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PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

UTILITARIAN EPISTEMOLOGY

KANT represents knowledge, feeling and will as separate functions of spirit and the method did not originate with him. It is a feature of a large part of pre-Kantian epistemology. In post-Kantian literature, Beneke and Herbart treat feeling and will as functions of ideas; Schopenhauer regards will as the mental ultimate, and Spencer considers both thought and will reducible to 'feelings and relations between feelings.' Recent psychologists find nothing in the motor consciousness which does not fall to the categories of either thought or feeling, and they raise the question as to the relations of thought and feeling to each other. The logical possibilities are that thought determines feeling, that feeling determines thought, that they mutually influence each other, and that both are determined by something which transcends both. The view that varieties of feeling are due to their cognized objects is the more common one, but it is not our purpose to discuss it here. The second view, that thought depends upon feeling, may take different forms. We may consider knowledge to be the instrument of either practical, esthetic or theoretic needs—may consider it as the instrument of any one or two or all of these. We shall discuss the view that knowledge is a means to the satisfaction of purely practical needs, or what may be called utilitarian epistemology.

I.

Conceptions, according to this theory of knowledge, are simply the meanings which groups of things acquire in our feeling-lives, and truth is that conception or system of conceptions which contributes most to the satisfaction of our practical needs. Conceptions are purely teleological instruments whose value depends upon their consequences when they are allowed to determine our actions. To the grocer, sugar is an article of merchandise, and the success of his business depends upon his adequately conceiving it so. To the housekeeper, sugar is a white, vegetable compound possessing cer-

tain values as food and very sweet to the taste. And so with others; each according to his practical needs conceives the sugar. Hence it follows that every conception of an object must be unjust to every other; knowledge is of such a nature that we must apprehend things by aspects and pieces; and knowledge is most unjust to things themselves. Objects are infinitely richer than knowledge. Moreover, our conceptions of objects are false in the emphasis which they lay now on one aspect and now on another according to our shifting practical interests. No attribute is really essential to any one thing, and on the other hand, each attribute seems essential when it suits our needs to regard it so. Consequently, the true and valid conception of a thing is always that aspect of it which has most significance for us at the time and in the light of our transient need. One conception could be truer than another only in case one of our needs were truer than another; that is, only in case some one of our needs conforms more to an absolute standard to which our needs ought to conform. Such an absolute standard, however, could be known only so far as it suits some one interest of ours to so conceive the universe; such a conception could be more valid than any other only in case some second standard existed to make it so; and so on, *ad infinitum*. No, the only criteria of truth are subjective—feelings of satisfaction, freedom from tension and uneasiness. That is to say, we recognize the truth by our assurance and confidence that we are comfortable and that our needs are satisfied.

This theory of knowledge (to restate it somewhat differently) begins with a pluralistic view of man's needs and natures. Our practical nature is distinct from our esthetic and logical natures, the practical being more important than the other two and each comprehending a world of needs. Needs and natures are ultimate so far as consciousness is concerned, and consequently we would more properly speak of knowledges than of knowledge, there being as many true knowledges of any object as there are needs to be met by it. Any view of things is true which arises in response to a need to which it tends to bring satisfaction as a means. Moreover, our needs are not here represented as correlated. One conception would be truer than another only if one of our purposes were truer than another; but we do not know that any one maintains that one purpose is truer than another. In some discussions our practical and esthetic natures seem to be represented as determining knowledge, while in others the practical nature alone is final. The latter is the dominant note in the view we are here interested in discussing. Utility is here the basis of knowledge.

Theoretic interest in the unity of knowledge is not practical, but its relation to practical issues is derivative. The unified view

of things is important only so far as the world is a unit; and the world is not, in any absolute sense, a unit, but a manifold. Utilitarian epistemology does not, however, discuss the question as to the relative simplicity or complexity of the world. Its world is practical, a world of action and reaction, and this purely practical world is plural.

