

DISCUSSION.

THE LOGIC OF HISTORY.

THE most important criticism evoked by Professor Rickert's book, 'Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung,' is an article by Ferdinand Tönnies in the *Archiv für systematische Philosophie*,¹ in which he takes exception to the identification of natural science with conceptual science. Rickert, in his book, draws a sharp distinction between *Begriffswissenschaften*, i. e., sciences whose end is the discovery of *universals* or general laws, and sciences of the *individual* whose end is the description and interpretation of single and unique facts and processes. The latter alone are sciences of the real, since the reality is everywhere the individual (this is the same distinction as that made by Windelband under the names *nomothetic* and *ideographic sciences*).

Tönnies objects that it is an unwarranted limitation of the scope of sciences which deal with universals, to identify them solely with the natural sciences. This, he thinks, would shut history out of the category of science altogether. He says that Rickert seems concerned, above all things, to show that the *matter* of history excludes its treatment by the methods of natural science, and this is the ground of Rickert's denial of the value of psychology to the historian. Psychology deals with the *general* nature of mental processes. It can not explain the individual. And what the historian needs is insight into the unique processes of individual minds—a kind of divinatory intuition of the individual. To this insight psychology will not help him. Tönnies replies that great historians actually do make use of the psychological theories of their own times, and that the imperfection of psychology is no argument against its value as a science auxiliary to history. As well object to the application of plant physiology in botany because the known laws of physiology do not suffice to explain every accidental variation of plant-life.

Tönnies holds that, besides the merely descriptive histories (chronicles, local histories, etc.), there is room for a more strictly scientific treatment of history in which the laws of historical development are traced and in which the individual is treated merely as the example of a law or universal principle. And this, of course, is the highest form of historical science. Tönnies says that the truth on which Rickert's greatly overdone antithesis between the two types of science is built up is simply the distinction between

¹ 'Zur Theorie der Geschichte,' Band VIII., pp. 1-38. Rickert replied in the same volume, pp. 137-163, under the title, 'Ueber die Aufgaben einer Logik der Geschichte.'

pure science, which always deals in universals, and *applied science*, *i. e.*, the application of the universals of science to the actual world. Out of this simple distinction between pure theory and mere fact Rickert evolves a whole logic and theory of knowledge.

Rickert holds that history in its treatment of its individual and non-repeatable (*einmalig*) data selects and arranges its material under the guidance of *culture-values*, and that these are the sole objective and universal principles employed in history. Tönnies holds that there are other universal principles applicable to historical processes, *e. g.*, the law that the individual will is controlled by the social will, the influence of the *general movements, tendencies* and *prevailing ideas* of a period on its individual leaders, etc. These principles constitute the elements of a general social theory applicable to all history. Tönnies concludes that Rickert's rigid separation of conceptual (or natural) and historical sciences is unwarranted.

In general reply to this criticism Rickert states that Tönnies and others have failed to understand his book, primarily because they have not grasped the problems of a logic of history, and he addresses himself to the statement of these problems. There are two principal problems: (1) What *value* as objective knowledge have the forms of thought used in this particular field? (2) What *ends* are *actually* sought by the science in question? The first problem belongs to the *criticism of knowledge*, the second to *methodology*. The latter question must be answered before the former can be considered at all.

Rickert points out that he does not deny the presence of historical elements in natural science, nor the application of conceptual universals in history. But the science of knowledge must consider distinctive *methods* in their purity and isolation. And the problem is not principally a question of difference in materials, but in *ends*. The *end of natural science* is to subsume the individual under the universal, to reduce fact to law. *The end of history is to understand and interpret reality in its singularity and individuality*. In both natural science and history a given material may be treated from the standpoint of evolution. But in natural science, *e. g.*, in embryology, the particular case is treated simply as the exemplification of a general law, whereas in history, the science of the development of human *culture*, each period, phase and personality has a unique and individual reality and significance. The term 'historical' should always refer to an individual and unique (*einmalig*) process or event. A *historical* religion, *e. g.*, is a singular and once-occurring religion in contrast to *natural* religion, which is assumed to be grounded in universal human nature. The contrast between the natural and the historical sciences is not, then, primarily one of

material, but of *method*. We might treat the development of the earth as a unique historical process. 'The logical opposition of method shows itself not in the material, but in the concepts employed,' and these, in turn, depend on the ends sought.

