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EXPERIENCE AND NATURE

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CHAPTER ONE

Experience and Philosophic Method

As Mr. Ralph Perry has said, experience is a weasel word. Its slipperiness is evident in an inconsistency characteristic of many thinkers. On the one hand they eagerly claim an empirical method; they foreswear the *a priori* and transcendent; they are sensitive to the charge that they employ data unwarranted by experience. On the other hand, they are given to deprecating the conception of experience; experience, it is said, is purely subjective, and whoever takes experience for his subject-matter is logically bound to land in the most secluded of idealisms.

Interesting as the theme is, it is aside from our purpose to account for this contradictory attitude. It may be surmised, however, that those guilty of the contradiction think in two insulated universes of discourse. In adherence to empirical method, they think of experience in terms of the modern development of scientific method; but their idea of experience as a distinctive subject matter is derived from another source—introspective psychology as it was elaborated in the nineteenth century.[1] But we must make a choice. If the identification of experience with purely mental states is correct, then the last thing one should profess is acceptance of empirical method as the scientific road to the understanding of the natural

[1] "Psychological: Consciousness as a process taking place in time." This is the primary definition given in Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology.

and social world in which we live. And if scientific method is intrinsically empirical, then the subject-matter of experience cannot be what introspective psychologists have told us it is.

Whether or no this suggestion is correct, recognition of the inconsistency is of use in enabling us, writer and reader alike, to trap and hold the slippery idea of experience, whenever it is proposed to set forth the implications of experience for philosophy; especially when, as in this discussion, its implications for a theory of nature, of the world, of the universe, form the issue. And I know of no better way of warning the reader against misconception of this purpose than to remind him that, as he reads the statement, he should interpret "experience" in the sense in which he himself uses the term when he professes to be faithful to the empirical method, not in the sense in which he uses it when he implies that experience is momentary, private and psychical.

There are two avenues of approach to the goal of philosophy. We may begin with experience in gross, experience in its primary and crude forms, and by means of its distinguishing features and its distinctive trends, note something of the constitution of the world which generates and maintains it. Or, we may begin with refined selective products, the most authentic statements of commended methods of science, and work from them back to the primary facts of life. The two methods differ in starting point and direction, but not in objective or eventual content. Those who start with coarse, everyday experience must bear in mind the findings of the most competent knowledge, and those who start from the latter must somehow journey back to the homely facts of daily existence.

Each way of approach has its advantages and its dangers. Those who are able to pursue the road of that technical and refined knowledge called science are fortunate. But the history of thought shows how easy it is for them to forget that science is after all an art, a matter of perfected skill in conducting inquiry; while it reveals that those who are not directly engaged in the use of this art readily take science to be something finished, absolute in itself, instead of the result of a certain technique. Consequently "scientific" philosophies have over and over again made the science of their own day the premises of philosophy only to have them undermined by later science. And even when reasonably sure foundations are provided by the science of a period, a philosopher has no guarantee save his own acumen and honesty that he will not employ them in such a way as to get lost on a bypath. Professed scientific philosophers have been wont to employ the remoter and refinished products of science in ways which deny, discount or pervert the obvious and immediate facts of gross experience, unmindful that thereby philosophy itself commits suicide.

On the other hand, the method which sets out with macroscopic experience requires unusual candor and patience. The subject-matter of science, for better or worse, is at least "there;" it is a definite body of facts and principles summed up in books and having a kind of independent external existence. But coarse and vital experience is Protean; a thing of moods and tenses. To seize and report it is the task of an artist as well as of an informed technician. As the history of thought shows, the usual thing, a thing so usual as probably to be in some measure inevitable, is for the philosopher to mix with his reports

of direct experience interpretations of it made by previous thinkers. Too often, indeed, the professed empiricist only substitutes a dialectical development of some notion about experience for an analysis of experience as it is humanly lived.

The philosophy which since the seventeenth century has almost achieved a monopoly of the title "empiricism" strikingly illustrates this danger. Not safely can an "ism" be made out of experience. For any interpretation of experience must perforce simplify; simplifications tend in a particular direction; and the direction may be set by custom which one assumes to be natural simply because it is traditionally congenial. For at least two hundred years many interests, religious, industrial, political, have centered about the status of the individual. Hence the drift in all systems save the classic traditional school, has been to think in ways that make individuality something isolated as well as central. When the notion of experiences is introduced, who is not familiar with the query, uttered with a crushingly triumphant tone, "*Whose* experience?" The implication is that experience is not only always somebody's, but that the peculiar nature of "somebody" infects experience so pervasively that experience is *merely* somebody's and hence of nobody and nothing else.

