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Universals

If the true world collapses, so must the world of appearances. Only then is Platonism overcome, which is to say, inverted in such a way that philosophical thinking twists free of it.

Martin Heidegger, 1936–7₁

1. Universals and the meaning of life

Philosophical interest in universals is a natural offshoot of our framework concerns. For framework activities are guided by goals, and to work towards a goal is to have an ideal, however mundane. Thus the cabinet-maker and athlete have some conception of ‘the perfect X’ in their respective fields; as does the gambler, who hopes for perfection as he looks down at the hand he has just been dealt. An ideal gives us something to aim for; a dream we can strive to realize or at least approximate. Of course, life calls on us to moderate our aspirations, and if we are to find contentment, our goals may have to become not so much ideal, as ideal-for-me-in-the-circumstances. As such, the child who dreamed of conquering Hollywood and grows into an unknown but working actress may still be content, if she develops her thinking skilfully enough; and even if lingering disappointment remains, this may be compartmentalized into rare maudlin moments. Others who develop less wisdom may seek contentment through the unfalsifiable hope of posthumous success. But although dreams shrink, many of us manage to hold onto them in some shape or form. Such dreams have thoroughly shaped the various fields of endeavour which determine our framework activities.

Ideals provide guidance in life, so were of natural interest in the philosophical quest to use reason to determine what we ought to do; thus Socrates sought to clarify the laudable ideals of justice, piety, virtue, courage, beauty and love. Philosophy then took on its characteristic shape when Plato introduced metaphysics into the equation to ask what these ideals actually *are*. On the face of it, an ideal such as perfect justice is just a dream; but Plato found reasons to believe that ideals are more real than life within the framework – he portrayed the dream as the reality and the reality as the dream. This move was facilitated by the concept of transcendence which he took from Parmenides, and the result was a conception of reality as a transcendent realm populated by ideal objects such as pure goodness, perfect justice and love itself, with everyday examples

of these demoted to approximations – representations or shadows of reality. Through this displacement of our concept of reality, then, the familiar world in which life has no meaning and we will die, was portrayed as unreal; and the ideals we strive for real. The real world was now as aspiration – or more generally thought – presented it. And in this way, reflection on universals provided the definitive Western philosophical route to transcendence and the denial of nihilism.

Consider the parable of the fall in Plato's *Phaedrus*; a narrative of a kind familiar to the Greeks from Hesiod, but here given a metaphysical twist. Plato portrays life in the framework as a temporary stage in the life of the immortal soul, which we occupy because of an imperfection in our souls that is lacking in the gods. This imperfection causes us to lose sight of the true reality of ideal forms which exist 'beyond the heavens', and take on material form as a mortal. After we subsequently die, our lives are judged, and we are either punished under the earth or rewarded in the heavens. Then, we are reincarnated, with our new status determined by the merit of our previous life. This cycle of reincarnation continues for a set period until the soul is released from material existence; but it may thereafter fall again.² The cycle can only be permanently broken by living a philosophical life in pursuit of knowledge, according to which we renounce material pleasures and focus our minds on the true reality of forms such as goodness and justice – knowledge of which teaches us how to live well. If we succeed, our souls are purged of imperfection and regain their focus on true reality, allowing us to put our flawed lives as human beings behind us.

Plato's account provides life with a meaning which resonates deeply with our lives within the framework, apparently vindicating them. For life is spent striving to realize ideals – most conspicuously in the case of the high achievers we tend to admire most – and Plato's account tells us that realizing certain ideals such as goodness and justice is just what we *should* be doing. For it is by coming to know ideals – by focusing our attention on them to the exclusion of all else, and thereby living lives that reflect them – that we can perfect our souls and ascend to a better life. That is the overall purpose of our efforts. Of course, human life is only a shadow of the life of the immortal soul, and this account does not tell us the meaning of *that*; but this is simply another benefit of the package. For we have no idea what purpose existence as a whole might serve, and so rather than embarking on the evidentially baseless task of trying to suggest one, the account seeks to counter nihilistic intimations by explaining our ignorance as a consequence of temporary material existence – leaving open the possibility that the soul will understand the reason for its existence when it regains full contact with the forms. Ultimately, then, the meaning of our real lives as immortal souls is something we have forgotten; but the quest to remember gives meaning to our embodied lives.

This account has plenty of appeal for someone concerned by nihilism, death and injustice. For it overcomes nihilism and death by conceiving our real lives as transcendent, while leaving room for a redemptive agenda according to which our mundane lives are to reflect only certain forms; those deemed conducive to a moral and aesthetic life. People who fail to live up to these standards are punished – their transgressions are not a regrettable life-style choice, but an objective mistake that will not go unnoticed. With so much power to ease these most natural of human concerns, it is no wonder that this account was to so fundamentally affect subsequent thinking.

This was mainly through its influence – once purged of its elitist focus on knowledge – on the world's most successful religions. But it also helped set in motion the discipline of philosophy, which dealt with the problems generated by introducing the concept of transcendence into our understanding of the world: with the metaphysical and epistemological status of appearance and reality, and thus issues such as the nature of ideals, substances, experiences, time, representation, knowledge and so forth. Since Nietzsche, it has been customary to portray this vision as born of hatred of life and will to power; and there is some plausibility to this, given Plato's renouncement of material pleasures, and his ranking of the philosophical life above all others. But it is just as plausible to portray it as life-affirming, since to someone who perceives nihilism as a threat to life's value, it offers a vindication of our daily strivings. And since there are many possible lifestyles, someone who valued life could be expected to recommend their own – if convinced it is best.³

The human appeal of Plato's metaphysical vision is clear, then, but does it have any sound theoretical basis? Does the ideal of justice, as opposed to particular just acts, require the existence of transcendent universals? Few would answer this latter question in the affirmative anymore. But plenty of philosophers still believe that there are real universals, and so the problem lives on; albeit now divorced from the connections with the meaning of life which gave it its start. However some think it should not live on. Scepticism about the universal/particular distinction finds forceful expression in Nietzsche, who sees it as an illusion of language. In his view, the subject-predicate form of language and logic serves the purposes of our way of life only by *falsifying* reality; and so Plato was naïve to think it reflected a fundamental metaphysical distinction.⁴ F. P. Ramsey took a similar line, as more recently have Fraser MacBride and Galen Strawson.⁵

