is the centre. The second thing, then, which I say we believe about all material objects: is that starting from any point on any one of them, all the rest will lie upon one or other of this definite set of straight lines. If you consider all the straight lines which lead from any point to all the different points on the surface of a sphere enclosing it, absolutely every material object in the Universe will, at any given moment, lie on one or other of these straight lines; it will lie at some distance or other along one or other of them. There is, we should say, no other position in space which any material object could occupy; these straight lines will pass through every position in space; so that, if an object is in space at all it must be on one or other of them. This, therefore, is one of the things which we mean by saying that all material objects are situated in space. We mean, that is, when we talk of the space in which material objects lie and move, a space in which there are no other directions in which you can go from any point, except those which I have specified. We do, I think, certainly hold that all the material objects I have mentioned, do lie in such a space: that from any one of them all the rest must at any moment lie in one or other of these directions. And when we talk of 'material objects', we mean, I think, as a rule, only to include under this description objects of which this is true.

But, now, I introduced this account of what we believe about material objects, in order to explain what we believe about the relation of material objects to that other quite different sort of things, which I have called acts of consciousness or mental acts. Common Sense has, I said, some quite definite views about the way in which acts of consciousness in general are related to material objects, and I wish now to state what these views are.

We all, then, commonly believe, I think, that acts of consciousness are quite definitely attached, in a particular way, to some material objects, and quite as definitely not attached to others. And why I introduced my account of space, was in order to make more clear in what sense we believe acts of consciousness to be attached to certain material objects. We believe, I think, that our acts of consciousness—all those which we perform, so long as we are alive—are attached to our bodies, in the sense that they occur in the same places in which our bodies are. We all do, I think, constantly assume this in ordinary life, and assume it with the utmost certainty; although I believe
most philosophers have held that, on the contrary, acts of consciousness do not occur in any place at all—that they are, simply, nowhere—not in space. But that we all do commonly assume it, that it is a belief of Common Sense, is, I think, pretty plain. I believe, for instance, that my acts of consciousness are taking place now in this room, where my body is. At the present moment I am hearing and seeing and thinking here, in this room. And when, just now, I travelled up to Waterloo by train, I believe that my mind and my acts of consciousness travelled with me. When the train and my body were at Putney, I was thinking and seeing at Putney. When the train and my body reached Clapham Junction, I was thinking and seeing at Clapham Junction. And so on with all the other places which I passed through. We all, I think, commonly assume, in this way, that our acts of consciousness take place at any moment, in the place in which our bodies are at that moment. I do not mean to say that we have any definite idea as to exactly where in our bodies our acts of consciousness take place. I do not think we have. We should not be prepared to say whether they all took place at exactly the same spot in our bodies or whether different acts took place at different spots; nor should we be prepared to assign any particular spot as the spot at which a particular act took place. All that we do, I think, believe with certainty is that they all do take place somewhere or other in our bodies. At all events we all constantly talk as if we believed this. And I may illustrate the force of this belief which we now have, by contrasting it with a different belief which was formerly held. Some savages, I believe, used to hold that, sometimes when a man was dreaming, his mind or soul used to leave his body and go to some other place and watch what was going on in that place: that, therefore, while he was asleep, his acts of consciousness might be taking place at some place other than that where his body was. Now I think I am right in saying that it is no longer Common Sense to believe this. We commonly believe nowadays that, so long as we are alive, we can, at least normally, only think and see and hear and feel, where our bodies are. We believe, at least, that an immense number of acts of consciousness are attached, each of them, to some particular body, in the sense that they occur somewhere or other in that body. My acts of consciousness take place in my body; and yours take place in yours: and our minds (generally, at least) go with us, wherever our bodies go.

We believe, then, I think, that many acts of consciousness are attached to particular material objects, in the sense that they take
place \textit{where} those objects are. But I do not mean to say that this is the \textit{only} sense in which we believe them to be attached to particular material objects. We also believe, no doubt, that many of them are \textit{dependent} upon the changes which occur in our bodies. For instance, I only see, when certain changes take place in my eyes; I only hear, when certain changes take place in my ears; only think, perhaps, when certain changes take place in my brain. We certainly believe that many acts of consciousness are attached to particular bodies in this way also. But the simplest and most universal relation which we believe to hold between acts of consciousness and particular bodies is, I think, the one I have mentioned—namely, that they occur \textit{where} those bodies are.