The dialectical situation which results may be illustrated by a quotation which is selected because it is typical of much contemporary philosophizing. "When I look at a chair, I say I experience it. But what I actually experience is only a very few of the elements that go to make up a chair, namely, that color that belongs to the chair under these particular conditions of light, the shape which the chair displays when viewed from this angle,

etc." The man who has the experience, as distinct from a philosopher theorizing about it, would probably say that he experienced the chair most fully not when looking at it but when meaning to sit down in it, and that he can mean to sit down in it precisely because his experience is *not* limited to color under specific conditions of light, and angular shape. He would probably say that when he looks at it, instead of experiencing something less than a chair he experiences a good deal more than a chair: that he lays hold of a wide spatial context, such as the room where the chair is, and a spread of its history, including the chair's period, price paid for it, consequences, public as well as personal, which flow from its use as household furniture, and so on.

Such remarks as these prove nothing. But they suggest how far away from the everyday sense of experience a certain kind of philosophic discourse, although nominally experiential, has wandered. Interesting results can be had by developing dialectically such a notion of experience as is contained in the quotation; problems can be made to emerge which exercise the ingenuity of the theorizer, and which convince many a student that he gets nearer to the reality of experience the further away he gets from all the experience he has ever had. The exercise would be harmless, were it not finally forgotten that the conclusions reached have but a dialectical status, being an elaboration of premises arrived at by technical analysis from a specialized physiological point of view. Consequently, I would rather take the behavior of the dog of Odysseus upon his master's return as an example of the sort of thing experience is for the philosopher than trust to such statements. A physiologist may for his

special purpose reduce Othello's perception of a handkerchief to simple elements of color under certain conditions of light and shapes seen under certain angular conditions of vision. But the actual experience was charged with history and prophecy; full of love, jealousy and villainy, fulfilling past human relationships and moving fatally to tragic destiny.

The excuse for saying obvious things is that much that now passes for empiricism is but a dialectical elaboration of data taken from physiology, so that it is necessary for any one, who seriously sets out to philosophize empirically, to recall to attention that he is talking about the sort of thing that the unsophisticated man calls experience, the life he has led and undergone in the world of persons and things. Otherwise we get a stencilled stereotype in two dimensions and in black and white instead of the solid and many colored play of activities and sufferings which is the philosopher's real datum.

The way of approach that sets out from that which is closest at hand, instead of from refined products of science no more signifies beginning with the results of psychological science than it does with those of physical science. Indeed the former material is further away from direct experience than that of physics. It signifies beginning back of any science, with experience in its gross and macroscopic traits. Science will then be of interest as one of the phases of human experience, but intrinsically no more so than magic, myth, politics, painting, poetry and penitentiaries. The domination of men by reverie and desire is as pertinent for the philosophic theory of nature as is mathematical physics; imagination as much to be noted as refined observation. It is a fact of *experience* that some

men, as Santayana has pointed out concerning Shelley, are immune to "experience" retaining intact the attitude of childhood. And for a thoroughgoing empiricist the most transcendental of philosophies is an empirical phenomenon. It may not prove intellectually what its originator supposed it to demonstrate, but it shows something about experience, something possibly of immense value for a subsequent interpretation of nature in the light of experience.

Hence it is that experience is something quite other than "consciousness," that is, that which appears qualitatively and focally at a particular moment. The common man does not need to be told that ignorance is one of the chief features of experience; so are habits skilled and certain in operation so that we abandon ourselves to them without consciousness. Yet ignorance, habit, fatal implication in the remote, are just the things which professed empiricism, with its reduction of experience to states of consciousness, denies to experience. It is important for a theory of experience to know that under certain circumstances men prize the distinct and clearly evident. But it is no more important than it is to know that under other circumstances twilight, the vague, dark and mysterious flourish. Because intellectual crimes have been committed in the name of the subconscious is no reason for refusing to admit that what is not explicitly present makes up a vastly greater part of experience than does the conscious field to which thinkers have so devoted themselves.