As our knowledges are determined now by one interest and now by another, any knowledge must be unjust to those aspects of its object which satisfy other needs; and this injustice and partiality make the traditional dignity of knowledge and the authority of reason seem ridiculous indeed. Truth is that view of things which satisfies practical need at any moment and this reminds one of the ancient doctrine, 'man is the measure of all things.'

Herein we have illustrated, then, several features of utilitarian epistemology—the manifoldness of man's needs and natures, the supreme importance of the practical, the necessary injustice of knowledge to its object due to its always being a tool in the satisfaction of a particular need, a purely subjective criterion of truth, and a practical or pluralistic view of reality.

II.

The writer feels sure that the above representation is neither just nor fair to any particular philosopher and that no one would recognize his own theory of knowledge in it. These doctrinal statements are intended, we repeat, only to illustrate the subject of this paper. Any one who takes the view that knowledge is a mere tool to the satisfaction of practical needs seems to be committed to the other features of the above analysis; these doctrines may be said to indicate a way of looking at knowledge. Probably all of these dicta can be found in some of the many books and essays which have recently been written on this interesting subject, but the doctrines above mentioned do not profess to be the statement of anybody's theory of knowledge. Utilitarian epistemology exists in so far as it exists at all only as a tendency of pragmatism.

Let us in the next place notice the doctrines mentioned, beginning with the first. Nearly everyone admits, to-day, that human needs and the objective world are very closely connected in knowledge; but the reflective individual is not giving himself now in one direction and now in another, moved by passions which have nothing in common. He craves before all things and through all things an unconditioned and continuous experience. It is more in accord with the experience of all to say that the reflective individual craves and seeks only reflective experience than to say he has a whole catalogue of separate and discordant needs. The instinctive and im-

pulsive wants of childhood are, by participation in the activities of society and by growth into the reflective consciousness of society, so transformed that there ceases to be a mere manifold of warring dispositions and tendencies. To the writer the continuity of reflective experience seems to be the one great demand of psychic life. The longing for a complete and self-contained experience, needing other persons and an objective world as conditions of its own self-realization, is the passion of human passions. The many instincts and impulses with which human nature is endowed come to be simply so many forms of self-seeking. Of course the individual man does not always consciously seek for the thing which he ultimately and supremely needs. A dumb mysticism, however, pleads for the Absolute, for a completely self-centered and self-sufficient experience; and no particular attainment satisfies because our grasp is only finite.

Reflective need comprehends theoretic and esthetic as well as practical need. A completely satisfying experience must leave no real passion unsatisfied. It is true that discrimination and conception are the handmaids of action but it is also true that action leads to new discrimination and conception. In the development of mind motor processes are continually contributing to knowledge and are sought for that purpose among others. But actions terminate with the particular while the heart craves the permanent and the universal. Only unreflective instinct and impulse can be satisfied by single actions, and the reflective yearning for a consistent experience, we repeat, is as much theoretic and esthetic as it is practical. Neither of these motives without the others is anything but an abstraction; neither could exist without the others. The satisfaction of the one leads to the satisfaction of the others also.

Consequently the purely subjective (that is, transient and private) criterion of truth is open to criticism. That truth is a satisfaction there can be no doubt; but the marks of cognitive, that is, objective validity are to be sought among the objects of knowledge and are never purely formal. If the criteria of truth were purely subjective we should have no ground for asserting their objective validity. Scepticism is both the historical and logical result of the subjective criterion of truth. Hume was right in holding to this outcome of the Lockean presuppositions as to this point. A reflective being is never satisfied that he possesses truth merely because he is at rest: he asks, with an eye to *all* experience, *Ought* I be satisfied with my idea? He judges, not only *Ich glaube*, but also *Man glaubt*; not only *Es gefehlt mir*, but also *Es ist schoen*. He exercises a critical oversight over his needs as well as over the conceptions which serve

as means to their satisfaction. Truth is one aspect of an ideal by which we judge our motives as well as their objects.

