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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CONTRIBUTIONS TO PHILOSOPHY

No. III.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM
OF KNOWLEDGE

BY

JOHN DEWEY

(HEAD PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO)

CHICAGO

The University of Chicago Press

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE.

It is now something over a century since Kant called upon philosophers to cease their discussion regarding the nature of the world and the principles of existence until they had arrived at some conclusion regarding the nature of the knowing process. But students of philosophy know that Kant formulated the question "how knowledge is possible" rather than created it. As matter of fact, reflective thought for 200 years before Kant had been principally interested in just this problem, although it had not generalized its own interest. Kant brought to consciousness the controlling motive. The discussion, both in Kant himself and in his successors, seems often scholastic, lost in useless subtlety, scholastic argument, and technical distinctions. Within the last decade in particular there have been signs of a growing weariness as to epistemology, and a tendency to turn away to more fertile fields. The interest shows signs of exhaustion.

Students of philosophy will recognize what I mean when I say that this growing conviction of futility and consequent distaste are associated with the outcome of the famous dictum of Kant, that perception without conception is blind, while conception without perception is empty. The whole course of reflection since Kant's time has tended to justify this remark. The sensationalist and the rationalist have worked themselves out. Pretty much all students are convinced that we can reduce knowledge neither to a set of associated sensations, nor yet to a purely rational system of relations of thought. Knowledge is judgment, and judgment requires both a material of sense perception and an ordering, regulating principle, reason; so much seems certain, but we do not get any further. Sensation and thought themselves seem to stand out more rigidly opposed to each other in their own natures than ever. Why both are necessary, and how two such opposed factors cooperate in bringing about the unified result of knowledge, becomes more and more of a mystery. It is the continual running up against this situation which accounts for the flagging of interest and the desire to direct energy where it will have more outcome.

This situation creates a condition favorable to taking stock of the question as it stands; to inquiring what this interest, prolonged for over three centuries, in the possibility and nature of knowledge, stands for; what the conviction as to the necessity of the union of sensation and thought, together with the inability to reach conclusions regarding the nature of the union, signifies.

I propose then to raise this evening¹ precisely this question: What is the meaning of the problem of knowledge? What is its meaning, not simply for reflective philosophy or in terms of epistemology itself, but what is its meaning in the historical movement of humanity and as a part of a larger and more comprehensive experience? My thesis is perhaps sufficiently indicated in the mere taking of this point of view. It implies that the abstractness of the discussion of knowledge, its remoteness from everyday experience, is one of form, rather than of reality. It implies that the problem of knowledge is not a problem which has its origin, its value, or its destiny within itself. The problem is one which social life, the organized practice of mankind, has had to face. The seemingly technical and abstruse discussion of the philosophers results from the formulation and stating of the question, rather than the question itself.

I suggest that the problem of the possibility of knowledge is but an aspect of the question of the relation of knowing to acting, of theory to practice. The distinctions which the philosophers raise, the oppositions which they erect, the weary treadmill which they pursue between sensation and thought, subject and object, mind and matter, are not invented *ad hoc*, but are simply the concise reports and condensed formulæ of points of view and of practical conflicts having their source in the very nature of modern life, and which must be met and solved if modern life is to go on its way untroubled, with clear consciousness of what it is about. As the philosopher has received his problem from the world of action, so he must return his account there for auditing and liquidation.

More especially, I suggest that the tendency for all the points at issue to precipitate in the opposition of sensationalism and rationalism is due to the fact that sensation and reason stand for the two forces contending for mastery in social life: the radical and the conservative. The reason that the contest does not end, the reason for the necessity

¹This paper was read at a meeting of the Philosophical Club of the University of Michigan.

of the combination of the two in the resultant statement, is that both factors are necessary in action ; one stands for stimulus, for initiative ; the other for control, for direction.

I cannot hope, in the time at my command this evening, to justify these wide and sweeping assertions regarding either the origin, the work, or the final destiny of philosophic reflection. I simply hope, by reference to some of the chief periods of the development of philosophy, to illustrate to you something of what I mean.