We believe, then, that acts of consciousness are attached to some material objects. But we believe, I think, no less certainly, that to the vast majority of material objects, \textit{no} acts of consciousness are attached. We believe that they \textit{are} attached to the living bodies of men—millions of different men—and, perhaps, of most animals; so that there is no lack of acts of consciousness in the Universe. But nevertheless to the vast majority of material objects we believe, I think, that \textit{none} are attached. We are sure that chairs and tables and houses and mountains and stones do not really see or hear or feel or think or perform any other mental acts: we are sure that they are \textit{not} conscious. We are sure too that the sun and moon and stars and earth are not conscious—that no conscious acts are attached to them, in the sense in which our conscious acts are attached to our bodies: \textit{they} do not feel or hear or see, as \textit{we} do. This, then, is one very important thing which we believe as to the relation between acts of consciousness and material objects: namely, that among the vast number of material objects in the Universe there are \textit{comparatively few} to which acts of consciousness are attached; in other words, by far the greater number of the material objects in the Universe are \textit{unconscious}. This, I think, may fairly be said to be the view of Common Sense nowadays. But this is another point in regard to which the present view of Common Sense differs a good deal from what it once was. There was, it seems pretty certain, a time when most men believed that acts of Consciousness \textit{were} attached to logs of wood, and stones, and trees, and to the sun and moon and many other objects. They believed that spirits were at various times \textit{in} these objects; and that while the spirits were in them, acts of consciousness often took place inside them: the spirit heard and saw and thought inside the log of wood, just as our minds hear and see
and think inside our bodies. There was, then, a time when men commonly believed that consciousness was (for a time, at least) attached to many bodies, which we now believe to be unconscious. But even then, so far as I know, they always believed that there were, at any given time, many places in the Universe in which no acts of consciousness were going on. We, I think, only go much farther than this: we believe that, at any given time, the number of spots in which no act of consciousness is taking place is immensely larger than that of those in which an act of consciousness is taking place.

This, therefore, is one thing which we believe with regard to the relation between consciousness and material objects. But there are, I think, also two others which deserve to be mentioned. The first of these is this. We believe that we are at certain times conscious of certain material objects: we see, and feel, and think of them. But we believe with the utmost certainty that these material objects can and do continue to exist even when we are not conscious of them. We are, for instance, at this moment seeing certain material objects in this room. But we believe that they will continue to exist, even when we have all gone away and the room is shut up for the night and no one is seeing them. If I leave a room, for five minutes, in which a fire is burning, and then come back and find it burning still, I assume that it has been burning all the while I was away, and when no one was seeing it or feeling its heat, just as much as when I was there to see it. We all, I think, constantly assume with regard to material objects that they are, in this sense, wholly independent of our consciousness of them: they are all objects of a sort, which exist just as much when we are not conscious of them as when we are. We may, indeed, say of all material objects that they have three characteristics: (1) they are quite a different sort of thing from acts of consciousness; (2) they are all of them, at any given time, situated somewhere or other in space; and (3) they have this property which I have just mentioned—namely that they are a sort of thing which exists when we are not conscious of it just as much as when we are. These three characteristics are not, I think, sufficient to define a material object: there may be other objects, which possess all three and yet are not material objects. But they are, I think, three of the most important characteristics which material objects have; and we should not call anything a material object, unless we meant to assert that it had all three.

A second thing, then, which we believe about the relation of consciousness to matter, is that matter is independent of our conscious-
ness of it—that it exists even when we are not conscious of it; and we believe, too, that there are existing at any moment many more material objects, of which no man or animal is conscious, than material objects of which we are conscious. And the third thing which we believe about the relation of consciousness to matter is the following. We believe, namely, that there probably was a time when there were no acts of consciousness attached to any material objects on the earth: a time, when the earth was so hot that no living beings could exist upon it; and when therefore there could be no conscious beings on it either. And as regards human bodies and human consciousness we believe, I think, that this is not only probable, but certain. We believe that it is only for a comparatively limited time—comparatively limited, though amounting, perhaps, to several millions of years—that men have existed upon the earth: before that time, there were no bodies upon the earth which could be called human, and also no minds which could be called the minds of men; though there may have been minds and acts of consciousness belonging to other sorts of animals. And just as we believe that, at some time in the past, there were probably no conscious beings at all upon the earth, and certainly no beings with human consciousness; so we believe that there may come a time, in the future, when this will again be so. We should not indeed deny that, even when there was no consciousness on the earth, there may have been conscious beings elsewhere in the Universe, on other planets; we should not deny that there may be some now; nor should we deny that this may still be so, when (if ever) the time comes, when all consciousness upon the earth is again extinguished. But we should, I think, hold that there may have been, and may be again, long periods in the history of the material Universe, during which no consciousness was attached to any of the bodies in it—when no conscious acts were taking place anywhere in it. We believe, that is to say, that just as consciousness certainly is now attached to comparatively few among the material objects in the Universe, so there may have been in the past and may be again in the future, long periods when it was or will be attached to none at all. This is, I think, one belief of Common Sense with regard to the relation of consciousness to material objects; and, if it be so, it is certainly an important element in our general view of the Universe.

