

## ***Two And One-Half Arguments For Idealism***

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**1.1** The question of whether a valid normative ethics requires a metaphysical logic, or even reason, as a ground, or whether a true ground is to be found in some other direction has long roots and great consequences. Analytic metaphysics often is written as if it and its philosophers proceed upon questions *sine ira ac studio*, that is, as if untroubled but by technicalities. I do not have this equanimity. The question of whether ethics needs metaphysics is my *personal* problem. Why on earth we should think of modeling on reality on beings as goddamned stupid and cruel as human beings? And if not on the human person, then on what? To what other ground might metaphysics, which searches to make proper disposition of the ground of every thing, including persons, by fundamental ontological categories, show us? Or does it direct us like a silent pointing ghost to the natural world alone? This question rolls in my head like a pea in a tin can. Here is an attempt to answer it by slivering ontology into a specimen thin enough and yet solid enough to look at for such an inquiry.

**1.2** Put aside, please, your arguments against idealist ontology. By this I mean that as most of you have reasons to refute the claim that the fundamental category of reality is spiritual or non-physically mental, with or without a concept of the causal spatio-temporal world as epiphenomenal, I must ask for your open-minded consideration of unfamiliar arguments for an unfamiliar kind of idealist ontology—personalist idealism: unfamiliar, though commonly present under or behind many aporias, disjunctions, and unfinished inquiries. Put aside as well, readers, your arguments against realist ontology. By “realist” this I mean just about everything other than a mind-dependent universe. I ask this also for the sole and fugitive purpose of getting your willing consideration of monist idealism.

On the other hand, I do not ask you to put aside, even for this passing hour, your constructive or affirmative arguments for a realist ontology or for substance dualist ontology. The border between proof, dispositive argument, and refutation is not long-lived in the course

of an inquiry. But since so much of analytic metaphysics has been devoted to refuting idealism, and since so much of the broader course of modern philosophy—both analytically-inspired and phenomenologically-inspired—has been to describe varieties of empirically-based physicalist world-views, seeking an emergent compromise between man and nature, I ask of you a fresh disposition to arguments for idealism. Maintaining due regard for the empirical and for the rational is difficult when affirming an idealist ontology. Everyone of you is likely to have a different opinion as to what is success in this matter. But I ask nothing of you in this regard: it is another problem, a different fuss, belonging to a region of the horizon past the short pace of this paper. I will consider neither reasons for realism nor reasons against idealism, because the constructive and affirmative reasons for idealism are few and one is often hard-pressed to find them in the debates in epistemology and philosophy of mind. But there are separable constructive claims for idealism worth explaining without reference to physicalism, behaviorism, cognitivism, coherentism, presentism and eternalism, four-dimensionalism, or even new mysterianism.

**1.3** The record of the critical philosophy has been very long. Husserl always maintained that phenomenology was an empirical study. Culture theory, in art, literature, urbanism, and material culture studies, as well as the history of ideas, maintains a materialist basis, not naively or flatly materialist but broads enough to enclose both the material basis of communication along with the human stain in history. Thinkers of this sort are not ontologists, or at least do not originate their approaches in novel ontological claims. Their positions, even when they appear as revolutionary as do, say, feminism or speculative realism,<sup>1</sup> rely on adapted phenomenology.

In the midst of this, and since the decline among philosophers of credibility for absolute idealism, there have been in published academic philosophical literature two original affirmative arguments for an idealist ontology. These arguments lay claim to a non-absolute idealism. In the case of John Foster, our contemporary, the claim is in the end for substance dualism, though he called it “canonical idealism” and “phenomenalist idealism” at points in its development. The other argument preceded it by a century. It was the work of Borden Parker Bowne, one of the most distinctive and now neglected American philosophers. Both of these theories affirm a non-absolute idealism, and both conclude with some idea of personhood. Foster has hinted at this only more lately, but it was the central drive of Bowne’s work. Because it is necessary for a successful idealism to head in this direction, I shall describe John Foster’s core argument for idealism first in this essay and then describe Borden Parker Bowne’s core argument for idealism. These two exposition focus on developing the constructive argument. each concluding with a word about the position of God in their metaphysics. Each will also point toward the strengths and weaknesses of the positions. But on the whole I shall forbear discussing the many interesting parallels and orthogonal between

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<sup>1</sup>Or the furthest view yet: Cary Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” in *PMLA* vol. 124, no. 2 (2009), pp. 564-75.

these two lines of thought until the final (fourth) section; and even then my focus will not be historical. Evaluation of the two arguments directs us toward another new argument for idealism that patches their faults—or perhaps fulfills the promise of a new power of idealism in philosophy. I think it might, but I do not yet see the whole of that argument. I see a part of it—half of it at the most.

My expositions do not employ solely the names of concepts and other terms used by Foster and by Bowne. There are two reasons for this. The first is that a more neutral ground than that provided by their terms is necessary for explaining the arguments. Foster's argument is notoriously intricate. Bowne uses quite plain though sophisticated language, and as a result it seems simpler than it is. My way of explaining each differs according to their manner of thought. The second reason is that my aim is to find out about idealism more than it is to find out about Bowne and Foster, nor so much to harmonize them as to think about the direction for their philosophical faith to which they both pointed.

**2.1** In 1982 a longtime Oxford philosopher named John Foster published a defense of an idealist ontology. What he defends is not anything like the Hegelian absolute idealism that most people call “idealism.” The affirmative content of Foster's system has little in common with the traditional metaphysics of idealism in Continental Europe or its British form in the thought of F. H. Bradley. The way in which Foster defends it also followed a new path. He has used the tools of contemporary Anglo-American analytic metaphysics, a form of the logical discourse that replaced Bradley and absolute idealism and a great many other schools of thought in the twentieth century in phases that included positivism and “ordinary language” analysis. Since 1982 Foster pursued his ideas, expanding the argument from its basis in eighteenth-century British epistemology into philosophy of mind and the ontological controversies of modern foundationalist metaphysics. The work of his contemporary disputants in these areas has generally supported physicalism, materialism, realism, and empiricism. Some of their work is anti-physicalist, and a good deal more is devoted to softening the edge of various kinds of non-metaphysical reductionism. A few philosophers have affirmatively argued for idealism in analytic terms. Foster has, however, a constructive concept for idealism unique to his own thought. He has looked at it from various angles in steady monographic discourse, making a few changes along the way. Part of the importance of this is that Foster does not argue for idealism on the basis of the shreds of it built into the creation of phenomenology and thereby alive, in some ways, in modern Continental philosophy. Instead, he has argued as an analytic philosopher. By this route he has approached an older possibility of a non-absolute idealism, implicit in Berkeley, and alive in Continental thought, though he does not seem interested in *existenzphilosophie*. Foster has been engaged with issues common to the major analytic philosophers in philosophy of mind and modern metaphysics for the last half-century, but he is virtually the only proponent of a fully idealist ontology among them.

Foster's first book, *A Case for Idealism*, presents a dense extended logical argument with

many working parts. The book, as he said he came to realize, put “an intolerable demand on the reader.” To make his case more compact and intelligible he published two articles, in 1993 and 1994, as “succinct” versions of his strongest, most central argument. He presented idealism as a defense of Cartesian dualism in a book on the philosophy of mind in 1991. He also took on the main schools of contemporary epistemology in a through-going version of his philosophy in another book in 2000. In 2004 he published a discussion of some of the theological ideas to which his work is pointed and on which it is based. Finally, 2008, he very substantially rewrote and clarified his first book and published the result as *A World For Us*.<sup>2</sup> This book is the most important statement of idealistic ontology in a century, using the ideas developed in all relevant areas of philosophy over that century, but we must wait to learn whether it can remedy the difficulties his early work gave readers.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout this career of publication, Foster has used an idea of his own invention as his core argument. Foster most recently calls it “the interchange case”,<sup>4</sup> and I shall refer to it as the “Interchange Argument.” He has written five published versions of it: the first in 1982’s *A Case for Idealism* and the fifth in 2008’s *A World For Us*. The Interchange Argument does the brunt of the work in his two “succinct” articles and is discussed in a very rich context in *The Nature of Perception*.<sup>5</sup> In both the first and the last of the texts, he sets forth the argument in the same framework—as a direct proof of the necessity of idealism—although in quite different words, the first being a long series of propositions and deductions and the last being a more readable essay. He changes his angle of approach in the works between these.<sup>6</sup> He ties it in different ways to his other basic concepts, arguments, and positions.<sup>7</sup> He also changes his concrete examples.<sup>8</sup> But in all versions Foster takes pains to place the Interchange Argument in an authoritative and definitive position with respect to his arguments against ontological realism in general and against physicalism, functionalism, behaviorism, emergentism, etc. He says that it is the affirmative, constructive logic of idealism: the reason for his view, neatly

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<sup>2</sup>The works by Foster mentioned here are, alphabetically as follows, along with the abbreviations I have used to cite them: *The Case for Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1991), cited as “CI”; *The Divine Lawmaker: lectures on induction, laws of nature, and the existence of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), cited as “DL”; *The Immaterial Self: a defence of the Cartesian dualist conception of the mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); “In Defense of Phenomenalistic Idealism,” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. 54, no. 3 ((September, 1994), pp. 509-529, cited as “DP”; *The Nature of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 200), cited as “NP”; “The Succinct Case for Idealism” in Howard Robinson, ed., *Objections to Physicalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 293-314, cited as “SC”; and

*A World For Us: the case for phenomenalistic idealism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), cited as “WU.”