At the outset we take a long scope in our survey and present to ourselves the epoch when philosophy was still consciously, and not simply by implication, human, when reflective thought had not developed its own technique of method, and was in no danger of being caught in its own machinery—the time of Socrates. What does the assertion of Socrates that an unexamined life is not one fit to be led by man ; what does his injunction “Know thyself” mean ? It means that the corporate motives and guarantees of conduct are breaking down. We have got away from the time when the individual could both regulate and justify his course of life by reference to the ideals incarnate in the habits of the community of which he is a member. The time of direct and therefore unconscious union with corporate life, finding there stimuli, codes, and values, has departed. The development of industry and commerce, of war and politics, has brought face to face communities with different aims and diverse habits ; the development of myth and animism into crude but genuine scientific observation and imagination has transformed the physical widening of the horizon, brought about by commerce and intercourse, into an intellectual and moral expansion. The old supports fail precisely at the time when they are most needed—before a widening and more complex scene of action. Where then shall the agent of action turn ? The “Know thyself” of Socrates is the reply to the practical problem which confronted Athens in his day. Investigation into the true ends and worths of human life, sifting and testing of all competing ends, the discovery of a method which should validate the genuine and dismiss the spurious, had henceforth to do for man what consolidated and incorporate habit had hitherto presented as a free and precious gift.

With Socrates the question is as direct and practical as the question of making one's living or of governing the state ; it is indeed the same question put in its general form. It is a question which the flute player,

the cobbler, and the politician must face no more and no less than the reflective philosopher. The question is addressed by Socrates to every individual and to every group with which he comes in contact. Because the question is practical it is individual and direct. It is a question which everyone must face and answer for himself, just as in the Christian scheme every individual must face and solve for himself the question of his final destiny.

Yet the very attitude of Socrates carried with it the elements of its own destruction. Socrates could only raise the question, or rather demand of every individual that he raise it for himself. Of the answer he declared himself to be as ignorant as was anyone. The result could be only a shifting of the center of interest. If the question is so all-important, and yet the wisest of all men must confess that he only knows his own ignorance as to its answer, the inevitable point of further consideration is the discovery of a method which shall enable the question to be answered. This is the significance of Plato. The problem is the absolutely inevitable outgrowth of the Socratic position; and yet it carried with it just as inevitably the separation of philosopher from shoemaker and statesman, and the relegation of theory to a position for the time remote from conduct.

If the Socratic command, "Know thyself," runs against the dead wall of inability to conduct this knowledge, someone must take upon himself the discovery of how the requisite knowledge may be obtained. A new profession is born, that of the thinker. At this time the means, the discovery of how the aims and worths of the self may be known and measured, becomes, for this class, an end in itself. Theory is ultimately to be applied to practice; but in the meantime the theory must be worked out as theory or else no application. This represents the peculiar equilibrium and the peculiar point of contradiction in the Platonic system. All philosophy is simply for the sake of the organization and regulation of social life; and yet the philosophers must be a class by themselves, working out their peculiar problems with their own particular tools.

With Aristotle the attempted balance failed. Social life is disintegrating beyond the point of hope of a successful reorganization, and thinking is becoming a fascinating pursuit for its own sake. The world of practice is now the world of compromise and of adjustment. It is relative to partial aims and finite agents. The sphere of absolute and enduring truth and value can be reached only in and through

thought. The one who acts compromises himself with the animal desire that inspires his action and with the alien material that forms its stuff. In two short generations the divorce of philosophy from life, the isolation of reflective theory from practical conduct, has completed itself. So great is the irony of history that this sudden and effective outcome was the result of the attempt to make thought the instrument of action, and action the manifestation of the truth reached in thinking.

But this statement must not be taken too literally. It is impossible that men should really separate their ideas from their acts. If we look ahead a few centuries we find that the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle has accomplished, in an indirect and unconscious way, what perhaps it would never have effected by the more immediate and practical method of Socrates. Philosophy became an organ of vision, an instrument of interpretation; it furnished the medium through which the world was seen and the course of life estimated. Philosophy died as philosophy, to rise as the set and bent of the human mind. Through a thousand devious and roundabout channels, the thoughts of the philosopher filtered through the strata of human consciousness and conduct. Through the teachings of grammarians, rhetoricians, and a variety of educational schools, they spread in diluted form through the whole Roman Empire and were again precipitated in the common forms of speech. Through the earnestness of the moral propaganda of the Stoics they became the working rules of life for the more strenuous and earnest spirits. Through the speculations of the Sceptics and Epicureans they became the chief reliance and consolation of a large number of highly cultured individuals amid the social turmoil and political disintegration going on. All these influences and many more finally summed themselves up in the two great media through which Greek philosophy finally fixed the intellectual horizon of man, determined the values of its perspective, and meted out the boundaries and divisions of the scene of human action.