Thus we might reason that general terms like 'justice' must refer to something to be meaningful, but being general, cannot refer to particulars – and so must refer to universals. Such reasoning, which would presuppose what Ryle disparaged as a 'Fido'-Fido account of meaning, is suggested by Plato in the *Republic*; though he elsewhere expresses doubts.⁶ However Ryle was right: linguistic meaning is generally more complex than a direct correspondence between words and entities, so we cannot simply read off the existence of universals from the form of language. Wittgenstein's well-known 'games' example shows the inadvisability of assuming underlying commonality from sameness of label; and the lesson does not stop at social phenomena such as games or justice.⁷ For we know, for instance, that two objects experienced as the same colour in normal conditions may not share any intrinsic physical property accounting for this; this is not a decisive objection to objectivist accounts of colour, but it does show that judgements of sameness embedded in language may be rendered doubtful by science.⁸ Dennett, echoing Nietzsche, thinks that our evolutionary history is to blame: 'If some creature's life depended on lumping together the moon, blue cheese, and bicycles,' he says, 'you can be pretty sure that Mother Nature would find a way for it to "see" these as "intuitively just the same kind of thing"'.⁹

A moderate conclusion that can be drawn from these considerations is D. M. Armstrong's; namely that if we are to endorse an ontology of universals, it must be empirically guided – both scientific evidence and philosophical considerations must

be brought to bear in determining whether predicates apply to universals – and if they do – which universals they apply to.¹⁰ This conclusion falls a long way short of Nietzschean scepticism; but it is not clear that anything else is required. Moreover it is not clear that Nietzschean scepticism is even *coherent*, since to be so its claim must be capable of being formulated without the universal/particular distinction it repudiates – it cannot be the claim that reality lacks the property of being divided into universals and particulars, for instance. Of course, once we reject the ‘Fido’-Fido account, we will not think that all predication ascribes a property.¹¹ But in that case, it is unclear what the sceptic is saying, or how the scientific, and specifically evolutionary considerations sometimes adduced in its support are to be interpreted as claims about reality, if they do not ascribe properties to particulars.

The nominalist – who also claims that reality is not divided into universals and particulars – faces no such difficulties, because they accept some basis in reality for our classification of things as of the same type; they simply deny that this is the existence of real universals. The Nietzschean needs an equivalent account. Thus consider Quine’s rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, with which MacBride compares his own Ramsey-inspired scepticism.¹² Quine argues that no statements are true simply in virtue of meaning, which effectively makes all statements synthetic – with the appearance of an analytic/synthetic distinction to be explained in terms of distinctions between synthetic statements, just as the nominalist explains the appearance of a universal/particular distinction in terms of particulars alone. In both cases an alternative to the distinction placed in question renders the position coherent.

But Nietzschean scepticism offers no such account. Strawson, for instance, thinks it is enough to claim that the distinction is ‘unexceptional in everyday life’, but ‘superficial from the point of view of science and metaphysics’; there is a ‘conceptual distinction’ that works well in everyday life, but no ‘real distinction’, since ‘concrete objects are nothing but concrete instantiations of properties’.¹³ Driving this view is a desire to avoid both the Lockean conception of substance as independent of properties, and the Humean ‘bundle’ conception of objects as properties without bearers. Since particulars and properties seem equally problematic when isolated, Strawson concludes that the Lockean and Humean views are dead-ends which language alone – and not the world – drives us to.

However the claim that reality contains no ‘real distinction’ between properties and particulars is clearly not an everyday claim. So if language and thought are not to be trusted beyond the everyday, then the sceptic has no right to this claim unless they can provide an alternative account of how it is to be understood without the distinction it puts in doubt. Strawson says that Nietzsche, ‘never thinks that there’s any insuperable difficulty in using language that builds in such errors to express truths about those very errors’ – and this does seem right about Nietzsche.¹⁴ But if language and thought are sometimes to be trusted, we need to know when. Perhaps not when we find ourselves led to intractable problems. But metaphysical problems typically become deadlocked, so to take this line would threaten a general scepticism about metaphysics – which might be conducive to Nietzsche in some of his moods, but is certainly not what Strawson intends. And more importantly, if we give up on metaphysical problems because we believe they are illusions of language, we are still left with the phenomena

that gave rise to them. This is particularly clear in the case at hand, where a refusal to pursue the metaphysics of the universal/particular distinction would render its everyday usefulness entirely mysterious.

Strawson seems to be on firmer ground when he recommends we simply *look* at an ordinary object, and *see* that its properties – its way of being – is exactly the same as its being; we can gaze beyond the deceptive shroud of human language and thought, he thinks.¹⁵ However what we see is entirely compatible with all the traditional positions on the problem of universals. It is not as if the Platonist thinks we have distinct impressions of both the universal and the particular; or that nominalists rest their case on our inability to see anything except the particular. Both positions are metaphysical interpretations of what we all see alike. And so is the sceptic's view; the difference is that it is an interpretation which repudiates a distinction required by the only natural way we have of making sense of it as a metaphysical claim.

Abandoning the universal/particular distinction does not offer an easy way out, then. For the distinction is so basic to our thinking that to deny it is simply to raise the new metaphysical question of what – if not ascribing properties to particulars – we are doing when we talk about the world. Maybe this can be achieved; Whitehead made the attempt, for instance.¹⁶ However if the result is a revisionary metaphysic – which will doubtless generate problems of its own – this undermines the initial appeal of the move, which was to sweep away the ancient problem of universals. This is not to deny that particular problems may be raised about *where* we draw universal/particular distinctions; detailed problems of the kind Ramsey and MacBride raise, and Armstrong tries to address. And we may profitably express scepticism about the misleading form of language in particular cases where we have learnt to make better sense of the world; as when science refines our notion of colour, or philosophy our notion of existence. But complete scepticism about the distinction seems to ask too much of philosophy – namely that it step outside our understanding of the world and put something else in its place.

Once excessive scepticism about language, as well as excessive trust in it, are put to one side, we can look to the real theoretical basis for the problem of universals, which can be developed in two closely connected ways, both stemming from Plato.¹⁷ The first is most easily grasped by just looking – look at two points in a uniformly blue sky. Exactly the same blue can be seen at both. Since we cannot be aware of the same particular as wholly located at two different places at the same time, it seems we must in some sense be aware of a universal. For a universal – on one natural conception at least – is something which can be wholly present not only in two places at once, but in any number; since it makes no difference to its identity how many appearances it puts in. As Keith Campbell puts it, 'increasing or decreasing it by millions, in no way either augments or diminishes the universal itself'.¹⁸ Strange as it seems when spelt out this way, this is a natural way of thinking – lots of different things can be the same blue, and it makes no difference to the nature of blue how much or little of the world happens to be that colour. However, any commitment to the existence of universals creates an immediate and obvious clash with objective thought, which tells us that the world is a collection of physical things, such as books and quarks, which are most naturally conceived as particulars with individual, unrepeatable being. The

problem of universals, then, is to determine whether or not objective thought must be supplemented with general, universal things such as blueness. This is the traditional 'one over many' route into the problem.¹⁹

The second comes from reflection on the generality of thought, as expressed in language. For ideas or concepts are general, in that they can apply to any number of different things. It seems, then, that if thought is to have application to the world – if the world is to be intelligible – then it must itself contain generality; there must be something general answering to the generality of our thought. And yet our conception of the objective world is of a world of particulars. Thus reflection on thought, just like reflection on the world, brings us to the question of whether objective thought must be supplemented with universals. In the first case, we see the generality in the world – a world we have already made sense of – while in the second, we reason that since we can make sense of the world, the world must contain generality.