<sup>3</sup>Peter Unger in *All the Power in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), says of CI that “much of the book seems written in a difficult technical style. But from what I’ve managed to understand, I’m convinced that the work deserves serious study” (p. 26, n. 13)

<sup>4</sup>WU pp. 127-135.

<sup>5</sup>NP pp. 263-271.

<sup>6</sup>Especially in NP and SC.

<sup>7</sup>E.g., his analogy of “the ten lenses” in NP pp. 67-70.

<sup>8</sup>He most commonly uses Oxford/Oxfordshire and Cambridge/Cambridgeshire but in DP pp. 517-520 Greensboro, NC replaces Cambridge.

fitted into all the arguments against its challengers.

Amidst very many topics that Foster covers in his writing on idealism, and along with the close consistency among his chief lines of thought, the Interchange Argument is his positive analytic core argument for an idealist ontology. It is an argument for non-absolute idealism and the first original and good idealist affirmative hypothesis of this kind in a century, in contrast to the numerous able criticisms of physicalism.<sup>9</sup> In order to examine its validity, I primarily use the statement of the Interchange Argument that John Foster published in *A World For Us*.<sup>10</sup> It is his most recent and most thorough version. The argument does not change in any consequential way from 1982 through 2008. I will, however, freely refer to wording and ideas in the versions that enrich this argument or help make it more lucid.

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<sup>9</sup>There might be other affirmative arguments in the published works of the most prominent idealist critics of physicalism, such as Robert Adams and Howard Robinson, but there not seem to be a purely constructive and very, very strong idea such as we find in Foster.

<sup>10</sup>WU pp. 126-148. In CI it is given on pp. 87ff.

**2.2.** The Interchange Argument makes a fundamental and universal ontological claim. This is not an honorary title, nor does Foster aim simply to paint a pretty picture of a “world for us.” He earned the claim because he attempts to endow “canonical idealism” by the pursuit of metaphysical possibility “at the theoretical limit.”<sup>11</sup> Of the few discussions of Foster’s work, all follow Foster’s own long march to the core argument, that is, the train of positions and concepts that lead up to the Interchange Argument in all of his published versions of it.<sup>12</sup> Each of these concepts supports the Interchange Argument, either as a necessary ground or a necessary consequence. Each bolsters the core argument. For both those who might agree with Foster, and those many more who disagree, this plan gives Foster too much of the exposition on his own terms because it protects the core argument from apodeictic exposition. It leaves the entire structure open to suspicion of tautology, with certain more widely known terms added on to give the appearance of non-circularity.<sup>13</sup> Though the long march plan is Foster’s own, a network of mutually reinforcing concepts looks to be no more than a custom-made jigsaw, however rigorously developed, when opposed to vigorous creative and non-reductive materialism. Deixis is not an improper argument, for it is a way of understanding and persuading. But Foster’s analytic case for idealism is not given full force, or even well-described, save by a clear apodeixis of the Interchange Argument, that is, an exposition of the unargued and fundamental claims, in their solitude, necessary to the theory.<sup>14</sup>

(1). The Interchange Argument has three premises. (I). We have sensations, and we desire to learn about the world as a whole from them. In order to learn about the world as a whole, we must consider our sensations as a whole. In order to do that, the philosopher examines our thoughts about sensations. Even if we conclude that our thoughts themselves are sensory, we can proceed to examine them as a whole only by considering them, at least provisionally, as non-sensory events. This is the non-epistemic analysis of mental events.<sup>15</sup> (ii). In non-epistemic analysis we can hold in thought many things that sensory evidence does not show to be real and even things that sensory evidence shows to be unreal. When we perform this operation, we can sometimes imagine as the fundamental constitution of sense-

<sup>11</sup>This seems apparent to me right from the first introduction of “intrinsic content” in WU pp. 47ff.; cf. CI pp. 73ff.

<sup>12</sup>These are the most helpful reviews I have read: of *The Case for Idealism*: Richard Fumerton, (untitled) in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 45, no. 3 (March, 1985), pp. 459-461; and Harold Kincaid, (untitled), in *The Philosophical Review* (vol. 93, no. 3 (July, 1984), pp. 465-468; of *A Succinct Case*: David Gordon, “A Revival of Idealism?,” (a review of Howard Robinson ed., *Objections to Physicalism*) in *Religious Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2 (June, 1983), pp. 249-255; and of *A World for Us*: Paul Coates, (untitled), in *Analysis* (online reviews), vol. 70 (July, 2010), 3pp. (<http://analysis.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/-crossref-forward-links/anq088v1>); Geoffrey Madell, (untitled), in *Philosophy*, vol. 84, no. 2 (April, 2009), pp. 307-310; and William Seager, (untitled), in *Philosophical Reviews*, April 7, 2009 (<http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?-id=15785>). See also Hong Yu Wong, “Cartesian Psychophysics,” in Peter Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, ed., *Persons: Human and Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 169-198.

<sup>13</sup>In fact Foster’s core argument is generally called his topic-neutrality argument, but topic neutrality is one of his theses and not his argument.

<sup>14</sup>Although a fresh approach of this kind might seem to do violence to the complexity of Foster’s ideas, it is actually a way to make clear a very difficult argument.

<sup>15</sup>SC pp. 294-295.

data and of the world states of affairs that we do not epistemically know to be true. Non-epistemic analysis stipulates that the degree to which we must in the end constrain these by logic is so remote as to be irrelevant for its purposes. Such states of affairs are therefore metaphysically conceivable.<sup>16</sup> (iii). One metaphysically conceivable state of affairs in the fundamental constitution of reality, or ontology, is that parts of it are wholly opposites of what we universally think them to be and that the true state of affairs in this regard is not attested to by any sense-data and consequently cannot be proven or disproven by any epistemic examination. Let us call one such an unattested metaphysically conceivable state of affairs an interchanged ontology.

(2). From these premises follow three conclusions. (I). According to an interchanged ontology, all our understanding of sensory information is mental. The reality posited as true by the interchanged ontology would be true regardless of what we think we know about reality. Since epistemic evidence does not show the occluded interchange, we know only the arrangement apparent to us as if there were really no interchange.<sup>17</sup> Therefore what we know are the mental events according to which we understand and learn from sensory data rather than the state of affairs that constitutes, or perhaps generates, the sensory events. In this case, the world we know does not exist without our mental activity; in its absence, another reality, the one unknown to us, exists and solely exists. (ii). The occluded interchanged reality therefore certainly escapes our entire notice. We know a world that works, a world in which every thing depends on everything else in every detail and in which there never can be any entity or force that so deviates from the structure of the rest that we cannot possibly come to understand its cause with adequate time and effort. Not only is there no reason for anything to deviate from the intelligible structure, there is also every reason that everything should not deviate from it. (iii). Therefore, we hold no sensory understanding of the world except by our mental activity. Our mental activity comprises both the outward as well as, of course, the inward realms. It comprises our entire relation to existence, and we have or know no existence except by mental phenomena.<sup>18</sup>

(3). This way of explaining Foster's reasoning uncovers three apodeictic claims following each of the three pairs of premises and conclusions above. (I). Although "the best explanation" might have faults and leave us in the dark about many things, it is necessary to take as a correct explanation that explanation which is best by virtue of harmonizing more fully with the world known to us than, and therefore has fewer faults than, any other explanation. Under the Interchange Argument, Foster's conclusion as to mental phenomena will hold true no matter what future facts or explanations of facts we arrive at. Foster is a full-

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<sup>16</sup>See Andrew Melnyk, "Physicalism Unfalsified: Chalmers' Inconclusive Conceivability Argument," in C. Gillett & Barry Loewer, ed., *Physicalism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 331-349, esp. pp. 346ff.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. WU p. 119.