So far, then, the elements which I have tried to emphasize in the Common Sense view of the Universe, are these. Firstly, that there certainly are in the Universe two very different kinds of things,
WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

namely material objects and acts of consciousness. And secondly, as to the relation of these two kinds of things three points: the first (1) that conscious acts are attached to comparatively few among the material objects in the Universe; that the vast majority of material objects are unconscious. Indeed the only bodies to which we should say we know them with certainty to be attached are the living bodies of men, and perhaps other animals, upon the Earth. We should not deny that they may be attached also to other bodies on other planets: that there may on other planets be other living beings, which are conscious. But we should, I think, say that conscious acts certainly are not attached to the vast majority of the material objects in the Universe. This is one of our beliefs about the relation of acts of consciousness to material objects. A second is (2) that material objects are all of such a kind that they may exist, even when we are not conscious of them, and that many do in fact so exist. And the third is (3) that there may have been a time when acts of consciousness were attached to no material bodies anywhere in the Universe, and may again be such a time; and that there almost certainly was a time when there were no human bodies with human consciousness attached to them, upon this earth.

And now there are only two other points in the views of Common Sense about the Universe, to which I wish to call attention.

The first is one, which I have constantly assumed in what I have already said, but which I wish now to mention expressly. It is this. That all material objects, and all the acts of consciousness of ourselves and other animals upon the earth, are in time. I say ‘are in time’; but, to speak more accurately I ought to say either have been in time or are so now or will be so in the future; either this, or else all three—both have been in time in the past, and are so now, and will be so in the future. For just one of the things which we mean by talking of ‘time’ is that there are such things as the past, the present and the future, and that there is a great difference between the three. None of the material objects in space and none of our acts of consciousness can we hold to be truly said to exist at all, unless it exists at the time at which we say so: only those of them, for instance, which exist at the time at which I am now speaking can now be truly said to exist at all: of others it may be true that they did exist in the past or that they will exist in the future, but it cannot be true that they do exist. What I mean, then, when I say that all material objects and all our acts of consciousness are in time, is this: that each of them either did exist in the past, or exists now, or will exist in the future;
either this, or else, all three: both did exist at some time in the past, does exist now, and will exist in the future. And I mean, too, that to say that a thing 'did exist' is something different from saying that it 'does exist' and both these again from saying that it 'will exist'; and that each of these different statements is in fact true of some things. I am, for instance, quite sure that there have been in the past many acts of consciousness, both of my own and those of other men; I am quite sure that many are existing now; and I am very certain, though less certain, that many will exist in the future. And so too of material objects: many have existed in the past, many do exist now, and many (in all probability) will exist in the future. I say we all commonly believe that these things are so. We believe that the three statements 'It did exist'; 'It does exist'; 'It will exist': are each of them true of many material objects and many acts of consciousness; the first true of some; the second true of others; and the third of still others; and of many, again, all three. And we believe also, that one or other of these statements is true of all of them; either this, or else in some instances that all three of them are true of one and the same thing: the sun or the earth, for instance, both did exist, do exist, and (probably) will exist. This, I say, is certainly the belief of Common Sense.

And there is only one other belief of Common Sense which I wish to mention: namely, this. We believe that we do really know all these things that I have mentioned. We know that there are and have been in the Universe the two kinds of things—material objects and acts of consciousness. We know that there are and have been in the Universe huge numbers of both. We know that many material objects exist when we are not conscious of them. We know that the vast majority of material objects are unconscious. We know that things of both kinds have existed in the past, which do not exist now, and that things of both kinds do exist now, which did not exist in the past. All these things we should, I think, certainly say that we know. And moreover we believe that we know an immense number of details about particular material objects and acts of consciousness, past, present and future. We know most, indeed, about the past; but a great deal about the present; and much also (though perhaps this is only probable knowledge) about the future. Indeed the sphere of most of the special sciences may be defined as being to give us detailed knowledge about particular objects of the kinds which I have been trying to define: that is to say, about material objects which are or have been somewhere or other in space, and about the
acts of consciousness of men upon the earth. Most of the special sciences confine themselves to some particular group among objects of these two kinds; and we believe that they have been very successful in giving us a great deal of real knowledge about objects of these kinds. Astronomy, for instance, tells us about the heavenly bodies— their size and movements and composition and how they act upon one another. Physics and chemistry give us detailed knowledge about the composition of different kinds of material objects, and how they and their minute parts act upon one another. Biology gives us knowledge about the differences between different kinds of animals upon the earth. Botany about the differences between different kinds of plants. Physiology about the processes which go on in living bodies. Geology gives us knowledge about the present state and past history of the different layers of rock or soil of which the crust of the earth is composed. Geography gives us knowledge about the present distribution of land and water upon the surface of the earth; about the positions of mountains and rivers; about the different soils and climates of different parts of the earth. History and biography give us knowledge about the actions of different men and collections of men, which have existed upon the surface of the earth; and also about their acts of consciousness, what sorts of things they saw and heard and thought and believed. Finally Psychology deals specially with the acts of consciousness of men and to some extent of animals also; it tries to classify and distinguish the different kinds of mental acts which we perform, and to decide how these different acts are related to one another. All these sciences which I have mentioned are, you will observe, occupied exclusively with giving us information about the two kinds of objects which I have tried to define— namely, material objects in space, and the acts of consciousness of men and animals on the surface of the earth. And we certainly believe that all of them have succeeded in acquiring a great deal of real knowledge about objects of these kinds. We distinguish sharply, in each case, between things which are now absolutely known; things which were formerly believed, but believed wrongly; and things which we do not yet know. In the case of all these sciences, there are, we believe, an immense number of things which are now definitely known to be facts; a great many, which were formerly believed, but are now definitely known to be errors; and a great many which we do not know and perhaps never shall know. In all our ordinary talk, in all newspapers and in all ordinary books (by which I mean books other than philosophical books) we constantly
assume that there is this distinction between what we know, what
we wrongly believe, and what we are still in ignorance about: and
we assume that an enormous number of truths about material
objects and the acts of consciousness of men belong to the first class
—the class of things absolutely known—known, that is, by some man
on the surface of the earth. All this is, I think, certainly nowadays
part of the belief of Common Sense about the Universe.