However whether or not the world contains generality, it falls short of our ideals. Thus people and states are at best relatively, rather than ideally, just; while a circle drawn in the sand is only an approximation to the geometrical ideal of circularity. This may suggest, as it did to Plato, that the generalities thought corresponds to are non-physical ideals, rather than occupants of the objective world; and that the generality we experience in the world is of a secondary kind, somehow inherited from these ideals – perhaps the blueness we see is only a shadow of the universal reality we grasp with our minds. Or perhaps, as Aristotle thought, the blueness is in some sense a worldly 'this-such' (*tode ti*), if not actually a particular, which possesses the potential to become universal in the mind that comprehends it.

2. Universals, ontology and mind

Nominalism, in the hands of most contemporary philosophers, is an attempt to secure ontological status for objective thought against the threat of generality. Nominalism's approach is to deny the existence of generality; or as we might say in revisionist spirit, show that generality can be accounted for in terms of particularity. However a recurrent complaint has been that it either fails to account for the appearance of generality, or else accounts for it by smuggling in *real* generality. Thus, for instance, an unrestricted set nominalism, which claimed that to have a property is to be a member of a set, would fail to account for the appearance because it would not explain our sense that some sets are natural; that nature comes divided into general patterns, and hence that all possible groupings of particulars are not ontologically on a par. But a version of nominalism that does account for the appearance of generality, such as resemblance nominalism, seems able to distinguish the natural sets only by appealing to real generalities; namely resemblance generalities. Given this general dilemma, in addition to the practically innumerable problems that have arisen for specific proposals, some philosophers have concluded that the nominalist project of eradicating generality from the world is untenable.

This prompts another strategy, which is to argue that generality can, after all, exist within the objective world. Thus Armstrong's 'immanent realism', according to which

universality is inextricably built into the objective world, such that particularity and universality are inseparable – distinguishable but not related – like the size and shape of an object.²⁰ Or alternatively, we might drive a wedge between generality and properties, and content ourselves with building *properties* into the objective world. Thus we might recognize the existence of ‘tropes’ – understood as instances of properties in objects – as the ontologically basic kind of particular.²¹ Both kinds of account try to take the wind out of the nominalist’s sails by laying claim to the intuitive view that everything is a particular, without thereby abandoning properties – which they achieve by enlarging our notion of a particular; either to include Armstrong’s ‘thick’ particulars which ‘enfold universals within themselves’; or to include tropes, which are particularized properties – abstract particulars that combine into concrete particulars.²²

Like nominalism, this strategy also promises to remove the apparent obstacle of universals from an ontological understanding of objective thought, since the fundamental immanent universals, or the tropes, could be *physical*. However it is not clear it fares any better. For despite the many advances Armstrong brings to realism, he leaves the main obstacle exactly where he found it – since immanent realism accepts that different particulars may have exactly the same property, and hence that one property may completely exist in many places at the same time. If this seems counterintuitive, then that is ‘simply the fault of the Nominalist’s intuitions’, he tells us.²³ And yet it was the nominalist’s intuitions, inherited from objective thought, which generated the problem in the first place. Trope theorists, by contrast, *do* make headway with this intuitive obstacle – by particularizing properties. But in doing so, they revert to the predicament of the nominalist, since if properties are no longer general, they are no longer of any obvious use in explaining generality. Thus the trope theorist still needs an account of generality, and a standard response – that of D. C. Williams – is to appeal to resemblances between tropes. But then just as with resemblance nominalism, this seems to smuggle in real resemblance generalities, rather than explaining away the appearance of generality with particulars alone.

Now what both these strategies have in common is their ontological seriousness, in that they are looking to an account of particulars, universals, or both, to provide the final word about what reality consists in. Armstrong brings this out well in characterizing his combined physicalism and immanent realism as comprising commitments at different levels. Thus only immanent realism is general enough to count as ‘first philosophy’, and hence ontology proper; while physicalism is a more specific kind of ‘world-hypothesis’ – an instance of ‘speculative cosmology’.²⁴ The reasoning here seems clear enough, for to claim with the physicalist that everything is fundamentally physical still leaves open the question of what is meant by ‘everything’. But this is an ontological question *par excellence*; one that can apparently only be answered by invoking the universal/particular distinction to endorse some version of realism or nominalism. So it seems that ontology, just as Aristotle thought, always leads back to the status of particulars and universals – since these are the most abstract categories of being. Understood in this way, a dualist and physicalist might endorse the *same* ontology; their disagreement would only be about whether any particulars (if they are both nominalists), or particulars and universals (if they are both realists), are intrinsically mental. This is a more general disagreement than whether or not

there are any electrons, for instance; but not general enough to count as an ontological disagreement.

To provide a solution to the problem of universals, then, is to provide a fundamental ontology, and thus an exhaustive, if maximally general, account of what exists. In our terms, the aim is to say what exists in the final context. All the standard theories in the debate, apart from Plato's, assume that the objective world exists in the final context; even if it is supplemented by mental reality, or is to be analysed as itself a kind of mental reality. Only Plato's theory is different, since it holds that the objective world is transcended. Nevertheless in providing an account of universals, Plato's intention is still to tell us what exists in the final context; namely universals that are transcendent from the perspective of the objective world.

A theory which lacks this aim is Kant's transcendental idealism. For although it resembles Plato's idealism in incorporating a transcendent hypothesis, it also claims that transcendent reality is unknowable as it is in itself. It is this latter claim which rules out the kind of ontological ambition common to the other theories. For if the final context is transcendent and unknowable as it is in itself, we are in no position to account for it in terms of universals and particulars. Thus Kant has no use for a theory of universals; which is what we find when we look to his system. Instead of any commitment to a nominalist or realist position, we are instead provided with a distinction between two types of representation: concepts and intuitions. Thus the faculty of sensibility gives us 'singular representations', while the faculty of understanding produces concepts which, when applied to objects, do so 'by means of a feature which many things may have in common'. For Kant, then, generality and particularity are not explained ontologically, but in terms of transcendental psychology.²⁵

If we now turn to the transcendent hypothesis, we find the same situation as with Kant; to the extent that since we are also claiming that reality is transcendent, and that its independent nature is unknowable, we have no use for a theory of universals. The appearance of the universal/appearance distinction still needs to be explained, however, and we cannot follow Kant's account, since it draws on his rich conception of mind, according to which the objective world is a mental representation made possible by deeper levels of mental processing. Our conception of mind, by contrast, is maximally thin; it is of a misrepresentation based on our understanding of the objective world. So eschewing both ontological seriousness and Kantian idealism, what does the transcendent hypothesis say?

