

ERWIN
SCHRÖDINGER



*MY VIEW
OF THE
WORLD*

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

MY VIEW OF THE
WORLD

By the same Author

WHAT IS LIFE?

SCIENCE AND HUMANISM

SPACE-TIME STRUCTURE

STATISTICAL THERMODYNAMICS

NATURE AND THE GREEKS

MIND AND MATTER

EXPANDING UNIVERSES

ERWIN SCHRÖDINGER

MY VIEW OF THE
WORLD

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

page vii

SEEK FOR THE ROAD

I	Metaphysics in general	3
II	A cheerless balance-sheet	7
III	Philosophical wonder	10
IV	The problem	12
V	The Vedantic vision	18
VI	An exoteric introduction to scientific thought	23
VII	More about non-plurality	30
VIII	Consciousness, organic, inorganic, mneme	38
IX	On becoming conscious	45
X	The moral law	52

WHAT IS REAL?

I	Reasons for abandoning the dualism of thought and existence, or mind and matter	61
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Contents

II	Linguistic information and our common possession of the world	<i>page</i> 67
III	The imperfection of understanding	82
IV	The doctrine of identity: light and shadow	92
V	Two grounds for astonishment: pseudo-ethics	104

FOREWORD

The two essays here published for the first time are separated by an interval of thirty-five years. The first and longer one was written shortly before my appointment as Max Planck's successor in Berlin, and a few months before the idea of what is now called wave mechanics began for a while to monopolise my whole interest; the second and shorter one dates from two years after my appointment as Professor Emeritus at the University of Vienna. The two are closely related in theme, and, of course, also connect with many ideas which I have publicly advocated in the intervening period.

I do not know whether it is presumptuous of me to suppose that readers will be interested in 'my' view of the world. The critics, not myself, will decide on this. But a gesture of decorous modesty is usually in fact a disguise for arrogance. I should prefer not to be guilty of this. Anyway, the total (I have counted) is about twenty-eight to twenty-nine thousand words. Not an excessive size for a view of the world.

There is one complaint which I shall not escape. Not a word is said here of acausality, wave mechanics, indeterminacy relations, complementarity, an expanding universe, continuous creation, etc. Why doesn't he talk about what he knows instead of trespassing on the professional philosopher's preserves? *Ne sutor supra crepidam*. On this I can cheerfully justify myself: because I do not think that these things have as much connection as is

Foreword

currently supposed with a philosophical view of the world. I think that I see eye to eye here, on certain essential points, with Max Planck and Ernst Cassirer. In 1918, when I was thirty-one, I had good reason to expect a chair of theoretical physics at Czernowitz (in succession to Geitler). I was prepared to do a good job lecturing on theoretical physics, with, as my supreme model, the magnificent lectures given by my beloved teacher Fritz Hasenöhr, who had been killed in the War; but for the rest, to devote myself to philosophy, being deeply imbued at the time with the writings of Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Mach, Richard Semon and Richard Avenarius. My guardian angel intervened: Czernowitz soon no longer belonged to Austria. So nothing came of it. I had to stick to theoretical physics, and, to my astonishment, something occasionally emerged from it. So this little book is really the fulfilment of a very long cherished wish.

E.S.

ALPBACH

July 1960

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SEEK FOR THE ROAD

Wo Rätsel mich zu neuen Rätseln führten
Da wussten *sie* die Wahrheit ganz genau.

GRILLPARZER

Where riddles led me on to further riddles,
To *them* the truth was quite precisely known.

AUTUMN, 1925

I
METAPHYSICS IN GENERAL

It is relatively easy to sweep away the whole of metaphysics, as Kant did. The slightest puff in its direction blows it away, and what was needed was not so much a powerful pair of lungs to provide the blast, as a powerful dose of courage to turn it against so 'timelessly venerable a house of cards.

But you must not think that what has then been achieved is the actual elimination of metaphysics from the empirical content of human knowledge. In fact, if we cut out all metaphysics it will be found to be vastly more difficult, indeed probably quite impossible, to give any intelligible account of even the most circumscribed area of specialisation within any specialised science you please. Metaphysics includes, amongst other things—to take just one quite crude example—the unquestioning acceptance of a more-than-physical—that is, transcendental—significance in a large number of thin sheets of wood-pulp covered with black marks such as are now before you.

Or, to take it at a deeper level: call to mind that sense of misgiving, that cold clutch of dreary emptiness which comes over everybody, I expect, when they first encounter the description given by Kirchhoff and Mach of the task of physics (or of science generally): 'a description of the facts, with the maximum of completeness and the maximum economy of thought'; a feeling