These two influences were the development of Christian theology and moral theory, and the organization of the system of Roman jurisprudence. There is perhaps no more fascinating chapter in the history of humanity than the slow and tortuous processes by which the ideas set in motion by that Athenian citizen who faced death as serenely as he conversed with a friend, finally became the intellectually organizing centers of the two great movements which bridged the gulf

between ancient civilization and modern. As the personal and immediate force and enthusiasm of the movement initiated by Jesus began to grow fainter and the commanding influence of his own personality commenced to dim, it was the ideas of the world and of life, of God and of man, elaborated in Greek philosophy, which served to transform moral enthusiasm and personal devotion to the redemption of humanity, into a splendid and coherent view of the universe; which resisted all disintegrating influences and gathered into itself the permanent ideas and progressive ideals thus far developed in the history of man.

We have only a faint idea of how this was accomplished, or of the thoroughness of the work done. We have perhaps even more inadequate conceptions of the great organizing and centralizing work done by Greek thought in the political sphere. When the military and administrative genius of Rome brought the whole world in subjection to itself, the most pressing of practical problems was to give unity of practical aim and harmony of working machinery to the vast and confused mass of local custom and tradition, religious, social, economic, and intellectual, as well as political. In this juncture the great administrators and lawyers of Rome seized with avidity upon the results of the intellectual analysis of social and political relations elaborated in Greek philosophy. Caring naught for these results in their reflective and theoretical character, they saw in them the possible instrument of introducing order into chaos and of transforming the confused and conflicting medley of practice and opinion into a harmonious social structure. Roman law, which formed the vertebral column of civilization for a thousand years, and which articulated the outer order of life as distinctly as Christianity controlled the inner, was the outcome.

Thought was once more in unity with action, philosophy had become the instrument of conduct. Mr. Bosanquet makes the pregnant remark "that the weakness of mediæval science and philosophy are connected rather with excess of practice than with excess of theory. The subordination of philosophy to theology is a subordination of science to a formulated conception of human welfare. Its essence is present, not wherever there is metaphysics but wherever the spirit of truth is subordinated to any preconceived practical intent." (*History of Aesthetics*, p. 146.)

Once more the irony of history displays itself. Thought has become practical, it has become the regulator of individual conduct and social

organization, but at the expense of its own freedom and power. The defining characteristic of mediævalism in state and in church, in political and spiritual life, is that truth presents itself to the individual only through the medium of organized authority.

This was a historical necessity on the external as well as the internal side. We have not the remotest way of imagining what the outcome would finally have been if, at the time when the intellectual structure of the Christian church and the legal structure of the Roman Empire had got themselves thoroughly organized, the barbarians had not made their inroads and seized upon all this accumulated and consolidated wealth as their own legitimate prey. But this was what did happen. As a result, the truths originally developed by the freest possible criticism and investigation became external, and imposed themselves upon the mass of individuals by the mere weight of authoritative law. The external, transcendental, and supernatural character of spiritual truth and of social control during the Middle Ages is naught but the mirror, in consciousness, of the relation existing between the eager, greedy, undisciplined horde of barbarians on one side, and the concentrated achievements of ancient civilization on the other. There was no way out save that the keen barbarian whet his appetite upon the rich banquet spread before him. But there was equally no way out so far as the continuity of civilization was concerned save that the very fullness and richness of this banquet set limits to the appetite, and finally, when assimilated and digested, be transformed into the flesh and blood, the muscles and sinew of him who sat at the feast. Thus the barbarian ceased to be a barbarian and a new civilization arose.