<sup>18</sup>NP p. 251.

on dualistic idealist, having tried to construct a position that no current physicalist theory and no augmentation of human knowledge may falsify. The metaphysical conceivability of an occluded interchanged ontology is permanent: therefore, we must be certain of the mental character of cognition and the real world that we know. Foster regularly refers to “the claim for the best explanation” as a fixed and chief principle of method.<sup>19</sup> So no new forms of physicalism, even when based on new science, can provide a better explanation of the mental phenomena than can the theory that world itself is ideal. (ii). No understanding of the world can account for its richness<sup>20</sup> other than the one in which truthful understanding regards our fullest mental capacity as entitative. Every analytic theory is necessarily no more than a slice of mental activity itself.<sup>21</sup> (iii). The fundamental reason for this is that the human person is infinitely complicated. It is only from this concept as an apodictic truth that one can induce the conclusion that human ideas have more causal power to account for the richness of reality than anything else.<sup>22</sup> I will return at the end to considering what “infinite complexity” as an explanation for personhood and for the universe might possibly mean.

**2.3.** Those readers familiar with John Foster’s work might find my explanation of it unfamiliar. Foster’s thoughtful readers admires the steadiness of his pursuit of truth in fundamental questions but struggle as well with the many large ideas he co-ordinates in this pursuit. The reader might feel some melancholy for the words to which Foster gives intense focus. I do. But it is a very dense and difficult argument by itself, and trying to paraphrase the entire long march of Foster’s philosophy makes it harder rather than easier to understand. By using a fresh, effective set of words to describe Foster’s core argument we have arrived at its own apodeictic core.

Similarly, in evaluating the argument so stated we benefit by looking at the objections to it apart from both Foster’s and his critics’ positions on the complete set of epistemological and metaphysical questions they address. He takes on objections to the argument from analytic points of view solely, and of these he considers as objections to the Interchange Argument solely those not otherwise directly disposed of in the rest of his book-length run of argument. There is in fact just one such “intramural” objection. By this I mean that he believes all the possible objections special to the Interchange Argument boil down to one argument, which he discusses in every published exposition, the argument from Zero Nomological Deviation.

This objection holds that if the physical lawfulness of reality exactly corresponds to our “sensory organization”<sup>23</sup> of external phenomena, the best explanation of our true experience of the world is that reality is wholly physical rather than mental in any part. Foster replies in

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<sup>19</sup>Foster is most explicit about the necessity of this principle for his way of thinking in DL p. 41.

<sup>20</sup>Foster states this in many forms. The clearest is in his critique of behaviorism in IS p. 44 and pp. 61-62. Cf. NP p. 279

<sup>21</sup>Cf SC p. 232.

<sup>22</sup>IS pp. 155-156.

<sup>23</sup>SC p. 296.

two ways. First, that human understanding exists if and only if any such “forms of external structure” combine with “the human empirical viewpoint.” Without our streaming bits of sense-data, there is no knowing anything.<sup>24</sup> Second, that there can be organization of sense-data relevant to our knowledge without human nomothesis.<sup>25</sup> The physical reality might have all kinds of useful and wondrous laws, but only those laws that make for an intelligible reality are relevant, and these are of necessity contributed by the perceiver and the cognitive agent in the affair, the human being. Foster argues that the possibility of interchanged arrangements challenges the physical realist’s contention that we sensuously know the intrinsic structure of reality to be physical and also that by consequence there is no arrangement other than the one we sensuously know as physical reality. No relevant reality is possible without the structure we use for cognition, and thus organization or structure not suited to “us” is conceivable but only as a theoretical matter that *must* have certain consequences. For the conceivability of occluded intrinsic content requires us to falsify whatever denies this conceivability. A realist ontology makes this denial if it claims that what is forever unknowable to us *is or might be* differently organized from the world we know but we cannot discuss it in any meaningful way, and therefore realist ontology is falsified because it denies that which a proponent of realist ontology is in no position to affirm or deny; and a realist ontology makes this denial if it claims that reality *is and might not be* differently organized from the way we understand it, and therefore realist ontology is falsified because its proponent denies the conceivability of what clearly is conceivable. In either direction, realism is checked. Whether there is a differing but occluded nomological structure or not, the possibility defined by the Interchange Argument provides a glimmer of theoretical doubt just sufficient to undercut the absolute claim that realism makes.

This is implicated from the beginning in Foster’s concept of “intrinsic content”—whatever there is that we who are restricted to knowledge through the sensory organization and nomological structure that fits our capacities cannot know.<sup>26</sup> Intrinsic content is the square peg that the round hole cannot comprehend. Such an idea alone stands for nothing, since to base the possibility of error, whether in quotidian matters or in fundamental ontology, on something that is forever unintelligible to us is an absurdity logically entailed by tautologically basing an analytic argument on this definition of “intrinsic content.” So in order for the Interchange Argument to withstand objection Foster must add something to the idea of intrinsic content. He does do this, but not explicitly, by means of the three apodeictic concepts described above as (3). (i)., (ii)., and (iii)., which appear both *passim* in *A World For Us* and his other published expositions, as well as somewhat more explicitly in the concluding sections on philosophical theology in these works. Yet even without adding these ideas into the argument as constituent propositions, Foster has arranged matters such that the Interchange Argument can withstand the intramural objection—the one he believes is posed by analytic philosophy as the argument from Zero Nomological Deviance. Foster goes further, in fact: he claims that the

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<sup>24</sup>WU p. 32; also CI pp. 106-107, NP p. 162, IS p. 129.

<sup>25</sup>WU pp. 164-165 and 183-184; also CI p. 143 and SC p. 306. Cf. the line of thought in DL pp. 68-71ff and 116ff.

<sup>26</sup>WU pp. 40, 46, and 63-64; CI pp. 208 and 232.

simplest, barest possibility of an occluded interchange hanging by a thread “at the theoretical limits” must necessarily prove the validity of substance dualism and phenomenalist, canonical idealism. So, in the end, the issue in the Interchange Argument is the question of the value of conceivability arguments.

**2.4.** The idea behind conceivability arguments is that we benefit from theory when it is not incarcerated by possibility. No one, I suppose, has ever maintained that the line between the two is rigid, in part because a conceivability is stressful only when it is impossible—only when it is well enough away from the regularities of the natural world that a thinker both generous and rational must find it to be impossible in the ordinary way of understanding. In theory, there are no degrees of greater or lesser impossibility once such a line is crossed. But we already see that the impossibility of anything conceivable depends quite a bit on standards such as those, for example, we apply in law to a jury’s determination of guilt (“beyond a reasonable doubt”) or responsibility (“to a moral certainty”). In large terms, the distinction by virtue of impossibility of the possible from the conceivable to the prejudice of the latter depends on our confidence in the thinkers who dismiss conceivability arguments. The argument of such thinkers, however, is that a conception of what neither exists nor can so far as we know exist requires *a posteriori* assumptions, for if it did not require these assumptions we should have no limit to possibility whereas clearly some things are impossible. Therefore, a conceivability argument can be “at best” no stronger than the *a posteriori* assumptions necessary to its conceptions. One cannot consistently, thoroughly, or honestly divorce these assumptions from the rest of the *a posteriori* knowledge in which alone they make sense, so that as a result all the evidence of impossibility must weigh against anything improbable enough to have the force of a conceivability argument.

This criticism is, however, in error. The problem with it is that it leaves us no room for the possibilities of things being other than as we know them to be or even other than what we erroneously think them to be, though the opponent of conceivability arguments will have some recourse of reply. Whatever way in which we might understand how we get smarter over time, it is certain that there no “empirical discovery of human conceptual competence”<sup>27</sup> validly limits the good uses to which we put stretching our minds. Rather than proscribing conceivability argument, the idea that we do not yet know the full powers of human intellection must allow and even encourage arguments from conceivability. The alternative is to accept proscription or reduction of them on the basis of the confidence we have in the authority of the speaker.