The first thing to note is that Plato's inference from universals to transcendence parallels the inferences we have already made from mind and temporal presence to transcendence. Of course, it might be that reflection on universals does not support the transcendent hypothesis, though reflection on mind and time do. However there are two good reasons to suppose a connection. The first is that the debate about universals has contours already familiar to us. Thus nominalists deny universals, against realists who think that objective thought can somehow accommodate them; just as revisionists deny consciousness and pure block theorists deny the temporal present, against those who think objective thought must somehow accommodate them. In all these cases, the anti-realist side provides an objective alternative to account for the appearance of a reality they feel forced to deny, but one which invariably fails to satisfy the realist

side. The metaphilosophy of the transcendent hypothesis suggests that such debates are produced by a stand-off between two alternative methods for blocking an inference to transcendence.

The second reason is that the history of the concept of mind shows clear continuity between ancient concerns about universals and modern concerns about mind. This continuity comes into relief when we reflect on the fact that the modern, and specifically Cartesian, conception of mind was revolutionary. It offered a conception of mind centred on consciousness to replace the Aristotelian conception of the Scholastics – which was instead centred on thought.²⁶ This conceptual revolution explains why the contemporary problem of fitting consciousness into the objective world is not to be found in Greek philosophy, where the notion of sensations as possessed of a specifically phenomenal existence is lacking in any clear form.²⁷ For within Plato's metaphysics, it is the objective world, rather than the mind, which is conceived as phenomenal – the objective world is the phenomenal appearance of the transcendent reality of the forms. In Aristotle, substantial being is re-assigned to the objective world, but there is still no consistent notion of the mind as phenomenal. Rather mind is immaterial thought taking on the matter-less form of the world.²⁸ It is only in the modern period that mind becomes the phenomenal appearance of objective reality.²⁹ During this transition, what Plato called '*idéā*', and thought of as transcendent, developed into the paradigmatically mental '*idea*' – a term that became practically interchangeable with '*concept*' once this neologism entered philosophy in the seventeenth century.³⁰

This shift in the appearance/reality distinction reflected a new confidence in human ability to discover the nature of the objective world through science. For the objective world was now conceived as an independent reality that could be known through its appearances to mind, rather than as an illusory appearance (Plato), or as something underpinned by unintelligible matter (Aristotle). To secure the intelligibility of the objective world, empiricists such as Locke sought to show that features which apparently belonged to the objective world – but which seemed problematic for objective thought – were indeed only apparent, and hence, according to the new way of looking at things, features of mind. One of the most important applications of this strategy was the withdrawal of the secondary qualities to mind.³¹ And the other was the withdrawal of generality. Thus according to Locke's nominalist strategy, adapted by Berkeley and Hume, the appearance of generality was explained as the generality of appearance, by positing general ideas as among the furniture of the subjective mind; even if such ideas were not general by nature, as Berkeley insisted, they were still general in denotation.³² This gave us the essentially modern notion that the ideal of perfect justice, for instance, is not a Platonic form ('*idéā*'), but rather just an idea in people's minds.

Kant thought this kind of account mistakenly '*sensualized*' concepts. The error, which Sellars generalized with his notion of the '*Myth of the Given*', was failing to recognize that to make sense of a sensory idea – to grasp it *as* a sensory idea, and moreover as a general one of which our concern is only for its colour rather than its shape, for instance – is already to presuppose conceptualization; for Kant this explained why not all concepts could be derived from experience. Kant's alternative was to treat conceptualization as an explanatory posit rather than a subjective idea.³³ Thus he still explains the appearance of generality with the mind – in line with the standard modern

strategy – but instead of treating conceptualization as phenomenal – as having ideas before the mind – he treats it as a presupposition of our ability to find generality in either the world or mind, and hence to make sense of either. Thus although Kantian concepts are mental representations, they are representations discovered through analysis on the basis of their results. Even specifically empirical concepts are not imagistic, for Kant, but rather rule-based. They are determined by rules which the mind follows when constructing exemplar images in imagination, or when recognizing in intuition the instances to which the concept applies.³⁴

Given that the revolution in our conception of mind drew generality into the realm of the mental, then, we have good reason to suspect that the considerations that led us to the hypothesis that mind is transcendent will be intimately connected to the problem of universals. To see how this plays out in practice, we need to return to the details of the transcendent hypothesis.

3. Universals and the transcendent hypothesis

Recall that when we retreat from the naïve attitude, and thereby cease to think of what we are aware of as simply the world, we then think of it as the mind making us indirectly aware of the world. Yet there is nothing in the objective world corresponding to our notion of mind, so we hypothesize that mind is transcendent. Now on the face of it, this has nothing to do with generality and universals. Physical objects and experiences belong to different types, of course, since they are conceived as possessing different kinds of properties. And it is due to these differing properties that we do not think experiences belong to the objective world; experiences are supposed to have non-objective phenomenal properties, like experiential greenness. But since our grasp of the problem of consciousness presupposes properties on both sides of the divide, it seems to be tangential to the problem of universals.

This is not the case however, since a commitment to universals is built into our conception of consciousness. This situation came about when the concept of mind was revolutionized in the early modern period. For when the modern concept of mind centring on consciousness started to replace the ancient and medieval concept which had centred on thought, Plato's fundamental concern to show how reality is knowable was now addressed differently. Thus rather than supposing that the generality of thought was naturally in accord with a transcendent reality of universals, modern philosophers typically dispensed with transcendent reality and supposed that the objective world caused self-aware conscious representations of itself. Universals were no less central to this new answer than they had been to Plato's, however; it is just that the commitment was no longer made explicit. And it is partly due to this inheritance that consciousness cannot be fitted into the objective world – the modern discrepancy between the objective world and consciousness is simply a conceptual realignment of the Platonic discrepancy between the objective world and transcendent universals. The problem transformed as our thinking about transcendence developed.

Once the scientific revolution accustomed us to thinking of the objective world in terms of elementary particles and forces that we cannot ordinarily think of ourselves

as being directly aware of – as we *can* ordinarily think of ourselves as directly aware of objects like trees – there emerged a glaring conceptual clash between mind and world; and that is why we find the problem of consciousness so intuitive. The clash could hardly be more glaring, in fact, because the experiential concepts the modern conception of consciousness accustoms us to, are shadow concepts of features naïvely taken as objective – and hence the whole point of them was not to pick out objective features, but rather the experiential features caused by objective features. Since they are understood by their contrast with objective features – such that we take ourselves to be conceptualizing experiential red, rather than the redness in the objective world, for instance – these new concepts were bound to seem to pick out properties absent from the objective world.