I have tried, then, to enumerate certain general beliefs about the
Universe, which may, I think, be fairly said to be beliefs of Common
Sense: beliefs which we almost all of us nowadays entertain; and I
do not mean to say that these are the only views of Common Sense
about the Universe; but only that they are views which it does hold
—some of its principal beliefs. But now all of these beliefs taken
together do not amount to a general description of the whole Uni-
verse: they are not a general description of the whole Universe, in
the sense in which I said that the first problem of philosophy was to
give us such a description. They consist in saying that there certainly
are in the Universe certain large classes of things, and that these
things are related to one another in certain ways. But what they do
not say, as they stand, is that these large classes of things are the
only classes of things which are in the Universe, or which we know
to be in it: they do not say that everything which we know to be in
the Universe belongs to one or other of these classes; they do not
deny, as they stand, that there may be in the Universe, or may even
be known to be in it, important classes of things which do not belong
to any of the classes I have mentioned. For instance, Common
Sense says, according to me: There are in the Universe two classes
of things: There are material objects in space, and there are the acts
of consciousness of living men and animals upon the surface of the
earth. But, in order to convert these statements into a general
description of the whole Universe, we should have to add one or
other of two things. We should have to say either: Everything in the
Universe belongs to one or other of these two classes; everything is
either a material object in space, or an act of consciousness of some
man or animal on the earth. And this would plainly, if any one said
it, profess to be a general description of the whole Universe. Or else
we might say: Everything which we know to be in the Universe,
does belong to one or other of these two classes; though there may
be in the Universe other things, which we do not know to be in it.
And this also, I think, might fairly be said to be an attempt to give a
general description of the whole Universe. It would, indeed, consist
WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

in saying that, in a sense, no such description can be given; since it would say that there may be in the Universe things which we do not know of and therefore cannot describe. But it would profess to give a general description of everything that we know to be in the Universe; and would be a thing which no one would say unless his object were to solve our first philosophical problem—namely, to give the best general description he could of the whole Universe.

Starting, therefore, from the view of Common Sense that there certainly are in the Universe (1) material objects in space and (2) the acts of consciousness of men and animals upon the earth, we might most simply get a general description of the Universe in one or other of two ways: Either by saying, these two kinds of things are the only kinds in the Universe; or by saying: they are the only kinds we know to be in it, but there may possibly also be others. And as regards the first of these two views, I doubt whether any one, on reflection, would be willing to accept it quite as it stands. The most obvious objection to it is that by asserting that there are no acts of consciousness in the Universe, except those of men and animals on the earth, it denies the possibility that there may be or have been on other planets living beings endowed with consciousness. And this is a possibility which almost everybody would think it rash to deny. But still, by slightly modifying it to allow of this possibility, we get a view which might, I think, seem very plausible to many people. We might, for instance, say: There really is not, and never has been anything in the Universe, except material objects in space, on the one hand, and acts of consciousness, more or less similar to those of men and animals, attached to living bodies more or less similar to theirs, on the other hand. This is, I think, really a plausible view of the Universe; at least as plausible as many that have been proposed by philosophers. But, no doubt, the second view is more plausible still: it does seem more plausible to add the proviso: These are the only things we know to be in it; but there may be other kinds of things unknown to us. And this, I think, is a view which really has been held by many people, philosophers and others. They have held, that is, that the only kinds of things which we know to be in the Universe are material objects in space, and the acts of consciousness of men and animals on the earth; while adding also that there may be other kinds of things unknown to us.