A conceivable intrinsic organization of reality that has zero nomological deviance from the external organization of reality is simultaneously both wholly not an epistemic argument and wholly like an epistemic argument. This is something like what a purely conceivable idea must be. It both preserves the principle of sufficient reason and also takes into account the final uncertainty we have about causality. It holds together both the hard shell of sufficient

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<sup>27</sup>Melnyk, *Op. cit.*, p. 346.

reason and the soft flesh of causality. It is far, far cleaner and more fundamental than any explanation of causal events by finkish devices; and it raises no questions about whether *antitupia* in time, space, or properties, is essential, contingent, or counterfactual.<sup>28</sup> Foster's argument, amidst the perplexing details about Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire, is conceivability *simpliciter*. The conceivability of greater richness of circumstance in the fundamental ontology of reality in full than we think we can know requires that conceivability is ineluctable from our understanding—that conceivability is human understanding *sensu stricto*. The world we conceive entirely comprises mental activity, and mental activity entirely comprises our experience of the world. The idea of “richness” required for this conclusion leads to the extramural objections to the Interchange Argument as a proof of idealist ontology.

**2.5.** Like Berkeley, Foster believes that realism is an open path to scepticism and to nihilism, the Twin Gates of Mordor. But an idealist ontology must affirmatively block this path by its own account of matters and not solely by refuting the realist account. Using a history of philosophical methods and ideas unknown to Berkeley, Foster has continued the idealist's project of fine-tuning a true account of the relationship of man to the universe, or of mind to the world, that harmonizes the way the material appears to us and the idealistic truth that world is dependent on mind, for without such a harmony an ontologically independent world may become unknowable to us. We are the knowers in the face of the many gaps between the inward and the outward—the explanatory gap, our finitude before the unknown, our powerlessness before nature, our limited abilities amidst the virtually infinitely complicated. “This is the very core of (the) idealist position,”<sup>29</sup> Foster says,

...to take the physical world to be something whose very existence is constituted by facts about human sensory experience, or by some richer complex of non-physical facts in which such experiential facts centrally feature.<sup>30</sup>

As for all realistic positions, whether reductionist or some kind of compromise with materialism, Foster's long march of analysis in the end says that no matter how humane the intention of the compromise-minded realist, there is no logical way to think “how any of it could hope to do justice to the subjective character of our mental lives.”<sup>31</sup> In this exclamation we see that the great challenge of realism is that it confronts this intuition, the final sum of his apodeixis and his most consequential and vulnerable apodeictic claim. For we have another intuition about the material world as it appears to us that firmly claims that

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<sup>28</sup>Foster claims to derive his views on these matter from Locke, in WU pp. 52ff.

<sup>29</sup>WU 183; ...the physical world is something whose existence is ultimately constituted by facts of a more fundamental kind and that these constitutive facts centrally include one about human sensory experience

<sup>30</sup>WU pp. 40 *et pass.*

<sup>31</sup>NP p. 33.

...it is surely a manifest incoherence to suppose that the thing that is responsible for organizing our sensory experiences derives its very existence, in part, from the obtaining of that organization.<sup>32</sup>

The Interchange Argument rallies in one spot all the possible constructive arguments, as Foster sees it, against this doubt. The intuition as to the infinite complexity of human experience is the lever through which all threads of Foster's case, of absolute idealism, and of idealism generally, passes; and the lever is applied to precisely this doubt, standing for any claim in the harmony of the inward and outward in the case of human personhood and the universe.

Foster disposes of this "manifest incoherence" by a firm division between a "mundane framework," in which we act as if the world were not dependent on mind, and a "transcendental framework," in which we may think, as we must think, as idealistic ontologists, without fear of seeming impractical, or false, or contradictory, or ridiculous.<sup>33</sup> Thus the Cartesian substance dualism of this phenomenalist idealist: the physical is separate from the mental but dependent upon it, appearances having been preserved. Louis Althusser reached right into the idealistic roots of Marx when he said that the conflict between idealism and realism is an illusion because our ideas of matter change in our actual consciousness from age to age.<sup>34</sup> In a way Foster says the same thing, with a wholly different aim in mind.

The Interchange Argument attacks the claim that the idea of non *a posteriori* knowledge is utterly absurd. All idealism tries to find a way around this. Foster's way is the road of conceivability, requiring mere conceivability rather than affirmative *a priori* certainties to make the way for something that can stand with a dependent materialism. Just as every empirical breakdown of physical reality leads to an impassible end,<sup>35</sup> so the impassable gulf remains quite on the top of our intuitions. One conceivability is infinitely many, one unknown is infinite complexity; any remainder after the removal or reduction of all mental relations leaves an inoperable universe. Foster aims to explain this odd situation of substances by means of God.

All idealism, from Plato forward through Foster, requires a kind of inquiry, or *zetesis*, that escapes Meno's Paradox. If we do not somehow already know something about the things into which we inquire, we cannot have any ontological harmony with that world. Foster carefully constructs a version of zetetic harmony that preserves empirical understanding of the physical world, using to this end a great if little-noticed opportunity provided by Cartesian dualism.<sup>36</sup> His systematic intention is to preserve but safely to quarantine the problem to which answers such as Platonic *anamnesis* must now be considered "utter absurdities." To do

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<sup>32</sup>WU p. 181.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. DI pp. 525-526.

<sup>34</sup>Louis Althusser, in both "Lenin and Philosophy" and "Lenin Before Hegel," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971)

<sup>35</sup>Brill sec on behaviorism; IS61-2

<sup>36</sup>Weil

this he requires a countervailing apodeictic principle: the infinite complexity of the human mind, because in this case alone might our sensory organization be harmoniously ranged with a universe of occluded fundamental ontological truth that itself is arranged for our understanding, just as if we should be at home in it. Foster does not say why infinite complexity is apodeictically mental or spiritual rather than material or physical. Yet it is this non-analytic claim from which Foster's his long march of analytic argument is saved by his concept of God.

**3.1** Suppose we one day found out the noumenon. Suppose a boy walking in the feral Pindarus mountains of northern Greece, kicking aside some brush, saw a patch of the heaving shell of the great turtle on which the universe actually does rest, and a commission of the great scientists of the world affirmed that indeed all matter is made of turtle particles and all energy is turtle forces rising up from this chthonic being. (I write this as an illustration from bad science fiction, and like all analogies it is viable only up to a point, so I ask you to set aside the fact that if we perceived the great turtle it could not *a priori* be the noumenon.) The pre-discovery ontologies of materialistic and physicalistic realist ontology and of dualistic (canonical idealistic) and phenomenistic idealist ontology would both be thought to have failed. Realistic monism will have been shown to be wrong about what the world is, and idealistic dualism will have been shown to be wrong about how we know what that world is. And in the case of not know what something is, what one says about that something one doesn't know but claims to know is of little interest; and in the case of knowing what something is but not knowing how to account for knowing it makes the claims to knowledge vicious, or dubious, and certainly no sort of answer to the question of philosophical ontology. We cognitive agents would still not, under this circumstance, be invested in any way in the universe's activities. Most of our problems as humans would remain the same. The noumenon still remains unknown and unknowable, at least as of today's news reports. From an idealist perspective, realist ontology is nonetheless wrong about what is real and therefore wrong in explaining reality. Idealists argue that humankind, by means of the practice of philosophy, can kind-of, sort-of understand what the realists are ignorant of and generally they believe that at some time or in some way anyone might fully and finally understand it. But so as not to fool one's self, proponents of an idealist ontology ought to face a difficulty pointed to by the imaginary turtle-noumenon: how is it that we remain at all unknowing about the world if it is mental? And since any part that is not mental is inert, what does the dualistic idealist do with that which is truly real but inert? If we can explain how we know reality by means of ideas, but we know that our ideas cannot fully constitute reality, then we can't explain much at all about the reality we claim to know. What does this ideal knowledge of a reality inclusive of non-ideal reality amount to? Absolute idealism was in part a systematic answer to this question. But the Absolute in comprehending everything becomes as remote as the great turtle would, if it existed.