When disease or religion or love, or knowledge itself is experienced, forces and potential consequences are implicated that are neither directly present nor logically

implied. They are "in" experience quite as truly as are present discomforts and exaltations. Considering the rôle which anticipation and memory of death have played in human life, from religion to insurance companies, what can be said of a theory which defines experience in such a way that it logically follows that death is never a matter of experience? Experience is no stream, even though the stream of feelings and ideas that flows upon its surface is the part which philosophers love to traverse. Experience includes the enduring banks of natural constitution and acquired habit as well as the stream. The flying moment is sustained by an atmosphere that does not fly, even when it most vibrates.

When we say that experience is one point of approach to an account of the world in which we live, we mean then by experience something at least as wide and deep and full as all history on this earth, a history which, since history does not occur in the void, includes the earth and the physical relatives of man. When we assimilate experience to history rather than to the physiology of sensations, we note that history denotes both objective conditions, forces, events and also the human record and estimate of these events. Similarly experience denotes whatever is experienced, whatever is undergone and tried, and also processes of experiencing. As it is the essence of "history" to have meanings termed both subjective and objective, so with "experience." As William James has said, it is a "double-barrelled" fact.[1] Without sun, moon and stars, mountains and rivers, forests and mines, soil, rain and wind, history would not be. These things are not just external conditions of history and experience; they

[1] Lloyd Morgan, Instinct and Experience, pp. 126–128.

are integral with them. But also without the human attitude and interest, without record and interpretation, these things would not be historical.

There is an obvious retort to this plea to take the conception of experience with the utmost of naïveté and catholicity, as the common man takes it when he experiences illness and prosperity, love, marriage, and death. The objection is that experience is then made so inclusive and varied as to be useless for philosophic purposes. Experience, as we are here told to conceive it, includes just everything and anything, actual or potential, that we think of and talk about. So we might just as well start with everything and anything and drop out the idea and word, "experience." The traditional notion of experience, which has been disowned, may be erroneous. But at least it denotes something specific, differential; something which may be set in contrast with other things and may thus serve as a principle of criticism and estimate. But the whole wide universe of fact and dream, of event, act, desire, fancy and meanings, valid or invalid, can be set in contrast to nothing. And if what has been said is taken literally, "experience" denotes just this wide universe.

Here is indeed a vulnerable spot in experience as a guiding method for philosophy. It is presented to us as a catholic and innocent neutral, free from guile and partisanship. But then unwittingly there is substituted for this free, full, unbiased and pliable companion of us all, a simplified and selected character, which is already pointed in a special direction and loaded with preferred conclusions. So often does this occur, that one does well to exercise a wary scepticism whenever an inquirer insistently

professes that *he* keeps to an empirical method. And when this biased course, (easy to fall into as the history of thought testifies), is avoided, the alternative seems to be everything without discrimination, so that experience ceases to have a meaning.

The objection uncovers the exact meaning of a truly empirical method. For it reveals the fact that experience for philosophy is method, not distinctive subject-matter. And it also reveals the sort of method that philosophy needs. Experience includes dreams, insanity, illness, death, labor, war, confusion, ambiguity, lies and error; it includes transcendental systems as well as empirical ones; magic and superstition as well as science. It includes that bent which keeps one from learning from experience as well as that skill which fastens upon its faint hints. This fact convicts upon sight every philosophy that professes to be empirical and yet assures us that some especial subject-matter is experience and some other not.

The value of experience as method in philosophy is that it compels us to note that *denotation* comes first and last, so that to settle any discussion, to still any doubt, to answer any question, we must go to some thing pointed to, denoted, and find our answer in that thing. As method it has a contrast which it does not possess as subject matter, that with "rationalism," understanding by rationalism method which assumes the primacy and ultimacy of purely logical thought and its findings. There are two kinds of demonstration: that of logical reasoning from premises assumed to possess logical completeness, and that of showing, pointing, coming upon a thing. The latter method is that which the word experience sums up,

generalizes, makes universal and ulterior. To say that the right method is one of pointing and showing, not of meeting intellectual requirements or logical derivation from rational ideas, does not, although it is non-rational, imply a preference for irrationality. For one of the things that is pointed out, found and shown, is deduction, and the logic that governs it. But these things have also to be found and shown, and their authority rests upon the perceived outcome of this empirical denotation. The utmost in rationality has a sanction and a position that, according to taste, may be called sub-rational or supra-rational.