But the time came when the work of absorption was fairly complete. The northern barbarians had eaten the food and drunk the wine of Græco-Roman civilization. The authoritative truth embodied in mediæval state and church succeeded, in principle, in disciplining the untrained masses. Its very success issued its own death warrant. To say that it had succeeded means that the new people had finally eaten their way into the heart of the ideas offered them, had got from them what they wanted, and were henceforth prepared to go their own way and make their own living. Here a new rhythm of the movement of thought and action begins to show itself.

The beginning of this change in the swing of thought and action forms the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern times. It is the epoch of the Renaissance. The individual comes to a new birth

and asserts his own individuality and demands his own rights in the way of feeling, doing, and knowing for himself. Science, art, religion, political life, must all be made over on the basis of recognizing the claims of the individual.

Pardon me these commonplaces, but they are necessary to the course of the argument. By historic fallacy we often suppose, or imagine that we suppose, that the individual had been present as a possible center of action all through the Middle Ages, but through some external and arbitrary interference had been weighted down by political and intellectual despotism. All this inverts the true order of the case. The very possibility of the individual making such unlimited demands for himself, claiming to be the legitimate center of all action and standard for all organization, was dependent, as I have already indicated, upon the intervening mediævalism. Save as having passed through this period of tremendous discipline, and having gradually worked over into his own habits and purposes, the truths embodied in the church and state which controlled his conduct, the individual could be only a source of disorder and a disturber of civilization. The very maintenance of the spiritual welfare of mankind was bound up in the extent to which the claim of truth and reality to be universal and objective, far above all individual feeling and thought, could make itself valid. The logical realism and universalism of scholastic philosophy simply reflect the actual subjection of the individual to that associated and corporate life which, in conserving the past, provided the principle of control.

But the eager, hungry barbarian was there, implicated in this universalism. He must be active in receiving and in absorbing the truth authoritatively doled out to him. Even the most rigid forms of mediæval Christianity could not avoid postulating the individual will as having a certain initiative with reference to its own salvation. The impulses, the appetite, the instinct of the individual were all assumed in mediæval morals, religion, and politics. The imagined mediæval tyranny took them for granted as completely as does the modern herald of liberty and equality. But the mediæval consciousness knew that the time had not come when these appetites and impulses could be trusted to work themselves out. They must be controlled by the incorporate truths inherited from Athens and Rome.

The very logic of the relationship, however, required that the time come when the individual make his own the objective and universal

truths. He is now the incorporation of truth. He now has the control as well as the stimulus of action within himself. He is the standard and the end, as well as the initiator and the effective force of execution. Just because the authoritative truth of mediævalism has succeeded, has fulfilled its function, the individual can begin to assert himself.

Contrast this critical period, finding its expression equally in the art of the Renaissance, the revival of learning, the Protestant Reformation and political democracy, with Athens in the time of Socrates. Then individuals felt their own social life disintegrated, dissolving under their very feet. The problem was how the value of that social life was to be maintained against the external and internal forces that were threatening it. The problem was on the side neither of the individual nor of progress; save as the individual was seen to be an intervening instrument in the reconstruction of the social unity. But with the individual of the fourteenth century, it was not his own intimate community life which was slipping away from him. It was an alien and remote life which had finally become his own; which had passed over into his own inner being. The problem was not how the unity of social life should be conserved, but what the individual should do with the wealth of resources of which he found himself the rightful heir and administrator. The problem looked out upon the future, not back to the past. It was how to create a new order, both of modes of individual conduct and of forms of social life, which should be the appropriate manifestations of the vigorous and richly endowed individual.

Hence it is that the conception of progress as a ruling idea; the conception of the individual as the source and standard of rights; and the problem of knowledge, are all born together. Given the freed individual, who feels called upon to create a new heaven and a new earth, and who feels himself gifted with the power to perform the task to which he is called:—and the demand for science, for a method of discovering and verifying truth, becomes imperious. The individual is henceforth to supply control, law, and not simply stimulation and initiation. What does this mean but that instead of any longer receiving or assimilating truth, he is now to search for and create it? Having no longer the truth imposed by authority to rely upon, there is no resource save to secure the authority of truth. The possibility of getting at and utilizing this truth becomes therefore the underlying and conditioning problem of modern life. Strange as it may sound to say it,

the question which was formulated by Kant as that of the possibility of knowledge, is the fundamental political problem of modern life.