Consequently the reflective finite mind suspects that there is more to the object than any and all of its ideas contain. What an object ultimately is always transcends the 'that' of present knowledge, and indeed of all human knowledge; but this is simply saying that reality is ideal, that finite knowledge always has a prospective reference, and that an object is always the possibility of further experience and knowledge. What are those elements of nature which continually escape the powers of conception? Locke postulated a world of external substances which impress the mind and give it simple ideas; but when asked by the Bishop of Worcester what these external substances might be and why he asserts their being, Locke replied in such a way as to leave the bishop convinced that from Locke's point of view there are no such substances except in our ideas. The question is, Are there aspects of real things existing in the real world apart from our ideas? That the prospective object should transcend the retrospective object is a part of the idea which we have of the object. But this transcending prospective object is nothing apart from the retrospective. Both are necessary to the object. It is not things that human knowledge fails to do justice to, but that unconditioned experience of things which would exhaust and constitute them; and this failure is simply the relativity and finitude of human experience. If there is a deeper sense in which the real demanded by finite ideas is identical with the demand itself, if the purpose of every idea is ultimately its own object, if the need of experience is at last the experience of need, then this dualism of empirical attributes and underlying substratum must ultimately yield to the view that experience is reality. The selective function which constitutes the apparent partiality and injustice of knowledge is the one condition under which things can exist in finite experience. Reality is richer than finite conceptions because finite conceptions contain less than their own demand; but to separate finite conceptions from their demand and then treat the former as a mediation between the demand and its object is to ignore the fact that the demand, the prospective reference of experience, is essential to object and idea alike.

The practical world is plural; and if the utilitarian theory of knowledge as we have outlined it here were true, pluralistic ontology would need no further justification. The practical value of the theoretic impulse depends upon how much simplicity and sameness actually exist in nature. If the law of simplicity is not the law of nature, knowledge is neither possible nor desirable. Of course one can not refute pluralistic ontology in this way. To attempt to do

so would be as much a *petitio principii* as to attempt to disprove scepticism of the absolute type. Proof assumes, to start with, what pluralistic ontology, to start with, denies, namely, the unity of the object of knowledge. But even from a practical point of view, it is impossible to see how habit and accommodation would be possible in an indefinitely manifold world.

III.

The case of utilitarian epistemology is sometimes put strongly from the biological point of view. Doubtless the dominance of biological analogies in present thought has had much to do with this modern form of pragmatism; the doctrine of evolution is sometimes explicitly appealed to as proof. All life is a process of adjustment going on under a heavy pressure of necessity. Life is a growing complexity, an increasing manifoldness of needs, an ever-extending range and variety of stimulation and reaction. The evolution of life can not proceed far without simplification. Economy demands that many objects be treated in one way, that habits and classification be formed. Give an individual the complex organism of man, enlarge his life medium so as to include the entire world and remote stars and his own kind, disturb his unstable equilibrium by a running fire of stimuli so varied and incessant that his life becomes a continual readjustment to its conditions (that is, its needs), and you create the necessity for knowledge. Whatever else it is, knowledge is a practical necessity. A time comes when finer, completer and more spontaneous adjustments to the conditions of life are necessary than the rough methods of organic habit and accommodation achieve. Conscious discrimination, classification and judgment become necessary. Moreover, the individual must comprehend and classify himself. He must learn his own place in nature, in the world as a whole, and in history. The whole social consciousness is a practical necessity; and with the social consciousness come complex notions of the internal and external worlds, of moral good and evil, of the world beautiful and of the world as a whole. Social consciousness is the key-stone of the arch of knowledge in the reflective sense of the term. Could there be a completer analytical justification of utilitarian epistemology?