The value, I say of the notion of experience for philosophy is that it asserts the finality and comprehensiveness of the method of pointing, finding, showing, and the necessity of seeing what is pointed to and accepting what is found in good faith and without discount. Were the denotative method universally followed by philosophers, then the word and the notion of experience might be discarded; it would be superfluous, for we should be in possession of everything it stands for. But as long as men prefer in philosophy, (as they so long preferred in science) to define and envisage "reality" according to esthetic, moral or logical canons, we need the notion of experience to remind us that "reality" includes whatever is denotatively found.

When the varied constituents of the wide universe, the unfavorable, the precarious, uncertain, irrational, hateful, receive the same attention that is accorded the noble, honorable and true, then philosophy may conceivably dispense with the conception of experience. But till that day arrives, we need a cautionary and directive word,

like experience, to remind us that the world which is lived, suffered and enjoyed as well as logically thought of, has the last word in all human inquiries and surmises. This is a doctrine of humility; but it is also a doctrine of direction. For it tells us to open the eyes and ears of the mind, to be sensitive to all the varied phases of life and history. Nothing is more ironical than that philosophers who have so professed universality have so often been one-sided specialists, confined to that which is authentically and surely *known*, ignoring ignorance, error, folly and the common enjoyments and adornments of life; disposing of these by regarding them as due to our "finite" natures —a blest word that does for moderns what "non-being" was made to do for the Greeks.

The history of thought sufficiently manifests the need for a method of procedure that sets pointing, finding and showing, ahead of methods that substitute ratiocination and its conclusions for things that are done, suffered and imagined. Philosophers are wont to start with highly simplified premises. They do this not inadvertently, but with pride, as evidence that they really understand philosophic business. Absolute certainty in knowledge of things and absolute security in the ordering of life have often been assumed to be the goal of philosophic search; consequently philosophers have set out with data and principles sufficiently simple to yield what is sought. When some historic religion is ceasing to confer upon men a sense of certainty and security men especially resort to philosophy for a substitute. So they did in Greece; in Europe in the seventeenth century, and so we do today. Forms and essences, inner introspective facts, mathematical truths may be resorted to. This is a varying matter

of the temporal scene. The constant is demand for assurance and order, and the demand is met only by ignoring a vast number of the things that nature presents to us.

When we look for instances of a simplifying procedure exercised in this bias, we think perhaps most readily of Descartes with his certainty of thinking, of Spinoza with his conviction that a true idea carries truth intrinsically in itself so whatever must be thought, must—and alone must—*be*. But thinkers who profess empiricism also afford examples: there is Locke with his "simple idea," Hume with his "impression." And I do not see that contemporary hankering after ultimate "sense-data," or conviction that mathematical logistic is at last to open to philosophy the arcana of ultimate truth, differ in principle.

Now the notion of experience, however devoid of differential subject-matter—since it includes all subject-matters—, at least tells us that we must not start with arbitrarily selected simples, and from them deduce the complex and varied, assigning what cannot be thus deduced to an inferior realm of being. It warns us that the tangled and complex is what we primarily find; that we work from and within it to discriminate, reduce, analyze; and that we must keep track of these activities, pointing to *them*, as well as to the things upon which they are exercised, and to their refined conclusions. When we contemplate their fruits we are not to ignore the art by which they are produced. There is a place for polishers of stones and for those who put the stones together to make temples and palaces. But "experience" reminds us that a stone was once part of some stratum of the earth, and that a quarryman pried it loose and another workman blew the massive rock to smaller pieces, before it could be smooth-hewn and

fitted into an ordered and regular structure. Empirical method warns us that systems which set out from things said to be ultimate and simple have always worked with loaded dice; their premises have been framed to yield desired conclusions.