Science and metaphysics or philosophy, though often seeming to be at war, with their respective adherents often throwing jibes and slurs at each other, are really the most intimate allies. The philosophic movement is simply the coming to consciousness of this claim of the individual to be able to discover and verify truth for himself, and thereby not only direct his own conduct, but become an influential and decisive factor in the organization of life itself. Modern philosophy is the formulation of this creed, both in general and in its more specific implications. We often forget that the technical problem "*how* knowledge is possible," also means "*how knowledge* is possible;" how, that is, shall the individual be able to back himself up by truth which has no authority save that of its own intrinsic truthfulness. Science, on the other hand, is simply this general faith or creed asserting itself in detail; it is the practical belief at work engaged in subjugating the foreign territory of ignorance and falsehood step by step. If the ultimate outcome depends upon this detailed and concrete work, we must not forget that the earnestness and courage, as well as the intelligence and clearness with which the task has been undertaken, have depended largely upon the wider, even if vaguer, operation of philosophy.

But the student of philosophy knows more than that the problem of knowledge has been with increasing urgency and definiteness the persistent and comprehensive problem. So conscious is he of the two opposed theories regarding the nature of knowledge, that he often forgets the underlying bond of unity of which we have been speaking. These two opposing schools are those which we know as the sensationist and the intellectualist, the empiricist and the rationalist. Admitting that the dominance of the question of the possibility and nature of knowledge is at bottom a fundamental question of practice and of social direction, is *this* distinction anything more than the clash of scholastic opinions, a rivalry of ideas meaningless for conduct?

I think not. Having made so many sweeping assertions I must venture one more. Fanciful and forced as it may seem, I would say that the sensational and empirical schools represent in conscious and reflective form the continuation of the principle of the northern and barbarian side of mediæval life; while the intellectualist and the rationalist stand for the conscious elaboration of the principle involved in the Græco-Roman tradition.

Once more, as I cannot hope to prove, let me expand and illustrate. The sensationalist has staked himself upon the possibility of explaining and justifying knowledge by conceiving it as the grouping and combination of the qualities directly given us in sensation. The special reasons advanced in support of this position are sufficiently technical and remote. But the motive which has kept the sensationalist at work, which animated Hobbes and Locke, Hume and John Stuart Mill, Voltaire and Diderot, was a human not a scholastic one. It was the belief that only in sensation do we get any personal contact with reality, and hence, any genuine guarantee of vital truth. Thought is pale, and remote from the concrete stuff of knowledge and experience. It only formulates and duplicates; it only divides and recombines that fullness of vivid reality which is got directly and at first hand in sense experience. Reason, compared with sense, is indirect, emasculate, and faded.

Moreover reason and thought in their very generality seem to lie beyond and outside the individual. In this remoteness, when they claim any final value, they violate the very first principle of the modern consciousness. What is the distinguishing characteristic of modern life, unless it be precisely that the individual shall not simply get, and reason about truth, in the abstract, but shall make it his own in the most intimate and personal way? He has not only to know the truth in the sense of knowing about it, but he must feel it. What is sensation but the answer to this demand for the most individual and intimate contact with reality? Show me a sensationalist and I will show you not only one who believes that he is on the side of concreteness and definiteness, as against washed out abstractions and misty general notions: but also one who believes that he is identified with the cause of the individual as distinct from that of external authority. We have only to go to our Locke and our Mill to see that opposition to the innate and the *a priori* was felt to be opposition to the deification of hereditary prejudice and to the reception of ideas without examination or criticism. Personal contact with reality through sensation seemed to be the only safeguard from opinions which, while masquerading in the guise of absolute and eternal truth, were in reality but the prejudices of the past become so ingrained as to insist upon being standards of truth and action.

Positively as well as negatively, the sensationalists have felt themselves to represent the side of progress. In its very eternal character,

a general notion stands ready made, fixed forever, without reference to time, without the possibility of change or diversity. As distinct from this, the sensation represents the never-failing eruption of the new. It is the novel, the unexpected, that which cannot be reasoned out in eternal formulæ, but must be hit upon in the ever-changing flow of our experience. It thus represents stimulation, excitation, momentum onwards. It is a constant protest against the assumption of any theory or belief to possess finality; and it is the ever-renewed presentation of material out of which to build up new objects and new laws.