**3.2** Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910) created “Boston personalism” as a systematic metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> By a continuous line of tight-strung argument he created personalist idealism. This system included an idealist ontology, critiques of atomism and evolution, affirmative Christian theism, and a normative ethics. He rejected realist ontology and he also rejected idealist ontology as it was then known: the absolute idealism of Hegel and his non-materialist followers. He saw himself as broadly Kantian, but he set a course apart from the see-saw struggles of Continental neo-Kantianism in attempting to co-ordinate physical science and the body of knowledge then called the human sciences. William James, who knew the European developments, was his friend, but he did not write any thoughts about James (apart from their correspondence). He certainly knew about Josiah Royce, an influence for absolute idealism on Bowne’s followers who in turn brought Royce to his final position of “absolute personalism.”<sup>38</sup> He never mentions Natorp, or Cohen, or Nietzsche, or Dilthey, so that even though he studied in Germany and was an active intellectual, one cannot be sure of his awareness of the issues in French and German philosophy in his day. Having learned that his place was under Kant’s aegis, he absorbed Herbart and Schlegel and Schleiermacher, the Hegelian idealism of his youth, but stopped at Lotze.

Though superannuated in teaching philosophy, Lotze was taught in divinity schools, such as that at Boston University, and continued to be taught at least to the third generation of Bowne’s students. Lotze preserved a few ideas, or clues to ideas, from idealist ontology before the Hegelian onslaught--- not unlike the downtown of an American provincial city that, having let go to seed when the suburbs were built, had fine older buildings ripe for rehabilitation when people began to look to city life as upon a cherished memory recalled amidst the feelings of isolation and repression that suburban life came to be. This was the concept of personhood as the ultimate or fullest reality. Its germ was in Schleiermacher; from Lotze’s seedling grew not only “Boston Personalism” under Bowne and his students (with a California variant) but

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<sup>37</sup>The secondary philosophical literature on Bowne is mediocre. Essays worth reading include (alphabetically): Peter Bertocci, “Reflections on the Experience of ‘Oughting,’” in Paul Deats and Carol Robb ed., *The Boston Personalist Tradition....* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1986), pp. 212ff.; Errol Harris, “The Problem of Self-Constitution in Idealism and Phenomenology,” in Thomas Buford and Harold Oliver, ed., *Personalism Revisited....* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 213-233; and Leroy Loemker, “Some Problems in Personalism” in *Ibid.*, 171-185. In addition, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* endowed “Personalism” with an article in 2009.

On the other hand, development of Bowne’s theology by his students, notably his successor Edgar S. Brightman is more thoughtful and more important both as theology and as ethics. Most of Brightman’s students were socialists and pacifists. They included Edward Muelder and Harold deWolf, long-time professors at Boston University, and their student, Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Boston Personalism” is not to be confused with numerous other “personalisms.” Even in Bowne’s own day there was a non-theistic mirror version developed by Hubert Howes Ellison at Berkeley. Later American personalism has opposing libertarian and Catholic socialist versions. Jan Olof Bengtsson in *The Worldview of Personalism....* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) gives an excellent discussion of the intellectual origin of the personalist idea in early nineteenth-century German thought but his discussion of later forms is largely confined to Scandinavia Protestantism and thus excludes Catholic and Orthodox work.

<sup>38</sup>For Royce and Boston personalism see Dwayne Tunstall, *Yes But Not Quite* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), pp. 9-17, 52-60, and 79.

theistic ontologies and humane theologies throughout Europe and America. There are right-wing and left-wing personalism, Catholic and Protestant and Orthodox personalisms. They are a strain of Berkeley's idealism, the final source of which is probably Leibniz; and this strain, when advanced without the metaphysics and formal logic of system-building, when it is more a world-view than a system, when in short it was truly personal, appears in Kierkegaard and thereafter as existentialism.

Bowne was the final forward systematic metaphysician of idealism before World War I, the last Kantian idealist with an original and fundamental answer before analytic metaphysics came into the world. His long argument has none of the anguish of reborn metaphysics, is translucent and also was new. He saw it as the most logical, necessary, and available *saltus* over mechanism that was not absolute, that was Christian yet philosophically systematic. He thought of empirical science but did not bend to it. He saw the mounted horseman riding on without his head—that's a habit philosophers have—and so he tried to explain how to keep it attached. He did this without benefit of phenomenology or even of pragmatism, both of which it seems he regarded as non-idealist. He simply used the traditional direct speculative metaphysic. His style of argument is lucid, arrow-straight and plain, it is sarcastic, and it is aggressive. We see a straight line from the first page right to the back of the book.

**3.3** If one were to put his major books in a row along the arrow's path, the first must be his *Metaphysics*, then his *Ethics*, and finally *Studies in Theism*.<sup>39</sup> *Metaphysics* begins at the beginning, with "Being," and right through the 90 pages of the four first chapters runs the groundwork argument for personhood as the fundamental term in ontology. It's a clockwork, but, clear though it is, it is his new idea; simple though it is, he is careful to pare away objections to it. In order to focus on the constructive argument, I will mention his responses to "the great fallacy mill"<sup>40</sup> only in passing. Even with these, he clears his desk almost effortlessly, like the man who hits the target four quick times at the shooting gallery and then collects his prize. The first section is "Ontology," and here are the basic arguments of its first four chapters.

First, he establishes "The Notion of Being." It is evident that we humans do not create reality and have no knowledge of it before encountering it. The latter clause is both cause and

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<sup>39</sup>The first editions of these works are: *Metaphysics: a study in first principles* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882); *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892); and *Studies in Theism* (New York: Philips and Hunt, 1879). Note that although *Studies in Theism* is the earliest, but I am regarding it here as the last of the three in terms of argument and topicality. Bowne's *The Immanence of God* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1905) is his most mature theological work.

In this paper I have used the following editions and referred to them by the following abbreviations: *Metaphysics* (New York: American Book Co., 1910), cited as "M"; *The Principles of Ethics* (New York: American Book Company, 1892), cited as "E"; and *Studies in Theism* (New York, Phillips & Hunt and Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1880), cited as "S".

<sup>40</sup>M p. 114.

effect of the prior clause. We cannot violate “our natural sense of reality” because we are more inconceivable without that than we are without reason.<sup>41</sup> Thus, the only job for reason is to construe the reality given by the senses. Reason is not a tool of discredit or disbelief because it cannot validly make contradictory situations out of one reality.

Both physics and metaphysics carry us at once into a world of realities whose existence and nature can be assured only by thought.<sup>42</sup>

If this sounds like a contradiction to you, it is because you imagine that thought has a long slog of a job to harmonize itself with nature. It may have such other business if and only if the senses provided disharmonizing information, but the senses and our mind are part of something that either pre-existed them or is entirely unknowable to us apart from their concurrence. Everything is definite and local, having a full measure of being. Being then resides not in static abstract and universal terms, but in infinite definite localities. Bowne argues that if we rigorously dismiss abstraction from each and every one of the infinite definite localities, there remains solely the “power of action.”

Real things are distinguished from things having only conceptual existence by this power and fact of action.... We demand of being that it shall contain in itself the ground and explanation of the apparent order.... Only the definite and only the active can be viewed as ontologically real....<sup>43</sup>

The truth is that in the separation between a thing and its power, we are the dupes of language.... Things as existing do not have the distinction of substance and attribute which they have in our thought. They do not consist of subjects to which predicates are externally attached...but they exist only in the predicates.<sup>44</sup>

In a quick sweep, Bowne has claimed that real being is intrinsically like us and that it is non-substantial. If this is true, then persons are non-substantial powers as well—further, that all “powers or forces are only abstractions from the one indivisible agent.”<sup>45</sup> No other approach to nature renders it intelligible: not by picture or by representation but by “thought” are we epistemically and ontologically placed in reality.<sup>46</sup>

Second, he deduces “The Nature of Things” from this basis. The reality in which we placed in so far as it may be known by us is marked by causality, or the laws of causality. Bowne talks about laws but he never means by “law” an invisible commanding force, since such an entity is either unknowable or phenomenal and hence subject to causal marking; and he never means a nominal summation of discrete events. By law of causality he means that which

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<sup>41</sup>M p. 5.

<sup>42</sup>M p. 6.

<sup>43</sup>M pp. 16-17.

<sup>44</sup>M p. 21.

<sup>45</sup>M p. 24.

<sup>46</sup>M p. 27.

all things must have “in order to exist at all.” No thing is a “picturable object,” which according to Bowne alone may be the content or meaning of the term “substance.” Every thing is, instead “a concrete and definite principle of action.”

