

But I shall adduce, here and now, three familiar examples in order to illustrate what I have so far described only in general terms.

The neuro-physiologist who is studying the mechanism of perception, like the physiologist who is studying the mechanism of digestion or reproduction, bases his theories upon the most solid kind of evidence that his work in the laboratory can provide, namely upon what he and his collaborators and assistants can see with the naked or the instrumentally assisted eye, and upon what they can hear, say, from the Geiger counter. Yet the theory of perception at which he arrives seems constitutionally to entail that there is an unbridgeable crevasse between what people, including himself, see or hear and what is really there—a crevasse so wide that he has apparently and can have no laboratory evidence that there exists even any correlation between what we perceive and what is really there. If his theory is true, then everyone is systematically debarred from perceiving the physical and physiological properties of things; and yet his theories are based on the very best experimental and observational evidence about the physical and physiological properties of such things as ear-drums and nerve-fibres. While at work in the laboratory he makes the best possible use of his eyes and ears; while writing up his results he has to deliver the severest possible censure upon these sham witnesses. He is sure that what they tell us can never be anything like the truth just because what they told him in his laboratory was of the highest reliability. From one point of view, which is that of laymen and scientists alike while actually exploring the world, we find out what is there by perceiving. From the other point of view, that of the inquirer into the mechanism of perception, what we perceive never coincides with what is in the world.

There are one or two features of this embarrassment which should be noticed. First, it is not a dispute between one physiologist and another. Doubtless there have been and are rival physiological hypotheses and theories, of which some will be defeated by others. But what are at loggerheads here are not two or more rival accounts of the mechanism of perception, but between a conclusion derivable apparently from *any* account of the mechanism of perception on the one side and everyone's workaday theory of perception on the other. Or, rather, I am

stretching the word 'theory' over-violently when I say that the dispute is between a physiological theory of perception and another theory. For when we use our eyes and ears, whether in the garden or in the laboratory, we are not trading on any theory to the effect that we can find out the colours, shapes, positions and other characters of objects by seeing, hearing, tasting and the rest. We are finding out these things or else, sometimes, getting them wrong, but we are not doing so under instruction from any theory. We learn to use our eyes and tongues before we can consider the general question whether they are of any use; and we continue to use them without being influenced by the general doctrine that they are of some use or by the other general doctrine that they are of no use.

This point is sometimes expressed by saying that the conflict is one between a scientist's theory and a theory of Common Sense. But even this is misleading. It suggests, for one thing, that in using his eyes and ears the child is after all taking sides with a theory, only with a popular, amateurish and unformulated theory; and this is quite false. He is not considering any theoretical questions at all. It suggests for another thing that ability to find things out by seeing, hearing and the rest is dependent on, or is a part of, common sense, where this phrase has its usual connotation of a particular kind and degree of untutored judiciousness in coping with slightly out of the way, practical contingencies. I do not exhibit common sense or the lack of it in using a knife and fork. I do in dealing with a plausible beggar or with a mechanical breakdown when I have not got the proper tools.

Seemingly inescapable consequences of the physiologist's account of perception appear to demolish not just the credentials of some other theory of perception, but the credentials of perception itself; to cashier, that is, not just some supposed opinion held by all plain men about the reliability of their eyes and ears, but their eyes and ears themselves. This apparent conflict is not, then, to be described as a conflict between one theory and another theory, but rather as a conflict between a theory and a platitude; between what certain experts have thought out and what every one of us cannot but have learned by experience; between a doctrine and a piece of common knowledge.