The sensationalist appears to have a good case. He stands for vividness and definiteness against abstraction; for the engagement of the individual in experience as against the remote and general thought about experience; and for progress and for variety against the eternal fixed monotony of the concept. But what says the rationalist? What value has experience, he inquires, if it is simply a chaos of disintegrated and floating débris? What is the worth of personality and individuality when they are reduced to crudity of brute feeling and sheer intensity of impulsive reaction? What is there left in progress that we should desire it, when it has become a mere unregulated flux of transitory sensations, coming and going without reasonable motivation or rational purpose?

Thus the intellectualist has endeavored to frame the structure of knowledge as a well-ordered economy, where reason is sovereign, where the permanent is the standard of reference for the changing, and where the individual may always escape from his own mere individuality and find support and reinforcement in a system of relations which lies outside of and yet gives validity to his own passing states of consciousness. Thus the rationalists hold that we must find in a universal intelligence a source of truth and guarantee of value which is sought in vain in the confused and flowing mass of sensations.

The rationalist, in making the concept or general idea the all-important thing in knowledge, believes himself to be asserting the interests of order as against destructive caprice and the license of momentary whim. He finds that his cause is bound up with that of the discovery of truth as the necessary instrument and method for action. Only by reference to the general and the rational can the individual insert perspective, secure direction for his appetites and impulses, and escape from the uncontrolled and ruinous reactions of his own immediate tendency.

The concept, once more, in its very generality, in its elevation above the intensities and conflicts of momentary passions and interests, is the conserver of the experience of the past. It is the wisdom of the past put into capitalized and funded form to enable the individual to get away from the stress and competition of the needs of the passing moment. It marks the difference between barbarism and civilization, between continuity and disintegration, between the sequence of tradition which is the necessity of intelligent thought and action, and the random and confused excitation of the hour.

When we thus consider not the details of the positions of the sensationalist and rationalist, but the motives which have induced them to assume these positions, we discover what is meant in saying that the question is still a practical, a social one, and that the two schools stand for certain one-sided factors of social life. If we have on one side the demand for freedom, for personal initiation into experience, for variety and progress, we have on the other side the demand for general order, for continuous and organized unity, for the conservation of the dearly bought resources of the past. This is what I mean by saying that the sensationalist abstracts in conscious form the position and tendency of the Germanic element in modern civilization, the factor of appetite and impulse, of keen enjoyment and satisfaction, of stimulus and initiative. Just so the rationalist erects into conscious abstraction the principle of the Græco-Roman world, that of control, of system, of order and authority.

That the principles of freedom and order, of past and future, or conservation and progress, of incitement to action and control of that incitation, are correlative, I shall not stop to argue. It may be worth while, however, to point out that exactly the same correlative and mutually implicating connection exists between sensationalism and rationalism, considered as philosophical accounts of the origin and nature of knowledge.

The strength of each school is the weakness of its opponent. The more the sensationalist appears to succeed in reducing knowledge to the association of sensation, the more he creates a demand for thought to introduce background and relationship. The more consistent the sensationalist, the more openly he reveals the sensation in its own nakedness crying aloud for a clothing of value and meaning which must be borrowed from reflective and rational interpretation. On the other hand, the more reason and the system of relations which

make up the functioning of reason are magnified, the more is felt the need of sensation to bring reason into some fruitful contact with the materials of experience. Reason must have the stimulus of this contact in order to be incited to its work and to get materials to operate with. The reason then that neither school can come to rest in itself is precisely that each one abstracts one essential factor of conduct.

This suggests, finally, that the next move in philosophy is precisely to transfer attention from the details of the positions assumed, and the arguments used in these two schools, to the practical motives which have unconsciously controlled the discussion. The positions have been sufficiently elaborated. Within the past one hundred years, within especially the last generation, each has succeeded in fully stating its case. The result, if we remain at this point, is practically a deadlock. Each can make out its case against the other. To stop at such a point is a patent absurdity. If we are to get out of the cul-de-sac it must be by bringing into consciousness the tacit reference to action which all the time has been the controlling factor.