These are the sublunary world. Whatever sets such a world spinning “does not belong to human philosophy.”<sup>47</sup>

It might seem that, having sorted matter, reality, knowledge, and God, Bowne would pause. But that was not his style. His next step is to take on in about twenty pages what has become arguably the largest issue in analytic metaphysics. This is Chapter Three, “Change and Identity.” If no state of things is “externally attached to things,” then every state of things is truly what each thing is at the time. The only reason to posit things at all is as a trope for explaining change. A “changeless core” is useless.<sup>48</sup> Non-substantial identity is an abstract trope as well but is more correct as it is a trope for the inexpressible continuity of the law of causality.<sup>49</sup>

With this insight it becomes plain that the question of change and identity must be considered from the standpoint of intelligence.... For the physical world, the continuity of law and relation are sufficient identity. We have here an antithesis of the real and the ideal which is somewhat peculiar, and which demands a word of explanation. Commonly by the real we mean the actual, existing apart from the mind in space and time; and by the ideal we mean that which exists only subjectively or in idea. But now it begins to appear as if the idea were needed to constitute and define the real, so much so that the real threatens to vanish otherwise.<sup>50</sup>

If the real exists in time, it cannot be known. The idea is timeless, so it cannot yield the thing in time, nor can the thing in time be thought of without ideas.

Common-sense will not allow the idea to be real, and logic will not allow the thing to be real.

There is no way out of this puzzle so long as we try to define reality without reference to intelligence.<sup>51</sup>

Things have existence only through

an energy not their own and have their identity solely through the intellect which constitutes them identical.... How this is possible there is no telling; but we get no

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<sup>47</sup>M p. 43.

<sup>48</sup>M p. 51.

<sup>49</sup>M p. 54.

<sup>50</sup>M p. 61.

<sup>51</sup>M p. 62.

insight into its possibility by affirming a rigid duration of some substance in the soul... Each new experience leaves the soul other than it was... It is this fact only which constitutes permanence and identity of self.<sup>52</sup>

Bowne leads us by this “word of explanation” to his most important conclusion yet: Instead...of interpreting personality from the side of ontology, we must rather interpret ontology from the side of personality.<sup>53</sup>

(“Personality” in older philosophical usage means the same thing we now call “personhood” and is the word Bowne uses. The difference is just a Latinate as opposed to an English suffix. From this point on in this essay I will use the term interchangeably). Intelligence comprises more than the formal, which simply abstracts from it. This much might be familiar to many of us. But Bowne calls that which is abstracted from personality, or personhood, not the Absolute. How is personhood different from the Absolute?

Bowne’s answer to this question extends from here all the way through his principal works in their systematic order. I shall follow him only one more step, through his fourth chapter, “On Causality,” onto the spot from which the rest of his thoughts on human personhood follow.

All predication must...take place within the sphere of intellect, and with reference to intellect.... And thus we see that the deepest thing in existence is neither being nor causation, as abstract categories, but intellect as the concrete realization and source of both.<sup>54</sup>

Personhood has no source in the contingent world. The contingent world instead has its source in something deeper than itself, in personhood so understood. Because this something is active, cumulative, always occurrent, never forgetful, living (if we want to use this word), it is no object of nor any content in intellect. It requires no machinery or germ, no *species intelligibilis*. It is nothing impersonal.

**3.4** Bowne is easy to read and easy to quote. He’s wholly self-confident, never shy. He is brave, mostly, until some of the further edges of social issues, where he is by turns outspokenly progressive and annoyingly conventional. In the fundamental of metaphysics he charted a clear complete course before he set pen to paper. Natural it is that the crux of the argument for personalist idealism is easy to find. It sits amidst the wider core of Bowne’s case for idealism, which I have tried to outline above, as two pivot-points.

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<sup>52</sup>M pp. 62-63.

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<sup>54</sup>M p. 86.

(1). Bowne has argued for the definition of substance as static and therefore impossible in time and for the definition of relation as dynamic and therefore necessarily ontologically more fundamental than substance, since in respect of the relations of the two concepts to time there can be but one way to connect them—the modular attachment of power to matter, or of accident to substance. Mechanical modularity is a bad explanation because the substance is unknowable, and it is a false claim because our faculties are dispositional rather than substantive. Let us assume then that there are no substances but solely relations are existent and necessarily always in flux. But movement still is unexplained. No “collection of bricks” adds up to any alteration.<sup>55</sup> No activities in space are real unless they have effect. But effect—causality—is merely re-puzzled by every concept we apply to it derived from observation of phenomena. Bowne has drawn a very simple bright line at this point: all mechanical forces require basal intelligence not only (a). for the sake of our understanding them but (b). in order for them to exist. Any world existent without our knowing it is not a part of any world we exist in, either temporarily or permanently, either materially or incorporeally. Being is nothing without causality; causality is nothing without intelligence. Reality is nothing without idea; idea is nothing without reality. Intelligence is the only concept that does not sneak back in the rear door what each of these antinomies has let out by the front door.

(2). If by “intelligence” Bowne were to have meant only logical reasoning, he would have thereby in this scheme of things confined reality to formal properties. But his case is idleness if he does not mean that reality is not ontologically intelligible through logical reasoning alone. Instead he conceives, as many before him did, of intelligence of such a kind and great capacity as to require a name fully separating the concept he has in mind from what any of us usually calls the intellect. That more capacious and more exalted term is “personhood,” formerly called “personality,” meaning the state of being a person, which is the name of a class of entity that can include, by varying degrees of participation or fulfillment, the persons of the Trinity and every human being of all time. But Borden Bowne adds something new to this by his distinction of what we might call maximum intellect from the Absolute: that the basal force of existence is the identity of self. Having evacuated substance and causality, all reality must be characterized as relation. The relation that comprises all reality fully at all points—not more in the higher and less in the lower—is personhood: not a thing or an event, not a substance or a cause, but the fundamental existent and the prime object of ontological inquiry. Intellect isn’t enough to hold its own identity or the ongoing identity of the real. Instead it adds news guises, veils, concepts, new ideas of matter. But how the job of the identity of the real must be done, Bowne says, because it quite evidently is done: it is not this that ever can be at question for any consciousness active in reality.

Bowne says

we know that a sufficient cause of phenomenal worlds exists; but we do not know, and have nothing like proof, that material elements exist.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>M p. 252.

<sup>56</sup>S p. 283.

Note that this *via negativa* does not produce, as it usually does, vitalism or panpsychism (which Bowne, like Foster, take great pains to confute). Bowne does not describe humankind as either *vinculum mundi* or *microsmos*. For Bowne “personality” is neither of these things, nor is it pure spirit or a combination of spirit with things. Bowne was a monist: there is only kind of being, including God and man and all else. “Personality” is then a name for everything, for all phenomena, that describes the basic being that neither substance nor causality, handy as they are, can describe, because both these concepts can bear no integral relation to what actually is. The constructive part of Bowne’s argument is this monism. Whereas both realism and absolute idealism explain the self in terms of reality, this monism explains reality in terms of the self. This “self” is not anyone’s ego, or all egos, or God. It is the actual process of predication, which can happen only in the mind but must take place in respect of everything to which we ascribe existence. Thus the “real” portion of existence must be ideal. The ideal must therefore in turn be phenomenal enough to encompass all existence, such that it cannot be universal and abstract. We might take the argument to be this: that our notions of “existence” are either so universalized that they cannot explain causality and therefore cannot explain reality. Reality then is to be explained not on an ontological realist basis but on the only basis adequate to its dynamic richness. This basis is the center of the ontology he called Personalism. Both ego and non-ego are conceivable only in dialectic because they are contentless compared to personhood. Both vitalism and the transcendental are mechanical by comparison. The real moving life of Being requires a ground to which all such abstractions contrast as unengaged compared to the evident and real but clearly non-substantial reality. Personhood is the engaged ground, fully engaged but conceived without causality, since causality can be conceived only as disengaged, non-relational, and static, however intelligently we use this category.