However we were led to the transcendent hypothesis not just by the fact that the mind is supposed to possess experiential properties, and that these properties are not – as a matter of fact – to be found in the objective world; this would leave the possibility, which some revisionists cling to, that they are somehow hidden in the objective world. Rather the basis of the hypothesis is stronger than this, because we also found that our conception of experience is ultimately incoherent. This is because we conceive experience as part of objective space and time, but also as self-knowing. It is within this latter narcissistic notion that the ancient problem of universals lives on in the modern problem of mind. For it tries to capture the crucial difference between mind and world; namely that the latter simply exists, whereas the former *grasps* that it exists.

In conceiving reality as self-aware experiential appearance, we have already presupposed conceptualization. This is not to invoke the spurious reasoning that experience presupposes conceptualization because we are conceiving it, which would recall Berkeley's notorious argument that we can have no idea of a non-mental reality; this is spurious because the fact that we must conceive something to talk about it – whether that something is experience or the universe before life evolved – cannot show that it could only exist conceived.³⁵ Rather, the point is that what we are conceiving, in conceiving of experience, is something that is by its very nature conceived as something: this is what its self-awareness amounts to, without which it could not be experiential.

There is a certain line of thought, stemming from Leibniz, which attempts to deny this by claiming that unconscious experience is possible; thus perhaps when we speak of being woken from a dreamless sleep by pain we commit to this. However, since whatever woke us from unconsciousness cannot have been a conscious appearance, and hence cannot have hurt, it is needlessly paradoxical, given the ready availability of alternative interpretations, to describe it as a 'pain'.³⁶ A more moderate line of thought in the same vein comes from discussions of non-conceptual content which stem, in recent times, from Gareth Evans.³⁷ So, for instance, it seems that we can experience a particular shade of red without having a concept for it, such that experiences 'far outstrip our color concepts', as Michael Tye puts it.³⁸ But this is only to claim that there are experience-types we lack a unique concept for, and does not conflict with our claim that the self-consciousness of any experience requires it to be conceptualized in some way or another. The claim would only be challenged if non-conceptual content could account for consciousness all on its own, as might seem to be the case in non-linguistic animals and pre-linguistic children. But given that animals and babies make some

kind of sense of their experiences – which might be accounted for by invoking non-linguistic representations of experiences – this simply calls on us to apply a broader notion of conceptual self-awareness in their cases.³⁹ And even if a higher, specifically linguistic standard of ‘concepts’ is insisted upon, the fact remains that our paradigm of experience – from which other applications must derive – is of an appearance that we conceive of in some way.⁴⁰

Now consider an experience of red. Since experience is self-aware, it is something which is aware of itself as something – or as we might more naturally say – it is something which I, the subject of the experience, am aware of as something. Typically I am aware of it as red, but my conception may be more or less detailed. But unless I conceptualize the experience in some way, it cannot be self-aware and hence cannot be an experience; a rock makes nothing of its own existence and so lacks experience. To conceptualize something is a matter of representing it. So we are supposing that for an experience of red to exist there must be a representational relationship between the concept of red and the experience; otherwise the concept would not represent the experience, so there would be no self-awareness and hence no experience.

Now standard cases of representation allow the possibility of misrepresentation, such that a picture, statement or experience may represent an apple as red even though it is not red. To misrepresent presupposes two conceptions – a conception of what the thing is represented as and another of how it actually is. Thus we may represent an apple as red because of the experiences it causes, but on realizing the causation is aberrant, we subsequently represent the apple as green; that the first conception was a misrepresentation presupposes the possibility of applying the second. But in the case of the self-awareness of experience, however, there is no such possibility, because there is only one concept in play – the application of which constitutes the experience’s appearing a certain way and hence being a certain way. For to conceive your own experience as red is for it to seem or appear to be red, and yet there is no appearance/reality distinction in our ordinary conception of experience. We conceive experiences as appearances. According to this conception of experience, then, if we conceive an experience as red, it *is* a red experience.

Since our conception of an experience does not distinguish how we represent it from what it is, the representational relation must hold between what the concept of red is a concept of – namely redness in general – and the experience. This is not so in cases where misrepresentation is possible. So, for instance, we may conceive an apple as red, but even if the apple is indeed red this does not presuppose a representational relationship between the redness conceived and the apple. This can be seen from the fact that the redness conceived would typically be experiential, such that we have in mind a generalization of experiential redness; while the property of the apple would be something objective, such as a spectral surface reflectance – two concepts are in play. In such a case, then, the representational relationship does not hold between the property conceived and objective property, but rather between the concept itself and objective property.⁴¹ The former might be thought of as the vehicle of representation, rather than its content, such that encounters with the objective property systematically trigger applications of the concept. This kind of representational relationship might be a highly abstract kind of isomorphism, the holding of which would not imply any

correlation between the content of the concept and the property represented. This point is underlined by considering the possibility of an alien subject in which an entirely different kind of experience is caused by the same objective property; the alien's concept might represent the objective property just as well as ours, despite having an entirely different content.⁴²

The case of the self-conceptualization of experience is different, however, for here the representational relationship *must* be between the property conceived by the concept of red and the experience. However all that could possibly relate the redness conceived to the experience is that the experience is an instance of redness; it is a concrete instantiation of what has been conceived. For if it were not an instance of the redness conceived, it would have to be possible that we conceive the experience as red – and hence it seems or appears red to us – and yet it is not actually a red experience; which would violate our conception of experience. So the experience must be an instance of the general redness we conceive.

However we cannot understand the experience being an instance of general redness in this kind of case without commitment to the existence of general redness itself – the universal – because any attempt to do so will undermine the representational relationship required for the experience to exist. Take the nominalist proposal that to be red is to belong to a certain set. In that case, the representational relationship would hold between the general redness we conceive and the experience, in virtue of the experience being a member of the set of red experiences. However being a member of the set of experientially red things presupposes the representation required for experiential status, and so cannot be what accounts for that representation. For being represented as experientially red is what is supposed to *make* something a self-aware experience; so it cannot be the case that the representation is facilitated by the fact that what is being represented is already a member of the set of self-aware experiences. Or take the nominalist proposal that to be an instance of experiential red is to resemble red experiences. Again, the resemblance could not be what accounts for the representation, since without the representation there would be no experiential redness, and hence no resemblance in virtue of experiential redness.

The self-awareness of experience only makes sense if being an instance of experiential red presupposes the existence of the universal of experiential red. For if the representation accounts for the self-awareness, and hence the existence of the experience, then the representational relationship cannot hold between the redness conceived and the experience in virtue of that experience being a member of a set, or in virtue of its bearing a resemblance to something else, for instance; because to be a member of a set, or bear a resemblance to something else, requires the experience to already exist. And if it already exists, then the relationship cannot be what makes it exist. Neither can the representational relationship be an abstract isomorphism between the concept and experience, because that would violate our conception of experience by allowing for the possibility of misrepresentation.