In a word, another great rhythmic movement is seen to be approaching its end. The demand for science and philosophy was the demand for truth and a sure standard of truth which the new-born individual might employ in his efforts to build up a new world to afford free scope to the powers stirring within him. The urgency and acuteness of this demand caused, for the time being, the transfer of attention from the nature of practice to that of knowledge. The highly theoretical and abstract character of modern epistemology, combined with the fact that this highly abstract and theoretic problem has continuously engaged the attention of thought for more than three centuries, is, to my mind, proof positive that the question of knowledge was for the time being the point in which the question of practice centered, and through which it must find its outlet and solution.

We return, then, to our opening remark: the meaning of the question of the possibility of knowledge raised by Kant a century ago, and of his assertion that sensation without thought is blind, thought without sensation empty. Once more I recall to the student of philosophy how this assertion of Kant has haunted and determined the course of philosophy in the intervening years—how his solution at once seems inevitable and unsatisfactory. It is inevitable in that no one can fairly deny that both sense and reason are implicated in every fruitful and significant statement of the world; unconvincing because we are

after all left with these two opposed things still at war with each other, plus the miracle of their final combination.

When I say that the only way out is to place the whole modern industry of epistemology in relation to the conditions which gave it birth and the function it has to fulfill, I mean that the unsatisfactory character of the entire neo-Kantian movement is in its assumption that knowledge gives birth to itself and is capable of affording its own justification. The solution which is always sought and never found, so long as we deal with knowledge as a self-sufficing purveyor of reality, reveals itself when we conceive of knowledge as a statement of action, that statement being necessary, moreover, to the successful ongoing of action.

The entire problem of mediæval philosophy is that of absorption, of assimilation. The result was the creation of the individual. Hence the problem of modern life is that of reconstruction, reform, reorganization. The entire content of experience needs to be passed through the alembic of individual agency and realization. The individual is to be the bearer of civilization; but this involves a remaking of the civilization which he bears. Thus we have the dual question: How can the individual become the organ of corporate action? How can he make over the truth authoritatively embodied in institutions of church and state into frank, healthy, and direct expressions of the simple act of free living? On the other hand, how can civilization preserve its own integral value and import when subordinated to the agency of the individual instead of exercising supreme sway over him?

The question of knowledge, of the discovery and statement of truth, gives the answer to this question; but it *only* gives the answer. Admitting that the practical problem of modern life is the maintenance of the spiritual values of civilization, through the medium of the insight and decision of the individual, the problem is foredoomed to futile failure save as the individual in performing his task can work with a definite and controllable tool. This tool is science. But this very fact, constituting the dignity of science and measuring the importance of the philosophic theory of knowledge, conferring upon them the religious value once attaching to dogma, and the disciplinary significance once belonging to political rules, also sets their limit. The servant is not above his master.

When a theory of knowledge forgets that its value rests in solving the problem out of which it has arisen, viz., that of securing a method

of action ; when it forgets that it has to work out the conditions under which the individual may freely direct himself without loss of the historic value of civilization — when it forgets these things it begins to cumber the ground. It is a luxury, and hence a social nuisance and disturber. Of course, in the very nature of things, every means or instrument will for a while absorb attention so that it becomes the end. Indeed it is the end when it is an indispensable condition of onward movement. But when once the means have been worked out they must operate as such. When the nature and method of knowledge are fairly understood, then interest must transfer itself from the possibility of knowledge to the possibility of its application to life.

The sensationalist has played his part in bringing to effective recognition the demand in valid knowledge for individuality of experience, for personal participation in materials of knowledge. The rationalist has served his time in making it clear once for all that valid knowledge requires organization and the operation of a relatively permanent and general factor. The Kantian epistemologist has formulated the claims of both schools in defining the judgment as the relation of perception and conception. But when he goes on to state that this relation is itself knowledge, or can be found in knowledge, he stultifies himself. Knowledge can define the percept and elaborate the concept, but their union can be found only in action. The experimental method of modern science, its erection into the ultimate mode of verification, is simply this fact obtaining recognition. Only action can reconcile the old, the general, and the permanent with the changing, the individual, and the new. It is action as progress, as development, making over the wealth of the past into capital with which to do an enlarging and freer business, which alone can find its way out of the cul-de-sac of the theory of knowledge. Each of the older movements passed away because of its own success, failed because it did its work, died in accomplishing its purpose. So also with the modern philosophy of knowledge ; there must come a time when we have so much knowledge in detail, and understand so well its method in general, that it ceases to be a problem. It becomes a tool. If the problem of knowledge is not intrinsically meaningless and absurd it must in course of time be solved. Then the dominating interest becomes the *use* of knowledge ; the conditions under which and ways in which it may be most organically and effectively employed to direct conduct.