**3.5** Bowne has compacted reality into an expansive idea of personhood. Now consider the following statement by Bowne:

No law of nature is the antecedent, but the consequent, of reality. ...Instead of expressing what things must be, they (“natural laws”) only reveal what things are. All natural laws, then, must be regarded as consequences of Reality, & never as its foundation.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to his strictly nominalist view of laws of nature, Bowne holds, on his nomological analysis and on wider grounds, that neither nature nor intelligence can do without the other. This is an extension of *esse est percipi*: that whatever is intelligible is intellected. But it is not phenomenalism. Bowne is claiming that the unknowable cannot be real and that all that is real can be intellected. The relations comprising reality are the “consequences” of the real, which exists only in so far as it is intelligible. “Things” are provisional explanations of capacities of

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<sup>57</sup>S p. 330; cf. E p. 6.

change. They are the static and changeless that we in fact never see, hear, touch, or otherwise perceive. Reality is neither self-subsisting nor absolute, any more than it is changeless.

This idealist ontology removes representation from its account of knowing. It is a redundancy, a function without effect. Transcendental subjectivity must come not from categories that assist, however necessarily, in the completion of pictures of reality, but from the full range of human personality, including what we ordinarily call intelligence. For if parts of the totality of human engagement with the real are filtered out by mechanisms of representation, we then know only a kind of ghost dance, transported to our locality from its locality. This multiplies mystery, and representation makes of space an efficient cause. Intelligence, with its categories, itself must therefore be not so much a thing as a thing known, like everything else. Bowne's argument uses the strictest attention to locality and detail. These are infinite, through unceasing mutation. We stand wholly interpenetrated by the real, constrained to it by our own active minds, in a unity he calls "personality." Compared to substance dualism, monistic idealism of this sort is troubled by no concept of the reproduction of reality. We are stuck, Bowne argues, with personality, the human part of the universe, in any case. We require it in order to perceive the universe and to acknowledge what we like to call existence.

Bowne's core argument is that mechanical forces require basal intelligence because every other explanation of them is mechanical and therefore inadequate. Like all strong idealists—and all strong materialists—he tries to see all the way to the end of the problem, taking no prisoners. His insight is that monism, as compared with any dualism, is *a fortiori* the stronger argument. It protects the singular status of mind against even the most sophisticated neurochemical account of consciousness because all causal relata are mental. Occurrent events are not spatially located and hence have no spatial parts as to the action of which some account is necessary. Bowne says that space itself has no effect on things and is "useless," adding nothing to a metaphysical account of causality. From this point of view, such issues as determinacy and indeterminacy, probability and process, and temporality are not solved nor altogether dismissed, but they are secondary to the chief esteemable activity of ontological inquiry: the nature of selfhood or subjectivity in connection with the entirety of reality. "When it comes to intelligence we must stop our regress & under it as intelligence."<sup>58</sup>

**3.6** Bowne constructed a thoroughgoing opposition to all impersonalism, including general ideas and reified abstractions.<sup>59</sup> But if the concrete has meaning only in relation to an intelligent and willing subject, to wit, a personality, how then do we conceive of God as real? If my mind does the job of structuring wholes, what does God do? Leibniz had a clearer answer to this, struggling with it, as did Malebranche and Berkeley; Bowne's own answer is unclear and scattered. His students and successors were much concerned with this question. Most

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<sup>58</sup>M p. 433.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. E pp. 34-37 and 72.

personalisms are theistic, but the question of God is detachable from the proposition that personhood is the most fundamental metaphysical category. Or, if one gives personality enough scope of action, God becomes real by becoming a personal problem. But we do not have to know everything in order to know something. We do not have to know God in order to live or be fully conscious of the absolute in order to grasp the meanings of the smallest details. “Details” exist solely in perceptions, yet it is nearly impossible to form a rock-reliable distinction between details as understood by human persons and details as understood by other perceptually competent organisms, conscious or self-conscious to one degree or another. We might try to understand personality as the key to this epistemological puzzle if we think of it as a brain or a face or some other symbol of absolute knowingness enclosing the universe in a great gaseous sphere. Thereby we should have a picture of a god, or an extraterrestrial, on whom to lay our incapacity to understand “fundamental” reality. Or we might feel confident of dropping the whole matter of epistemology if we took self as identity, rather than personhood, as the ultimate category. On this route, we have two choices. The first is simple solipsism, as free of ontological headaches as it is of moral responsibility. The other choice is to live, as we have for a century, with a personhood so highly reflective of reality that it is incised by it, not just mirrored. All persons thus are taken as some thing, condescended to as the “human spirit,” deeply constituted by matter and profoundly intelligible, as well as profoundly unintelligible. Each person comprises some bits of the universal heteroglossalia. None of these three choices—an alien to blame for our limits, amorality, or self without basal force—sounds much like the rational, active personhood Bowne had in mind. They all may be construed as forms of agency, but they also all are limitations of agency, representations of nature, and reproductions of external material nature. Bowne had the high hopes of his age that we largely have no longer.

Bowne occasionally describes personality by concepts that are vestiges of his Hegelian education, perhaps renewed by the influence of Josiah Royce,<sup>60</sup> but in his customary plain language: a personality is “The Infinite” because “it knows what it is doing.”<sup>61</sup> But Bowne had found that he must conclude, as he argues we must also do, that either personhood is so rich a set of circumstances that it replaces the Absolute and so stop systematizing, as Kierkegaard did; or he must limit personhood in some way so as to co-operate with the real as an intentional whole. The concept of personhood is a site of struggle to maintain a human connection to the divine, without relying upon universal terms or abstractions. To sustain the concept today we must crowd into “personality” much of what we now know about persons: our unconscious drives, our non-immune selves, our exchange value, and our constitution by the objects and processes of material culture. Even had Bowne achieved a perfect balance between human and divine, by ruthless, even outrageous, surrender of the substantiality of anything that might intervene, the freight of our self-knowledge in the succeeding centuries has disabled the balance of the apex among competing vertices. Up until just this point, on the eve of the last century, Bowne perfected the line of idealism as a rationalist inquiry and preserved the

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<sup>60</sup>Ref

<sup>61</sup>S p. 275.

empiricism that Berkeley aimed to endow it with. He also took from the back of treasure-cave one dusty jewel, the idea of personhood, away from which Berkeley had specifically and specially turned.<sup>62</sup> This jewel was already in the hands of the first non-rationalist idealist, arraying the light of a wholly new kind of non-metaphysical idealism: the existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard.

**4.1** This exposition of arguments strictly in the affirmative is somewhat artificial. Philosophical arguments live in a natural habitat of claims and counter-claims. They are like trees, the roots and budding leaves of which, and the trunk in between them, are equally indispensable to their lives. That both Bowne and Foster are here constructed with little or no reference to their interlocutors is my doing and not theirs. Both men have written many, many words to analyze counter-arguments to their positions, generously consider criticisms, and patch holes in their own positions. Throughout their works they constantly reviewed and defended their critiques of realist ontologies. Foster responds to technical philosophical issues, looking at formal arguments made of both words and logical operators. Bowne, on the other hand, replies to the objections made, in this manner, by “common sense.” One might consider whether the different style of their defenses against objections is in direct relation to Foster’s greater proximity to Berkeley and Bowne’s greater distance from Berkeley or in inverse relation to their conclusions.<sup>63</sup>

Foster maintains that the fact that we conceive of outward realities that differ from our best and most truthful understanding of the universe means that there might be a real world from which we are separated, and perhaps protected, by God, every bit as much as God constitutes and supports us by having created a universe wholly conformable to our perception and cognition. Those who are critical of this entire approach tend to regard Berkeley and Foster’s God as what used to be called by writers of detective stories a “squinkie”—a person brought in at the end to save at least a few of the good people in the story, and all of its plot, from danger or confusion by his or her surprising information or active intervention. In neither case, that of Berkeley or that of Foster, is this actually true, for they argue the cause of God in sincerity and not *faut de mieux*. However, Foster’s manner of maintaining the conceivabilities as both extra-phenomenal and extra-mental, leaves a larger notional gap for God to fill than does Bowne’s simpler argument. Whether other worlds are possible or not seems in Foster’s view to stretch “possibility” beyond sense, yet the conceivability of other worlds is a mortal threat of scepticism and nihilism. It is also a mortal threat to our existence. By this I mean not that Foster claims there is another reality capable of annihilating us, shadowing us to spring upon us, but that we and our world very well might not have existed,

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<sup>62</sup>In his *Philosophical Commentaries* (written in 1707-09 but first published in 1879 as *The Commonplace Book*), 713, Berkeley reminded himself: “Carefully to omit defining of person, or making much mention of it.”