Rather, the representational relationship could only hold between the redness conceived and the experience, in virtue of the experience being an instance of the universal of redness. Thus by conceiving or representing the universal of redness, the redness is actualized in a concrete instance, thereby securing the representational

relationship required for self-awareness; in this way, the representational relationship brings the experience into existence, or rather is constitutive of what it is. That is why the experience being an instance of the universal of redness – as opposed to the nominalist accounts of what it is to be an instance of redness – does not presuppose that the experience already exists. For representing the universal of redness is what *makes* the experience exist.

This might seem like an esoteric thought, but the phenomenon of actualizing a concrete instantiation of a universal by conceiving it, is in fact something we are quite familiar with from imagination. Thus we can, on occasion, focus our attention on the idea of experiential redness in general, for instance, and then suddenly find ourselves having a red experience – the universal of redness has been actualized by our representing it, and thereby a self-aware experience is brought into existence. This is not how we generally come by our experiences, however, most of which are conceived as the causal product of the objective world. Thus when we look at a red apple, our objective misrepresentation of experience allows us to think of the apple as causing a self-aware experience; the apple causes us to represent the universal of redness, and thereby causes a red experience to exist.

Thus our ordinary conception of consciousness presupposes universals. Once this is grasped, considerable light is shone on our curious conception of experiences as entities exhausted by their appearance. For the reason there is no reality below the appearance of consciousness, is that experiences are conceived as nothing more nor less than instances of universals. Just as there is nothing to the universal of red except its redness, so there is nothing to a red experience except what it is conceived as. It can have no hidden structure to uncover, since appearance is simply what meets our conception. What you are aware of in experiencing a uniformly blue sky is just an instance of your conception of that particular shade. It is your conception of that shade made concrete.⁴³

Now we have already seen that our positive conception of consciousness is a misrepresentation, and the recognition that consciousness presupposes universals simply builds upon that analysis – consciousness is misrepresented because our conception of it derives from objective thought; and the universals it implies are misrepresentations for the same reason. For redness only makes sense as an occupant of space and time; colour fills spaces at times. Yet reflection on the universality of redness suggests that it is only instances of red which need occupy space and time, and that since redness itself cannot be identified with any of its instances – or indeed with all of its instances, since that would just be a collection of red things – it must be something which does not occupy space and time. But now we have arrived at an incoherent conception of redness; we have no choice except to conceive it objectively, but we must also recognize that it cannot belong to the objective world. And this is because we are misrepresenting. Just as we do not and could not find experience in the objective world, it is also the case that we do not find universals in the objective world, only particular things. And we *could* not find universals there, since they are conceived as distinct from their spatiotemporal instantiations. But our conception of consciousness commits us to them nonetheless.

The reason for the misrepresentation is the same in both cases, namely that our perspective on the objective world – the fact that it appears to us – presupposes

transcendent being, and yet when we recognize this and try to make sense of that transcendent being, we can do so only with objective thought. Thus when we try to make sense of the appearance of the objective world as experience, we conceive experiences objectively; but are then obliged to attribute them a feature objective things cannot possess, namely self-awareness. And likewise when we recognize that appearance requires us to grasp generalities, we conceive universals objectively – as properties like redness which we know from the objective world prior to metaphysical reflection – but since we are now thinking of these properties as things in their own right, we thereby attribute them a feature which objective things cannot possess, namely generality.

Thus our commitment to universals provides another route to transcendence; because we have a perspective on the objective world which presupposes universals, but universals cannot belong to the objective world, we hypothesize that they are misrepresentations of transcendent being. And if they are misrepresentations, we should not try to draw up an ontology of particulars and universals. For even if the objective world consisted entirely of particular being, our perspective on it would still require universals and thus involve misrepresentation. As such, Plato was fundamentally right, to the extent that he recognized the need for transcendence to explain the fact that the world appears to us. However he was also importantly wrong in two respects.

The first is that he failed to realize that our conception of universals is formed by misrepresentation. Instead he trusted these conceptions more than those of objective thought, since he failed to realize that all our conceptions are rooted in the objective world. He thereby thought he could form positive conceptions of universals residing in transcendent reality, when in actual fact all attempts to positively characterize transcendent reality as it is in itself, result in vacuities which simply reveal our ignorance.

His second mistake was to think that universals were needed to explain most (if not all) of our concepts. It is easy to see why he was drawn to this view, since admitting forms of goodness, justice and the like, allowed him to link up transcendence with a rejection of nihilism. However, there is a crucial difference between experiential and other kinds of properties, namely that only the former are required by our conception of appearance. Thus we can experience a just act without conceiving it as just, but we cannot have a red experience without conceiving it as red; or at least as a quality distinguishable from other qualities. Consider triangularity – no actual triangles live up to this geometrical ideal, of course. But we are being misled if we think of this as akin to an ordinary comparison between two kinds of thing. For triangularity is not a thing, nor even an ideal thing; rather it is the implication of a definition. And no matter how hard it might be to provide a philosophical account of definition, or to find anything approaching a definition in the case of complex and fluent social phenomena such as justice, it is hard to believe – once the practical inescapability of objective thought is granted – that such an account would require anything to exist except people interacting with each other, saying and writing things, and having experiences and thoughts. It is hard to believe because people talking and thinking about triangles already seems sufficient to imply an ideal of triangularity. Once all this is in place, ‘actual triangularity’ is rendered otiose.

If we reject any view according to which we can define things into existence, then, we can view ideals as simply models implied by our definitions and theories. Such models are invaluable in our efforts to represent the objective world. Thus we devise astronomical models to predict the motions of the planets. But when we discover a discrepancy, it would be odd to suppose that there must be an ideal planetary motion exactly corresponding to the model that has thereby been discredited; belief in an ideal of triangularity is in no better shape. Of course, an account is still needed of why a multiplicity of actual triangles conform in some way to the ideal, and if this makes any reference to experience, however indirectly, then universals will still be implied. But the case of the experiential properties is crucially different, because here we are concerned with the requirements for something to exist. Thus for an experience to exist it must be self-aware; this requires conceptualization, and the only way for an experience to conform to our concept is for a universal to be instantiated. In the case of triangles, by contrast, we are talking about something which already exists, and so all manner of objective accounts of what conformity to our concept consists in become available.