No doubt, philosophers who have said this or something like it, have not meant by it quite what they said. Those who hold that there are and have been in the Universe material objects in space, and that
there are and have been acts of consciousness, can hardly deny that there certainly are in the Universe also at least two other things beside these—things which are neither material objects nor acts of consciousness—namely, Space and Time themselves. It must be admitted on this view that Space and Time themselves really are— that they are something; and it is obvious that they are neither material objects nor acts of consciousness. And similarly there may be in the Universe other kinds of things known to us, besides Space and Time, which are neither material objects nor yet acts of consciousness. For my part, I think, there certainly are several other kinds of things, and that it is one of the objects of philosophy to point them out. But those philosophers who have spoken as if material objects and acts of consciousness were the only kinds of things known by us to be in the Universe, have, I think, not really meant to deny this. They have meant, rather, that material objects and acts of consciousness are the only kinds of things known to us, which are in a certain sense substantial: substantial in a sense in which Space and Time themselves do not seem to be substantial. And I may say, at once, that, for my part, if we make suitable modifications of this sort, this view does seem to me to be a correct view. I hold, that is to say, that material objects in space, and the acts of consciousness of men and animals on the earth, really are the only substantial kinds of things known to us; though I should admit that there may possibly be others unknown to us; and though I think that there are certainly several unsubstantial kinds of things, which it is very important to mention, if we are to give a really complete general description of the whole Universe—Time and Space for instance.

One way, therefore, in which we might get a general description of the whole Universe, is by making additions to the views of Common Sense of the comparatively simple sort which I have just indicated. But many philosophers have held that any such view as this is very incorrect indeed. And different philosophers have held it to be incorrect in three different ways. They have either held that there certainly are in the Universe some most important kinds of things—substantial kinds of things—in addition to those which Common Sense asserts to be in it. Or else they have positively contradicted Common Sense: have asserted that some of the things which Common Sense supposes to be in it, are not in it, or else, that, if they are, we do not know it. Or else they have done both; both added and contradicted.
I wish now to give some examples of all three kinds of views. Both of those which add something very important to the views of Common Sense; and of those which contradict some of the views of Common Sense; and of those which do both.

To begin then with those which add something to the views of Common Sense.

There is, first of all, one view of this type which everybody has heard of. You all know, that enormous numbers of people, and not philosophers only, believe that there certainly is a God in the Universe: that, besides material objects and our acts of consciousness, there is also a Divine Mind, and the acts of consciousness of this mind; and that, if you are to give any complete description of the sum of things, of everything that is, you must certainly mention God. It might even be claimed that this view—the view that there is a God, is itself a view of Common Sense. So many people have believed and still do believe that there certainly is a God, that it might be claimed that this is a Common Sense belief. But, on the other hand, so many people now believe that, even if there is a God, we certainly do not know that there is one; that this also might be claimed as a view of Common Sense. On the whole, I think it is fairest to say, that Common Sense has no view on the question whether we do know that there is a God or not: that it neither asserts that we do know this, nor yet that we do not; and that, therefore, Common Sense has no view as to the Universe as a whole. We may, therefore, say that those philosophers who assert that there certainly is a God in the Universe do go beyond the views of Common Sense. They make a most important addition to what Common Sense believes about the Universe. For by a God is meant something so different both from material objects and from our minds, that to add that, besides these, there is also a God, is certainly to make an important addition to our view of the Universe.

And there is another view of this type, which also everybody has heard of. Everybody knows that enormous numbers of men have believed and still do believe that there is a future life. That is to say, that, besides the acts of consciousness attached to our bodies, while they are alive upon the earth, our minds go on performing acts of consciousness after the death of our bodies—go on performing acts of consciousness not attached to any living body on the surface of the earth. Many people believe that we know this: so many people believe it that, here again, as in the case of God, it might be claimed that this is a belief of Common Sense. But, on the other hand, so
many people believe that, even if we have a future life, we certainly do not know that we have one; that here again it is perhaps fairest to say that Common Sense has no view on the point: that it asserts neither that we do know of a future life nor that we do not. This, therefore, also may be called an addition to the views of Common Sense; and certainly it is a most important addition. If there really are going on in the Universe at this moment, not only the acts of consciousness attached to the living bodies of men and animals on the surface of this earth, but also acts of consciousness performed by the minds of millions of men, whose bodies have long been dead—then certainly the Universe is a very different place from what it would be, if this were not the case.

Here, then, are two different views of the type which I describe as making important additions to the views of Common Sense, while not contradicting it. And there is only one other view of this type which I wish to mention. Some philosophers have held, namely, that there certainly is in the Universe, something else, beside material objects and our acts of consciousness, and something substantial too—but that we do not know what the nature of this something is—that it is something Unknown or Unknowable. This view, you see, must be carefully distinguished from that which I mentioned above as not going much beyond Common Sense: namely the view that there may be in the Universe, things which are neither material objects nor the acts of consciousness of men and animals, but that we do not know whether there are or not. There is a great difference between saying: There may be in the Universe some other kind of thing, but we do not know whether there is or not; and saying: There certainly is in the Universe some other important kind of thing, though we do not know what it is. This latter view may, I think, fairly be said to go a great way beyond the views of Common Sense. It asserts that in addition to the things which Common Sense asserts to be certainly in the Universe—namely, material objects in Space and the Acts of consciousness attached to living bodies—there certainly is something else besides, though we do not know what this something is. This view is a view which has, I think, been held by people who call themselves Agnostics; but I think it hardly deserves the name. To know, not only that there may be, but that there certainly is in the Universe something substantial besides material objects and our acts of consciousness is certainly to know a good deal. But I think it is a view that is not uncommonly held.
WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

I have given, then, three examples of views which add to Common Sense without contradicting it and I now pass to the second type of views: those which contradict Common Sense, without adding to it; those which deny something which Common Sense professes to know, without professing to know anything, which Common Sense does not profess to know. I will call these, for the sake of a name, sceptical views.