<sup>63</sup>Near the end of his life, Bowne was writing a series of lectures on Berkeley, whose work he felt closer to than hitherto, according to his friend Francis John McConnell, in *Evangelists, Revolutionists and Idealists....* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press 1972, a reprint by of the 1942 first edition), pp. 134ff.

been unborn in a universe nevertheless real because sustained by God, and that our not understanding this is a threat to our well being. This is, then, an existential threat. It is therefore an error to claim that Foster's core argument is vitiated by a confusion between words and things, or between "set-theoretical representation" and "what is being represented,"<sup>64</sup> because the issue here is beyond the magisterium of formal attributes. The question really at stake is, religious rather than logically formal. If the existential and the logically formal do not quite line up, if the disjunction of "set-theoretical representation" and "what is being represented" still appears to you to be bare rude blatantly annoying error, then, I would argue, you do not grasp something crucial to the project of philosophy according to my view of what philosophy is—or not, according to your view of the same object. Foster would likely argue the same thing. Certainly, he must, in the end, argue it, along side of his participation in analytical metaphysics and as a result of it, his best formal thinking. At this point a critic of Foster still has the resource of arguing from the beginning again that all of this harmonious mental reality is so close to the *other* substance as to be redundant.

But Bowne has no other substance hanging about as his exposed flank. He boxes his critic out of this recourse, though his argumentation seems very much less sophisticated than Foster's. Bowne on other hand would have it that no such other realities are conceivable *qua* realities. If we think of something possible but not truthful, that possibility exists solely as a concept in our minds. For without being connected to our minds it must be inert; and what is inert cannot exist. Therefore it exists as a mental concept, but its possibility of existing as a real order of things disconnected, in even a small part, from our concepts is null. Everything is a concept in our minds just as soon as we think it, *eo instante*. It follows that no things are objects or events, except in the familiar and supposed common-sense manner—no things at all, nothing. Things exist only in so far as they exist as concepts. Bowne was a different sort of theist from Foster, though perhaps we this difference is *de minimis* should we consider outside of this project and inside of their whole philosophies.<sup>65</sup> Even without God at hand, the claim that the possibility of alternative worlds is governed by the possibility of alternative fundamental ontological categories is strong. The alternative ontology does show that the world is mind-dependent, as Foster claims, but it also shows, as Bowne claims, that this world is unintelligible apart from an ontologically fundamental category, or concept, of its intelligibility as a whole and at the end. This affirms mentalist or idealist monism as true of the alert and energetic universe we know. "Personhood" is the name for cashing out of the game. Bowne the ontologist is a croupier who with his rake sweeps all the chips from troublesome red into contented black.

**4.2** Now we come to personality, or personhood, as the basic attribute of existence. Foster

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<sup>64</sup>Kincaid, *Op. cit.*, pp. 466-467.

<sup>65</sup>Bowne's pupil and successor, Edgar Sheffield Brightman, concluded that personalist theology must choose between omnipotence and omnibenevolence as attributes of God since goodness is more important than power. This idea of a more finite God influenced the theological direction of process philosophy.

comes to it too, in his latest book—but very tentatively.<sup>66</sup> The concept does on the one side suggest itself as a squinkie and on the other side points away from analysis to other forms of philosophy. Despite and because of the revolutions in philosophy of the last century, these have become more complicated, rather than less so, on many fronts. Not the least of these is the doubt that “humanism” under any rubric “is disclosed as occidental subjectivism”<sup>67</sup>—a phrase I’ve chosen simply as a representative of the many, many forms this thought takes into cultural theory. So Foster is properly cautious in this matter in thinking about a personalist idealism. For Bowne the concept is indispensable, because he does have an exposed flank: the argument of absolute idealism, to which idealism itself quickly tended and always does. Bowne cannot, and no one really can, argue that human beings have causal power to the degree sufficient for qualifying as the fundamental category of reality. For the idealist must be concerned, just as much as the contemporary critical theorist, as desperately as we need to be invested in the universe given us, we have no evident right to think that we ourselves rise to the level of intelligence generalized across existence.

If we furrow our brows as hard as we can to think of the existent, occurrent universe as entirely comprising intelligible concepts, we will see little more than all these concepts somehow linked, these links constituting their intelligibility. But this might be enough: just to try to hold onto every thing as our concept in a great stewpot of concepts. People often call this assemblage a “network,” but stewpot is a more prudent characterization. These concepts are posed, disposed, opposed, composed, and transposed. What we then have in our stewpot is not objects and events but concepts of objects and concepts of events. Because they are stewing together, these concepts are narratives. All human ideas are narratives: not objects or events or substantive abstractions but narratives—so much so that our interpretations of things are as much of the things themselves as we are allowed.

This means that in some respects there is little or no difference between imaginary and the real, between what is forgotten and what is remembered, and between what is never found and what is always hoped. In other respects, though, there must be a vast difference between reality and fantasy. The realist wants to help save a decent human culture, founded on fact rather than superstition and progressing by real hope and true labor. The idealist also affirms our need of respect for empiricism. But personhood as a practical matter at least is infinitely complex. Both Foster and Bowne know this. I suspect that this complexity lies in our way of changing concepts from occasion to occasion, mixing the factual and the imaginary, according to moral obligation, and that this might be a big part of an ethical personalism founded on monistic idealist ontology.

The consequences of concepts are the real human feelings, the results of our actions and those of the natural world, that we subject to moral scrutiny. Personalism, with a thin god

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<sup>66</sup>DL pp. 144ff. is an argument toward some type of personalist idealism. One feels that Foster senses a conflict that he later chose to resolve differently in WU.

<sup>67</sup>Leslie Thiele, *Timely Meditations*.... (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 200.

or a thick one or with myth or without, is at its core an ethical philosophy. If all our concepts are narratives, then everything has moral consequences. This world is quite as complicated a moral sphere as we can possibly handle. Why then do we think we must deal at all with an independent reality that must be, if this line of thinking is correct, *superfluous*? One might say that all moral phenomena are physical facts. Very well, then, go back to the beginning to show that this idealist construction of moral facts is in error. But we still arrive at moral facts, moral knowledge, moral judgment, and moral decisions. *Do I need to tell you this?*

I hope not. Every philosopher works and writes because he or she desires the good. I want only to say that once we enter ontology there is no solution but some normative ethical construction of personhood, the development and practice of which is the remaining task. If this is an argument for idealism, it is half an argument, because it simultaneously accepts idealism and to a degree dismisses the problem and yet has not the resources on its own to deepen its concept of personhood. The argument therefore makes one further suggestion: that the resources of analytical metaphysics do not have this capacity. If this is the case, then ethics does not require this kind of metaphysics, though it is never immune from rational critique, if we are not to fool ourselves; and yet the situation of actual human suffering must always have a greater purchase on us. From this point of view, the best solution is the one that best grounds normativity. As weak as all idealistic theories of the good may be, realist ideas of normativity, necessarily, are weaker.

**4.3** It is not, however, my task to resolve philosophical ouroborism, nor am I sure that this either can or should be accomplished. It more than an emollient politeness to say that we all do have community of interest in the good. The most brilliant materialist moral thinker, Theodor Adorno, put the ethical case for materialist ontology as strongly as it is likely ever to have been put in a few words:

Mind arose out of existence, as an organ for keeping alive. In reflecting existence, however, it becomes at the same time something else. The existent negates itself as thought upon itself. Such negation is mind's element. To attribute to it positive existence, even of a higher order, would be to deliver it up to what it opposes.<sup>68</sup>

Yet he can hardly find words strong enough to affirm:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Adorno, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, *Minima Moralia* (New York: Verso, 2005) sec. 151.IX.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, sec. 153.

In that word “becomes,” in the prior quote above, Adorno does a great balletic *fouette* and *extension* over the explanatory gap. Kierkegaard, whom Adorno regarded as an idealist, tells us to pause before jumping. If speech, Kierkegaard said, is to be something more than ventriloquism, we must understand the duplication and re-creation of the human person. Without this, we really might just as well use a machine. This is not an easy boundary or a final result of the

question of the dependence of ethics on metaphysics. But it is, as Kierkegaard says, the Situation.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, *The Last Years: Journals 1853-1855* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), (B) 106 (p. 239).