Plato saw that the appearance of the world required that we grasp generalities, and that this required the existence of universals. He also saw that universals would have to transcend the objective world. But he did not see that substantive knowledge of transcendent reality as it is in itself is impossible; and thus he ended up populating it with fictional pure objects of thought – as perfect and isolated from change as Greek sculpture. The modern conception of consciousness preserved the best of Plato's insights, while providing us with a more useful notion of appearance. Appearance was no longer just a reflection of reality with tenuous ontological status, but rather a structured subjective reality, with the need for universals built into the nature of consciousness itself. This was useful, because it allowed us to think of appearances – now construed as mental states – as entities in causal contact with the objective world; eventually leading to the present situation where scientists can, in many cases, tell us which brain states cause which mental states. This modern conception of consciousness, just like the Platonic conception of forms it superseded, is rooted in recognition of the fact that we have a perspective on the objective world; and is an attempt to form a positive conception of that perspective. But such conceptions are ultimately incoherent, since they derive from the world of objective thought, where the perspective cannot belong. It is our need to form such conceptions, in order to refine objective thought, which explains the appearance of a universal/particular distinction.

It might now seem that the transcendent hypothesis takes a similar view of the universal/particular distinction to that of the Nietzschean sceptic, since both hold that it is part of a misrepresentation, and hence does not apply to independent reality. The difference, however, is that the Nietzschean sceptic thinks that the distinction obscures the nature of that independent reality, and hence is an obstacle to metaphysics.⁴⁴ The transcendent hypothesis, by contrast, holds that the distinction is integral to our best articulations of independent reality – those achieved through objective thought. It is also an aid to metaphysics, not a hindrance, both because reflection upon it provides a route to transcendence; and because it allows us to recognize the elements of misrepresentation which, when not grasped, can mistakenly seem to throw up philosophical obstacles to our understanding of the objective world.

4. Representation and the objective world

Our ordinary conception of experience and the universals it presupposes involves misrepresentation. We conceive experiences and universals in such a way that they could only exist in the objective world, and yet they do not, and could not, exist in the objective world. The misrepresentation can be recognized empirically, from the fact that the objective world does not contain such things, and through reason, from the fact that our conceptions are ultimately incoherent. What we are misrepresenting is transcendent reality, which we can only accurately represent by saying that it is transcendent.

But what is this notion of representation which is so integral to the transcendent hypothesis? The answer is that the hypothesis is free to endorse any of the various objective accounts of representation that have been proposed, which generally appeal to causal responsiveness, functional role, evolutionary history or some combination thereof; but it must add that whatever objective representation is, it is ontologically dependent upon transcendent being, just like the rest of the objective world.

Now this might seem problematic, given that according to the hypothesis the objective world is itself a commitment of the kind of representation of transcendent reality we employ. Thus it might seem that the hypothesis cannot locate representation in the objective world, since it presupposes a more fundamental kind of representation which accounts for our finding an objective world in the first place. And to think this would be to raise the question of *what* is representing transcendent being; since the representer could not be part of the objective world created by the representation – and hence not something like a human being – we might then be tempted to posit an elusive ‘transcendental ego’.

However this whole line of thought, which in outline is a common one in the history of philosophy, is illusory. It neglects the fact that our notion of representation is itself derived from our representation of the world. Thus we pick up the idea of representation (a representation of representation) from the objective world, in which we recognize, in language and pictures and so on, cases of both accurate representation and misrepresentation. It is by employing this notion in metaphysics that we come to the conclusion that we are misrepresenting transcendent reality by thinking of it as experiences in causal dialogue with objective conditions; we must be applying our ordinary, objective notion of representation, since it is the only one we have, and it is according to this notion that we are misrepresenting. Misrepresentation does not stand outside of the objective world to generate it, then, but is rather something we are committed to by a misrepresentation of reality which provides a standard of accurate representation which it cannot itself meet. Human beings and representation are commitments of this misrepresentation, within which we are able to ascertain that we are misrepresenting; that is, ascertain that human beings are misrepresenting independent reality in terms of an objective world.

When we compare this view of representation with that of physicalism and dualism, for instance, we see that the main difference is not metaphysical but epistemological – it is over whether we can turn representation on itself in order to represent its own independent nature. Thus the dualist will typically take representation to be a

fundamental feature of mind, such that given the nature of experience, experiences represent – or purport to represent – objective conditions. The physicalist, on the other hand, will typically take representation to be an objective feature which experiencing subjects share with other, non-experiential physical systems. Both assume that given that certain things exist, be they mental or physical, there will be representation. The transcendent hypothesis makes much the same assumption, despite its otherwise quite different commitments; since it holds that given the independent nature of reality, that independent nature will be misrepresented according to the criteria of representation set up within the misrepresentation. It sides with the physicalist in holding that these criteria are objective. However where it differs is in denying that we can represent the independent nature of representation itself; on the grounds that representation belongs to the objective world, which is part of our misrepresentation of independent being (again: according to the criteria set up by the misrepresentation). Thus like everything else in the objective world, representation is not the kind of thing that has an independent nature, though it is ontologically dependent on transcendent being that does.

The fact that we cannot say what representation independently is, however, presents no obstacle to our claiming to represent things, since our criteria of representation are objective. And the fact that representation must be accounted for in objective terms does not mean that we can only represent objective things, of course; we can represent anything – including fictional objects of thought – as any credible account of representation must allow. So there is no conflict between an objective account of representation and the hypothesis's claims about our representation of transcendent reality. However, if we attribute any features to this reality from the objective world, then we are bound to misrepresent it. The hypothesis avoids doing so by representing independent being as something which transcends our misrepresentation of it in objective terms. It acquires leverage on this representational intention by appealing to the case of dreams, where we can represent something either as part of the dream, or as something transcendent to the dream (without which there would be no dream). Of course, a dream and the objective world transcending it are equally part of our misrepresentation of what independently exists. But by hypothesizing an analogous dependency of the objective world upon independent reality, and thus representing the latter as transcendent, we do the best we can to acknowledge both that we cannot deny there is an independent reality, but that we recognize that we cannot characterize it in the objective terms which provide the bedrock of our thinking.

Now once we see that the criteria of representation are provided by our misrepresentation of independent being in objective terms, we should also see why it is misleading to think of representation – or intentionality – as the fundamental bond between mind and world. There is something to this thought; just not what has been traditionally supposed. It is correct in the sense that experience is an independent reality, and so it is our misrepresentation of experience that places us in an objective world; though our representation of that reality as experience is itself part of the misrepresentation. However it is not the case that the bond amounts to experiences and thoughts picturing – or otherwise reflecting – conditions in the objective world, perhaps through some abstract isomorphism. For if representation is objective, the

medium of representation can only be objective things such as language in use, and experiential states, understood as the brain states concomitant with experiences. The intentional bond should not be thought of as a relation between mental states and physical states conceived as independently existing items, then. Rather, the bond is that mind and world are both part of a representation of transcendent being, according to which they causally interact with each other.