Of this second type, there are, I think, two main varieties, both of which consist in saying that we do not know, certain things which Common Sense says we do know. No views of this type, I think, positively deny that there are in the Universe those things which Common Sense says certainly are in it: they only say that we simply do not know at all whether these things are in it or not; whereas Common Sense asserts quite positively that we do know that they are.

The first variety of this type is that which asserts that we simply do not know at all whether there are any material objects in the Universe at all. It admits that there may be such objects; but it says that none of us knows that there are any. It denies, that is to say, that we can know of the existence of any objects, which continue to exist when we are not conscious of them, except other minds and their acts of consciousness.

And the second view goes even further than this. It denies also that we can know of the existence of any minds or acts of consciousness except our own. It holds, in fact, that the only substantial kind of thing which any man can know to be in the Universe is simply his own acts of consciousness. It does not deny that there may be in the Universe other minds and even material objects too; but it asserts that, if there are, we cannot know it. This is, of course, an illogical position; since the philosopher who holds it, while asserting positively that no man can know of the existence of any other mind, also positively asserts that there are other men beside himself, who are all as incapable as he is of knowing the existence of any one else. But though it is illogical, it has been held. And it would cease to be illogical, if, instead of asserting that no man knows of the existence of any other mind, the philosopher were to confine himself to the assertion that he personally does not.

But now I come to the third type of views—views which depart much further from Common Sense than any that I have mentioned yet; since they both positively deny that there are in the Universe certain things, which Common Sense asserts certainly are in it, and
also positively assert that there are in it certain kinds of things, which Common Sense does not profess to know of. Views of this type are, I may say, very much in favour among philosophers.

The chief views of this type may, I think, be divided into two classes: first, those whose contradiction of Common Sense merely consists in the fact that they positively deny the existence of space and material objects; and secondly, those which positively deny many other things as well. Both kinds, I must insist, do positively deny the existence of material objects; they say that there certainly are no such things in the Universe; not merely, like the sceptical views, that we do not know whether there are or not.

First, then, for those views which merely contradict Common Sense by denying the existence of Space and material objects.

These views all, I think, start by considering certain things, which I will call the Appearances of material objects. And I think I can easily explain what I mean by this. You all know that, if you look at a church steeple from the distance of a mile, it has a different appearance from that which it has, when you look at it from the distance of a hundred yards; it looks smaller and you do not see it in many details which you see when you are nearer. These different appearances which the same material objects may present from different distances and different points of view are very familiar to all of us: there certainly are such things in the Universe, as these things which I call Appearances of material objects. And there are two views about them, both of which might be held quite consistently with Common Sense, and between which, I think, Common Sense does not pronounce. It might be held that some, at least, among them really are parts of the objects, of which they are appearances: really are situated in space, and really continue to exist, even when we are not conscious of them. But it might also be held, quite consistently with Common Sense, that none of these appearances are in space, and that they all exist only so long as they appear to some one: that, for instance, the appearance which the church tower presents to me on a particular occasion, exists only so long as I see it, and cannot be said to be in the same space with any material object or to be at any distance from any material object. Common Sense, I think, does not contradict either of those views. All that it does insist on, I think, is that these appearances are appearances of material objects—of objects which do exist, when we are not conscious of them, and which are in space. Now the philosophers whose views I am now

1I should now say 'parts of the surfaces of the objects'. (1952)
considering have, I think, all accepted the second of the two views about appearances, which I said were consistent with Common Sense—namely the view that these appearances only exist, so long as the person to whom they appear is seeing them, and that they are not in space. And they have then gone on to contradict Common Sense, by adding that these appearances are not appearances of material objects—that there are no material objects, for them to be appearances of.

And there are two different views of this kind, which have been held.

The first is the view of one of the most famous of English philosophers, Bishop Berkeley. Berkeley’s view may, I think, be said to have been that these Appearances are in fact not Appearances of anything at all. He himself says, indeed, that these Appearances are themselves material objects—that they are what we mean by material objects. He says that he is not denying the existence of matter, but only explaining what matter is. But he has been commonly held to have denied the existence of matter, and, I think, quite rightly. For he held that these Appearances do not exist except at the moment when we see them; and anything of which this is true can certainly not properly be said to be a material object: what we mean to assert, when we assert the existence of material objects, is certainly the existence of something which continues to exist even when we are not conscious of it. Moreover he certainly held, I think, that these appearances were not all of them in the same space: he held, for instance, that an appearance, which appears to me, was not at any distance or in any direction from an appearance which appears to you: whereas, as I have said, we should, I think, refuse to call anything a material object, which was not at some distance, in space, in some direction from all other material objects. I think, then, it may fairly be said that Berkeley denies the existence of any material objects, in the sense in which Common Sense asserts their existence. This is the way in which he contradicts Common Sense. And the way in which he adds to it, is by asserting the existence of a God, to whom, he thinks, there appear a set of appearances exactly like all of those which appear to us.