Before discussing the biological proof of utilitarian epistemology, we should separate the latter doctrine from pragmatic methodology. Some of those usually counted among the pragmatists, notably Professor Dewey, use the term of a *method* of taking up and handling the problems of knowledge and reality, while others apply it to a system of tenets with reference to knowledge and reality. As a method pragmatism is an attempt to assimilate certain new and

important biological conceptions of life to certain very old laws of the mind. That new light is thrown on these laws by the process was to be expected; and there is surely no fallacy in the process, even granting that the laws of thought come to have a certain biological flavor as a result. But utilitarian epistemology and pragmatic metaphysics are different stories. To say that all knowledge is relative to the knower's needs, and then to say that this is true because it is in accord with the doctrine of evolution, is one of two things, viz., it is either a circle in proof (in case evolution in turn is given a pragmatic basis), or something which is not pragmatism at all.

Moreover, it would not in any case follow from the biological argument that knowledge is simply a tool for the satisfaction of practical needs, because the life to be sustained is mental life. The conditions of mental life are not determined by an environment that is foreign to the mind, as the atmosphere and the soil are foreign to a plant; the conditions of mental life are determined by the mind itself. The life of knowledge processes is always mental, and knowledge is the handmaid only of knowledge. No occult practical necessity dictates terms of existence to the mind. The utilitarian view of knowledge seems strangely *non apropos* when we adopt the view-point of the knowledge processes themselves. The end to which an idea contributes is an end the determination of which is a part of the idea itself.

Three moments are characteristic of experience: it always covers a fact or facts, some meaning or value belonging to the facts, and a need for which both facts and meaning exist. The conative factor underlies both facts and their values. It is the unity and continuity of needs and purposes which give to the objects of experience their relations of contiguity and their permanence. Moreover, a close relation exists between our needs and the external world, that is, between our needs and the conditions of life to which the individual must continually readjust himself. The laws of matter and of life are the laws of our needs.

The strength of the agnostic position lies in a representational theory of knowledge according to which the facts of experience and our interpretations of them are separate and distinct from reality. Reality is of course unknowable from this point of view, but difficulties arise from this theory of knowledge when the problem of accounting for our knowledge of the existence of a reality which transcends experience is raised. If, on the other hand, we confine knowledge to meanings and evaluations, and regard sensational facts as illusory, we reach a theory of either agnosticism or rationalism according as we assert the correspondence of meaning to reality

or not, and in either case knowledge and reality fall apart. Truth from this point of view is the correspondence of thought with reality; and the existence of such a correspondence becomes an inexplicable miracle and contradiction. If knowledge be considered a matter of conation alone, reality becomes immediacy and mysticism follows. But experience is in fact all three of these moments in the unity of reflection. Facts, meanings and needs are abstractions from concrete experience. Neither is, in finite experience, changeless; they develop together by a law of their own activity, and together realize self-determined procedure as the highest outcome of their growth. Utilitarian epistemology does not sufficiently emphasize or recognize this reflective phase of experience.

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THE NEED OF A LOGIC OF CONDUCT

THAT there is a distinct dissatisfaction on all hands with the present state of ethics is shown unmistakably by the many proposals of a new way in the science which have been offered of late in the reviews and during the past few years in well-known treatises. There seems to be a general feeling that ethics as a reputable philosophic discipline is upon its trial and each succeeding month of late has brought its suggestion toward some promise of reform. The present discussion concurs in much of the prevailing anxiety and discontent but offers a suggestion toward the improvement of the science somewhat less apologetic, though by no means more conservative, than many which have been advanced. This suggestion is, in a word, that ethics shall cease from the attempt it has so long been making to define an ultimate ideal of character and conduct and turn its energies to the task of developing a logical method of determining concrete courses of conduct under concrete known conditions. There is need in ethics of the same kind of development as has come in the theory of logic through the abandonment of preconceptions and ideals akin to the rationalistic metaphysics of the seventeenth century. Such a development properly conducted would, however, as I shall try to show, be only the legitimate and proper outgrowth of the most promising theory of an ideal that the history of ethics has had to trace through various forms from ancient times down to our own. Just as Kant's renunciation of dogmatism was in reality no revolution, but only a step toward the better establishment of the same method of knowledge that Descartes and his followers had begun to understand but had