This point is easily confused, for since we conceive experiences objectively, it seems *they* must represent the world just as the putatively objective thing conceived would; that just as a picture represents the world, an experience conceived as an inner picture must do likewise. However, to conceive it as a picture is to misrepresent it as something objective, so it is not really representing the world; it does not bear the causal or functional properties and relations required for representation – which a real picture can possess – because it does not belong to the objective world. That experience sometimes appears to represent is simply a by-product of our misrepresentation of experience as something objective which enters into causal relationships with conditions in the objective world. Thus in the case of visual perception, the appearance is explained by our reliance on our notion of pictorial representation; and in the case of thought, the appearance is reliant upon our notion of linguistic representation.

The appearance is not always there, however, for despite the best efforts of some philosophers, it is not clear why we should think of a bodily sensation such as pain as representing a bodily condition; although we must certainly think of it as caused by an objective condition – which will generally involve the bodily condition where the pain is felt.⁴⁵ For a bodily sensation seems to be spatially located but does not seem to represent anything. The brain state it correlates with may represent something, but to insist that the experience itself does is simply a theoretical requirement of a mistaken view of how representation connects mind and world. This view is a remnant of dualism. For if mind and world were essentially different, their connection could not be explained objectively, but would require a unique connection – the mind's ability to intentionally direct itself then seems to fit the bill, as Descartes thought.⁴⁶ But once dualism is rejected, representation must be objectified, and we are back with causal and functional relations, except now feeling obliged – by the remaining influence of the rejected theory – to construe these as representational in every case involving mind; thereby stretching our notion of representation to cover cases where there may be no good reason to think it takes place.

Now experiences and the universals they commit us to, are misrepresentations of transcendent being; but it does not follow that the objective world is a misrepresentation too. For we do not represent transcendent reality as an objective world, and hence do not misrepresent it as such either. Rather, we represent transcendent reality as *caused* by an objective world; *this* is the misrepresentation. Consider a dream. We represent dream experiences as *caused* by dream objects and events, and not as the dream objects and events themselves. But if the objective world is not a representation of transcendent being, or an ontologically independent reality in its own right, this raises the question of what it is.

The best answer to this is that it is exactly what objective thought says it is: a world of physical things, such as electrons, tables and planets, in physical relations

with each other. For objective thought is metaphysically shallow; although our conception of the physical world presupposes particulars, properties and relations, such that two particular objects may share the same physical property, for instance, it goes no further than this. It does not dwell on the possible implication that properties must be multiply-instanced entities; it cannot countenance such entities, as the nominalist realizes, but since it is not in the business of metaphysics, it has no need to do so. And such implications need not be dwelt upon, according to the transcendent hypothesis, since the objective world is not a world of independent being. The indifference typically shown by scientists towards philosophical efforts to ontologically ground their descriptions of the world, turns out to be based on good sense. Some scientists may well think of themselves as describing the independent nature of reality, but this is a metaphysical interpretation of what they are doing, which is extraneous to their expertise.

Of course, this answer dodges the question to some extent, since the transcendent hypothesis must assign metaphysical status to the objective world, even though science and common sense need not. The status it assigns is that the objective world is a representational *posit*; something we commit ourselves to the existence of in order to make sense of transcendent being. The fact that the transcendent reality of experience is not actually caused by an objective world does not undermine this commitment; as might be the case if our only reason for believing an object existed was that it caused another object, but we then discovered that the causation was not actual. This is because the commitment is not based on the accuracy of our representation of experience, but rather the fact that our representation allows us to make maximum sense of reality in terms of that representation; it allows us to predict and control experience, for instance, where prediction and control are also understood in objective terms.

Although the hypothesis can make sense of our commitment to the existence of the objective world – since the commitment belongs within our representation – it cannot metaphysically interpret it as a commitment to independent being satisfying our objective descriptions. But it can interpret it as a commitment to our interpretation of independent being requiring us to posit something satisfying those descriptions. This is ontological commitment of a kind, and we can acknowledge it by recognizing a notion of physical existence underpinned by the nature of our misrepresentation of independent being; this requires a contextual understanding of existence, such that we may speak of things existing in contexts of existence other than the final context.⁴⁷ And since the transcendent hypothesis provides no obstacle to physical things existing in this sense, along with the functions their arrangements imply, there can be *accurate* representation in the objective world. The fact that when these representations concern metaphysics, they imply that representation itself is a posit without independent being, is a matter of indifference. For representation, like photosynthesis and combustion, requires only physical existence.

The hypothesis rejects ontological physicalism, of course, and even physicalism in Armstrong's non-metaphysical sense, since transcendent existence is not physical. But it can nevertheless endorse a physicalism restricted to our context of existence. And it provides the best possible reason for doing so, since it is the existence of mind which provides the main reason for thinking that physical reality must be supplemented

with something non-physical, or analysed as itself something non-physical. The hypothesis, however, reveals this reasoning to be based on a failure to recognize the transcendence of mind.

5. Plato's nascent nihilism

Nietzsche thought Plato's account of universals stripped meaning from the ordinary world in order to relocate it in a transcendent world, thereby paving the way to nihilism – once people rejected the transcendent world as a fiction. Nihilism, in his view, was often a symptom of weariness, decadence, and ultimately, *weakness*; it showed that people had been too weak and lazy to invest life with their own meaning, and thereby create a better world. They had preferred to believe in a fictional world that was *already* better than the real one, rather than go to the effort of *making* the real world better; and when they eventually saw through their belief in this fictional world, they had preferred to acquiesce in values that condemned the real world, rather than develop new values that did not. This situation would be rectified by the emergence of a stronger, more energetic class of people, who would not denigrate our changing world in favour of an illusory, unchanging one.⁴⁸

Heidegger, however, thought that Nietzsche's solution was the 'ultimate entanglement in nihilism'.⁴⁹ This is because he thought it presupposed that meaning is something that has to be imposed by the subject through an act of will, and hence that the world itself is meaningless until enlivened by our subjective being. Heidegger's own solution – at this point in his career – was to try to think back to a time before Plato made his supposedly fatal move of distinguishing appearance from reality; Nietzsche's mistake was to acquiesce in this move by seeking to glorify appearance. For in these halcyon days of Heidegger's imagination, the meaning of the ordinary world went unchallenged.⁵⁰ However what Plato actually did was to take the first crucial steps – in the Western tradition at least – on the path to realizing the truth of nihilism. For he realized that the meaning of life would have to be transcendent, and he also found reasons to think that reality *is* transcendent; it is just that on putting these points together he jumped to the wrong conclusion. He failed to realize that reason cannot escape objective thought, except to render itself metaphysically coherent by hypothesizing from its own resources that reality transcends it. And objective thought points inexorably to nihilism.