The social life of man may properly be treated with explicit regard to the universal. The particular fact may be brought under a system of laws. This is the procedure of sociology which is, like psychology, a natural science. The individual is treated solely as the exemplification of a general law. But the unique and once-occurring development of human culture can not be so treated. Hence when sociology attempts to be, as with Comte, a philosophy of history it becomes a 'logisches Unding.' The real historical connection (*Zusammenhang*) is always an *individual* process consisting of individual parts which are elements in an individual whole having culture-value. These wholes are historical groups (*e. g.*, the Italian humanists, etc.). Concepts may be formed of their common features. But these concepts are subordinate to the understanding of the group as a unique fact. The very fact that we *evaluate* historical events and processes points, of course, to an over-individual and objective system of values. But these have nothing to do with the abstract conceptual universals of natural science.

The naturalist, such as Tönnies, hypostatizes abstract laws and sets up a metaphysical realism of concepts. A theory of science (*Wissenschaftslehre*), free from metaphysical assumptions, holds that the real is always individual and that general 'movements,' historical 'tendencies,' etc., are real only in so far as they are constituted by individuals. A law or universal is a *means of cognition*, a *form of thought*, not an object of knowledge. And we must distinguish carefully between the general concept in natural science, for which the individual is a mere example, and the historical group concept which represents a single whole of related individuals.

This whole discussion serves to define more clearly the issue on a question that has not yet received the attention it merits at the hands of English and American students of philosophy. On the one hand, it is proposed to treat history scientifically by methods analogous to those of the natural sciences. Tönnies is essentially a naturalist. For him the ideal of all science is the reduction of the individual to the mere example of a universal or law. Behind this methodological attitude lurks a metaphysical theory, *viz.*, the superior reality of the universal, the ultimateness of scientific law. Rickert, on the other hand, insists that historical science has aims and methods peculiar to itself. Behind his acute exposition lurks also, in spite of his disclaimer, a *metaphysical* assumption, *viz.*, *the real is the individual*. And so Rickert emphasizes the uniqueness

of the cultural development of man as well as of every single historical process, and he views knowledge teleologically. This discussion in methodology brings us back to a fundamental problem of metaphysics—the relation of the individual and the universal. Rickert seems, on the whole, to be right in his account of the contrast in method between the natural sciences and the historical or humanistic sciences. But he does nothing to solve the dualism in our knowledge which this contrast creates. It may be true that the real is always individual. If so, we need to know what is the function and what constitutes the validity of the universals of science in relation to reality. Merely to make good the assertion that the real is the individual, one must give a clearer answer to this question than Rickert has done. On the other hand, there seems good ground for holding that there are conceptual universals or laws, valid for the social-historical world, although they are more remote and less easily discovered than in natural science. What is the significance of these universals in relation to the so-called general culture-values and to the individual real? Rickert has raised metaphysical problems which can not be laid simply by calling his opponents ‘conceptual realists.’ The unity of knowledge is a postulate of philosophical thinking, and this unity is left in question by the sharp antithesis of the natural and the historical sciences.

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THE LIMITATIONS OF MINOR LOGIC.

IN the last number of this journal, Mrs. Franklin says: “A recent writer in *Science* slips into a curious error in phraseology. He allows himself to speak of a ‘superabundance of physicians going hand in hand with a shortage of patients’ as being attributed to, etc. But the superabundance of physicians is the same thing as the shortage of patients,” etc. The editor of a journal disclaims responsibility for the opinions and doubtless also for the logic of its contributors. But in this case the responsibility appears to be thrown on the journal rather than on the contributor, who is not mentioned. We are all ready to confess that we are miserable sinners, but usually object to the imputation of any particular sin. I venture to suggest that Mrs. Franklin’s comments illustrate the limitations of minor logic rather than a lapse in logic on the part of the writer. He was discussing the statistics of medical students, and the conclusion of his sentence (omitted by Mrs. Franklin) was ‘must be attributed to a decrease in the number of illnesses, a decrease due to the application of modern methods of preventive