§ 37. Knowing and Being

With Kant, we called *synthetic* those judgments that attribute to an object something not contained in the *concept* of that object. The relation between subject and predicate in a synthetic judgment is not given by a definition; it is established by knowledge. The question of the validity of such judgments can be resolved only on the basis of insight into the nature of the cognitive act. We must accordingly turn back to the results of the first part of our inquiry. Not only do we find there the elements required to solve our problem; we also find the problem itself, which had already made its appearance on several occasions. At the time we were obliged to postpone an answer, even though the question troubled us very much. We were disturbed because there seemed to be no road that could lead us to indubitable, exact knowledge of reality. Now it is time to examine systematically the various possible paths. Perhaps there is some way to the earnestly sought goal of absolutely valid truths about reality, but the approach may not have been visible from the course taken thus far by our inquiry.

Let us then proceed step by step along the boundary between knowing and being so as to determine whether there is some opening that leads to the desired rigor in judgments about reality. In particular, let us look carefully at those places where outstanding thinkers believed they might be able to find such an opening.

The *real* embraces our experiences and whatever is connected with them according to certain rules (we have searched out these rules above, III A). To know reality is to find again one real object in another. Such knowledge always reduces in the final analysis to a re-cognition or an identifying with one another of intuitive or non-intuitive contents of consciousness. Due to the fleeting character of experiences, this act of comparing and finding the same is always subject to an uncertainty that, although harmless and of no significance for the practical conduct of science and everyday affairs, is always present theoretically and stands in the way of absolute infallibility. We never know for sure whether we have not falsely correlated a concept with some real object. We never know whether the features of the object do not in fact deviate somewhat from those that constitute the concept selected. The only means we found for producing fully exact concepts, therefore, was to free them entirely from the real. This we did by means of implicit definitions,
which define concepts exclusively by means of concepts and not by intuitive measures, not with reference to the real (see above, § 7).

Is it possible to pass with certainty from the realm of reality to that of rigorous concepts? Can we build a bridge between the two?

Now even if we found such a secure connecting link, we would have gained only a very modest advantage so far as knowledge of reality is concerned. For the course of our experience is a temporal one. Suppose at a given moment I perceive a real object and am certain that it falls under concept A and that it can also be designated by concept B. On the basis of my perception I can utter the judgment "A is B". But this judgment, as it stands, has validity only for the moment of observation; it is a proposition for that moment. I can do no more with it; it does not help me achieve those ends for which I make judgments about reality. Thus if I were to encounter object A again, how would I know that this time too it may be subsumed under concept B. In other words, how could I be certain that once I have found the proposition "A is B", I can henceforth assert it as a valid premiss in future inferences?

How do I know that the comet, whose return at a definite point in time I can predict, will submit without deviation or interruption to the same laws of motion that have governed its path according to all previous observations? Why are you confident that the cup of water you take from a spring during a long walk on a hot day will quench your thirst? Might it not poison you even if all the other properties characteristic of water remain unchanged? Is it absolutely out of the question that your dog, who day after day lies loyally at your feet and does not allow any stranger to come near you, might suddenly attack you and try to tear you to pieces?

These examples make it clear that at every moment of our lives we must assume countless judgments as true, if we are to be able to act, indeed, even to exist at all. Are these judgments really beyond all doubt?

The fact is that they are not absolutely certain. A synthetic judgment, which ascribes a particular property to some real thing and thus asserts a real interconnection of traits, never has the character of a universally valid truth. A detailed proof of this proposition is not necessary today, since it is no longer seriously disputed. No matter how discontinuous and non-linear the development of philosophy may be, we can nevertheless in our day consider extreme rationalism as definitively refuted. No philosophical system is able