But Berkeley’s view has not, I think, been shared by many other philosophers. A much commoner view is that these things which I have called the appearances of material objects, are in fact the appearances of something, but not, as Common Sense asserts, of material objects, but of minds or conscious beings. This view, there-
fore, both contradicts Common Sense, by denying the existence of material objects, and also goes beyond it by asserting the existence of immense numbers of minds, in addition to those of men and of animals. And it insists, too, that these minds are not in space: it is, it says, not true that they are at any distance in any direction from one another; they are, in fact, all simply nowhere, not in any place at all.

These views are, I think, startling enough. But there are other philosophers who have held views more startling still—who have held not only that space and material objects do not really exist, but also that time and our own conscious acts do not really exist either: that there are not really any such things in the Universe. At least, this is, I think, what many philosophers have meant. What they say is that all these four kinds of things, material objects, space, our acts of consciousness and time, are Appearances; that they are all of them Appearances of something else—either of some one thing, or else some collection of things, which is not a material object, nor an act of consciousness of ours, and which also is not in space nor yet in time. And, as you see, this proposition is ambiguous: whether it contradicts Common Sense or not depends on the question what these philosophers mean by calling these things Appearances. They might conceivably mean that these Appearances were just as real, as the things of which they are appearances; by asserting that they are Appearances of something else, they might only mean to assert that there is in the Universe something else besides—something to which these things are related in the same sort of way in which the appearance of a church-tower, which I see when I look at it from a distance, is related to the real church-tower. And, if they did only mean this, their views would merely be of the type of those that add to Common Sense: they would merely be asserting that, in addition to the things which Common Sense believes to be in the Universe, there is also something else beside or behind these things. But it seems to me quite plain that they do not really mean this. They do mean to maintain that matter and space and our acts of consciousness and time are not real in the sense in which Common Sense believes them to be real, and in which they themselves believe that the something else behind Appearances is real. And holding this, it seems to me that what they really mean is that these things are not real at all: that there are not really any such things in the Universe. What, I think, they really mean (though they would not all admit that they mean it) is something like this. There is a sense in which the pole-star,
when we look at it, appears to be much smaller than the moon. We may say, then, that what appears—the appearance, in this case—is simply this: that the pole-star is smaller than the moon. But there simply is no such thing in the Universe as this which appears: the pole-star is not smaller than the moon: and, therefore, what appears to be in the Universe—namely, that it is smaller than the moon—is a simple nonentity—there is no such thing. It is in this sense, I think, that many philosophers have believed and still believe that not only matter and space but also our acts of consciousness and time simply do not exist: that there are no such things. They have believed that they are something which appears; but that what appears simply is not anything—that there is no such thing in the Universe. This, I think, is what they really mean, though they would not all admit that they mean it. And as to what they hold to be in the Universe, instead of the things which Common Sense holds to be in it, they have held different views. Some have held that it is a collection of different minds; others that it is one mind; others that it is something which is in some sense mental or spiritual, but which cannot be properly said either to be one mind or many.

These, then, are some of the views which have been held as to the nature of the Universe as a whole. And I hope these examples have made clear the sort of thing I mean by the first problem of philosophy—a general description of the whole Universe. Any answer to the problem must consist in saying one or other of three things: it must say either that certain large classes of things are the only kinds of things in the Universe, i.e., that everything in it belongs to one or other of them; or else it must say that everything in the Universe is of one kind; or else it must say that everything which we know to be in the Universe belongs to some one of several classes or to some one class. And it must also, if it holds that there are several different classes of things, say something about the relation of these classes to one another.

This, then, is the first and most interesting problem of philosophy. And it seems to me that a great many others can be defined as problems bearing upon this one.

For philosophers have not been content simply to express their opinions as to what there is or is not in the Universe, or as to what we know to be in it or do not know to be in it. They have also tried to prove their opinions to be true. And with this, you see, a great many subordinate problems are opened up.
In order to prove, for instance, that any one of these views I have mentioned are true, you must both prove it and also refute all the others. You must prove either that there is a God, or that there is not, or that we do not know whether there is one or not. Either that there is a future life, or that there is not, or that we do not know whether there is one or not. And so on with all the other kinds of things I have mentioned: matter and space and time; and the minds of other men; and other minds, not the minds of men or animals. In order to prove that any particular view of the Universe is correct, you must prove, in the case of each of these things, either that they do exist, or that they do not, or that we do not know whether they do or not. And all these questions, you see, may be treated separately for their own sakes. Many philosophers, indeed, have not tried to give any general description of the whole Universe. They have merely tried to answer some one or more of these subordinate questions.