Thus the Socratic period recurs; but recurs with the deepened meaning of the intervening weary years of struggle, confusion, and conflict, in the growth of the recognition of the need of patient and specific methods of interrogation. So, too, the authoritative and institutional truth of scholasticism recurs, but recurs borne up upon the vigorous and conscious shoulders of the freed individual who is aware of his own intrinsic relations to the truth, and who glories in his ability to carry civilization — not merely to carry it, but to carry it on. Thus another swing in the rhythm of theory and practice begins.

How does this concern us as philosophers? For the world it means that philosophy is henceforth a method and not an original fountain head of truth, nor an ultimate standard of reference. But what is involved for philosophy itself in this change? I make no claims to being a prophet, but I venture one more and final unproved statement, believing, with all my heart, that it is justified both by the moving logic of the situation, and by the signs of the times. I refer to the growing transfer of interest from metaphysics and the theory of knowledge to psychology and social ethics — including in the latter term all the related concrete social sciences, so far as they may give guidance to conduct.

There are those who see in psychology only a particular science which they are pleased to term purely empirical (unless it happen to restate in changed phraseology the metaphysics with which they are familiar). They see in it only a more or less incoherent mass of facts, interesting because relating to human nature, but below the natural sciences in point of certainty and definiteness, as also far below pure philosophy as to comprehensiveness and ability to deal with fundamental issues. But if I may be permitted to dramatize a little the position of the psychologist, he can well afford to continue patiently at work, unmindful of the occasional supercilious sneers of the epistemologist, knowing that the future is with him. It is with him, because the whole cause of modern civilization stands and falls with the ability of the individual to serve as its agent and bearer. And psychology is naught but the account of the way in which conscious life is thus progressively maintained and reorganized. Psychology is the attempt to state in detail the machinery of the individual considered as the instrument and organ through which social action operates. It is the answer to Kant's demand for the formal phase of experience — how experience as such is constituted. Just because the whole burden and stress, both

of conserving and advancing experience is more and more thrown upon the individual, everything which sheds light upon how the individual may weather the stress and assume the burden is precious and imperious.

Psychology is the democratic movement come to consciousness. It is the remote and abstract question of how experience in general is possible, translated into the concrete and practical problem of how *this* and *that* experience in particular are possible, and of how they may be actualized.

Social ethics in the inclusive sense is the correlative science. Dealing not with the form or mode or machinery of action, it rather attempts to make out its filling and make up the values which are necessary to constitute an experience which is worth while. The sociologist, like the psychologist, often presents himself as a camp follower of genuine science and philosophy, picking up scraps here and there and piecing them together in somewhat of an aimless fashion — fortunate indeed, if not vague and over-ambitious. But social ethics represents the attempt to translate philosophy from a general and therefore abstract method into a working and specific method; it is the change from inquiring into the nature of value in general to an inquiry of the *particular* values which ought to be realized in the life of everyone, and of the conditions which shall render possible this realization.

There are those who will see in this conception of the outcome of a four-hundred-year discussion concerning the nature and possibility of knowledge a derogation from the high estate of philosophy. There are others who will see in it a sign that philosophy, after wandering aimlessly hither and yon in a wilderness without purpose or outcome, has finally come to its senses — has given up metaphysical absurdities and unverifiable speculations, and become a purely positive science of phenomena. But there are yet others who will see in this movement the fulfillment of its vocation, the clear consciousness of a function which it has always striven to perform; and who will welcome it as a justification of the long centuries when it appeared to sit apart, far from the common concerns of man, busied with discourse of essence and cause, absorbed in argument concerning subject and object, reason and sensation. To such this outcome will appear the inevitable sequel of the saying of Socrates that "an unexamined life is not one fit to be led by man;" and the final response to his injunction "Know thyself."

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