Structure of the Pure Object.

It is quite easy to give ourselves the illusion of knowledge by defining one thing in terms of others and the others in terms of what lies still further afield. Men are a kind of animal; animals are a peculiar manifestation of life; living things are a step beyond the compounds and aggregates of the ninety-two elements; and the elements are space-time structures of waves and/or particles. In four phrases we sum up the visible universe and, if the phrases are expanded into all the lore of the sciences, we feel we know something. No doubt we do, but there remains, none the less, an uncomfortable feeling of fraud. After all, our four phrases contain five unknowns: reason, instinct, life, space-time, and "waves and/or particles;" and the difficulty with these is that science can tell us nothing about them. For science does no more than correlate, with ever increasing complexity, the original five unknowns; and what we want is not more knowledge of correlation, but some knowledge of the unknowns that are being correlated.

Now this difficulty of the unknowns is, quite plainly, inherent in our mode of scientific knowledge. When science explains, it must have something to explain; what is explained is not the explanation itself, for the data are one thing and the hypothesis or theory another; and because of this radical difference no amount of scientific explanation can sum up to more than a correlation of data. One may fancy one is breaking this iron circle by urging that men are no more than animals, that animals are no more than plants, that plants are nor more than aggregates of atoms, -- but what about the atoms? They cannot be reduced indefinitely to other and slighter entities; and even if they are, one has succeeded only in emptying out experience of its more significant unknowns to substitute equally unknown insignificance.

So much to introduce our inquiry into the structure of the pure object. We ask about the unknowns in their apparent scientific unknowability, and we ask not about this one or that, about reason or instinct or life or space-time, but with perfect generality. Clearly enough they constitute a problem: for if we have called them unknowns, still they are not absolutely unknown, else how could we think of them and why should we have the idea that science does not account for them