And there is another sort of subordinate questions, which ought, I think, to be specially mentioned. Many philosophers have spent a great deal of their time in trying to define more clearly what is the difference between these various sorts of things: for instance, what is the difference between a material object and an act of consciousness, between matter and mind, between God and man, etc. And these questions of definition are by no means so easy to answer as you might think. Nor must it be thought that they are mere questions of words. A good definition of the sorts of things you hold to be in the Universe, obviously adds to the clearness of your view. And it is not only a question of clearness either. When, for instance, you try to define what you mean by a material object, you find that there are several different properties which a material object might have, of which you had never thought before; and your effort to define may thus lead you to conclude that whole classes of things have certain properties, or have not certain others, of which you would never have thought, if you had merely contented yourself with asserting that there are material objects in the Universe, without enquiring what you meant by this assertion.

We may, then, say that a great class of subordinate philosophical problems consist in discussing whether the great classes of things I have mentioned do exist or do not, or whether we are simply ignorant as to whether they do or not; and also in trying to define these classes and considering how they are related to one another. A great deal of philosophy has consisted in discussing these questions with
regard to God, a future life, matter, minds, Space and Time. And all these problems could be said to belong to that department of philosophy which is called Metaphysics.

But now we come to a class of questions which may be said to belong to other departments of philosophy, but which also have an evident bearing on the first main problem as to the general description of the Universe. One of the most natural questions to ask, when anybody asserts some fact, which you are inclined to doubt, is the question: How do you know that? And if the person answers the question in such a way as to shew that he has not learnt the fact in any one of the ways in which it is possible to acquire real knowledge, as opposed to mere belief, about facts of the sort, you will conclude that he does not really know it. In other words, we constantly assume in ordinary life that there are only a limited number of ways in which it is possible to acquire real knowledge of certain kinds of facts; and that if a person asserts a fact, which he has not learnt in any of these ways, then, in fact, he does not know it. Now philosophers also have used this sort of argument very largely. They have tried to classify exhaustively all the different kinds of ways in which we can know things; and have then concluded that, since certain things, which other philosophers have asserted or which they themselves formerly believed, are not known in any of these ways, therefore these things are not known at all.

Hence a large part of philosophy has, in fact, consisted in trying to classify completely all the different ways in which we can know things; or in trying to describe exactly particular ways of knowing them.

And this question—the question: How do we know anything at all? involves three different kinds of questions.

The first is of this sort. When you are asked: How do you know that? it may be meant to ask: What sort of a thing is your knowledge of it? What sort of a process goes on in your mind, when you know it? In what does this event, which you call a knowing, consist? This first question as to what sort of a thing knowledge is—as to what happens when we know anything—is a question which philosophy shares with psychology; but which many philosophers have tried to answer. They have tried to distinguish the different kinds of things, which happen in our minds, when we know different things; and to point out, what, if anything, is common to them all.

But there is, secondly, something else which may be meant; when it is asked what knowledge is. For we do not say that we know any
SOME MAIN PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

proposition, for instance the proposition that matter exists, unless we mean to assert that this proposition is true: that it is true that matter exists. And hence there is included in the question what knowledge is, the question what is meant by saying that any proposition is true. This is a different question from the psychological question as to what happens in your mind, when you know anything; and this question as to what truth is has generally been said to be a question for Logic, in the widest sense of the term. And Logic, or at least parts of it, is reckoned as a department of philosophy.

And, finally, there is still another thing which may be meant, when it is asked: How do you know that? It may be meant, namely, what reason have you for believing it? or in other words, what other thing do you know, which proves this thing to be true? And philosophers have, in fact, been much occupied with this question also: the question what are the different ways in which a proposition can be proved to be true; what are all the different sorts of reasons which are good reasons for believing anything. This also is a question which is reckoned as belonging to the department of Logic.

There is, therefore, a huge branch of philosophy which is concerned with the different ways in which we know things; and many philosophers have devoted themselves almost exclusively to questions which fall under this head.

But finally, if we are to give a complete account of philosophy, we must mention one other class of questions. There is a department of philosophy which is called Ethics or ethical philosophy; and this department deals with a class of questions quite different from any which I have mentioned yet. We are all constantly in ordinary life asking such questions as: Would such and such a result be a good thing to bring about? or would it be a bad thing? Would such and such an action be a right action to perform or would it be a wrong one? And what ethical philosophy tries to do is to classify all the different sorts of things which would be good or bad, right or wrong, in such a way as to be able to say: Nothing would be good, unless it had certain characteristics, or one or other of certain characteristics; and similarly nothing would be bad, unless it had certain properties or one or other of certain properties: and similarly with the question, what sort of actions would be right, and what would be wrong.

And these ethical questions have a most important bearing upon our general description of the Universe in two ways.

In the first place, it is certainly one of the most important facts about the Universe that there are in it these distinctions of good and