Professed sceptics rarely fare better, whether they consistently maintain the attitude, or whether they employ doubt in order to discover a triumphant exit into certitude. Man is naturally a credulous animal. It is well to be warned against too easy and inflexible acceptance of beliefs which, before they command acceptance, should exhibit credentials. But some things, things of action and suffering, are not matters of belief at all; they just are. No one ever doubted birth, death, love or hate, no matter how much theories about them justly provoke doubts. Philosophers have exhibited proper ingenuity in pointing out holes in the beliefs of common sense, but they have also displayed improper ingenuity in ignoring the empirical things that every one has; the things that so denote themselves that they *have* to be dealt with. No wonder Hume's doubts vanished when he played backgammon and made merry with his friends. Not that many of his doubts of doctrines were not suitable, but that in his companionships he was involved in another world from that to which he confined his philosophizing. Merriment and sorrow are not of the same order as beliefs, impressions and ideas. The advice of Epictetus to a fellow-slave whose master adhered to the school of sceptics, to rub his master with a curry-comb and anoint him with pepper-sauce is irrelevant to doubt about systematized beliefs, but it is a pertinent reminder that whatever things we are compelled to pay heed to, things of joy and

suffering, cannot have their *existence* honestly called in question.

When a thinker ventures to begin with things which are too crude and coarse to come within the ken of intellectualists, he finds, moreover, that as an empiricist he is not obliged to face the miscellaneous world *en masse*. Things are pointed to in kinds, possessed of order and arrangement. Pre-philosophic selections and arrangings may not be final for reflective thought, but they are significant for it. The bias they manifest is not that of the closet or library, but of men who have responded to the one-sided pressures of natural events. The key to the trends of nature is found in the adjectives that are commonly prefixed to experience. Experience is political, religious, esthetic, industrial, intellectual, mine, yours.

The adjectives denote that things present themselves in characteristic contexts, with different savors, colors, weights, tempos and directions. Experience as method warns us to give impartial attention to all of these diversifications. Non-empirical method sets out with the assumption that some one of these groupings of things is privileged; that it is supreme of its own right, that it furnishes a standard by which to measure the significance and real quality of everything else. The sequel is then but a dialectic. Philosophers deduce results in accordance with what is logically implied in their own choice of standard and measure.

Philosophy is a branch of that phase of things which is qualified by the adjective "intellectual." Since it is the express and proper business of the philosopher to subject things to reflection with a view to knowledge (to justifiable belief), he is prone to take the outcome of reflection for

something antecedent. That is to say, instead of seeing that the product of knowing is *statement* of things, he is given to taking it as an *existential equivalent* of what things really are "in themselves," so that the subject-matter of other modes of experience are deviations, shortcomings, or trespasses—or as the dialectical philosopher puts it, mere "phenomena." The experiential or denotative method tells us that we must go behind the refinements and elaborations of reflective experience to the gross and compulsory things of our doings, enjoyments and sufferings—to the things that force us to labor, that satisfy needs, that surprise us with beauty, that compel obedience under penalty. A common divisor is a convenience, and a greatest common divisor has the greatest degree of convenience. But there is no reason for supposing that its intrinsic "reality" or truth is greater than that of the numbers it divides. The objects of intellectual experience are the greatest common divisor of the things of other modes; they have that remarkable value, but to convert them into exclusive reality is the sure road to arbitrary divisions and insoluble problems.

Not all philosophies have assumed that reflective experience, with logic as its norm, is the standard for experiential, religious, esthetic, industrial, social objects. Many thinkers have concluded that dialectic ends in an impasse; that it involves us in contradictory statements. Then they have appealed to something which they assert is higher than thought. But it is significant that they think of this higher recourse as a higher kind of *knowledge*, as intuition, or immediate insight, mystical certainty of the truly real. Thus the thinker still shows his inability to take things as he has to take them as a human being, as

things to pay heed to under penalty of death and defeat, things to use and enjoy, to master and submit to. The notion still lurks that in their intrinsic being they are things of knowledge.

Then there are philosophers who, like Kant, finding themselves in intellectual difficulties, assert that moral experience reveals things-in-themselves at a deeper level than does science. There are a larger number who look askance upon science, and who claim that religious experience penetrates behind the screen that limits the vision of intellect. These apparent exceptions prove the rule. For the claim implies that moral or religious experience takes the place of knowledge, doing sufficiently, absolutely, what natural knowledge does only partially and relatively. The implication is that morals and religion have a direct revelatory worth. Now it is one thing to say that the world is such that men approach certain objects with awe, worship, piety, sacrifice and prayer, and that this is a fact which a theory of existence must reckon with as truly as with the facts of science. But it is a different thing to say that religious experience gives *evidence* of the reality of its *own* objects, or that the consciousness of an obligation proves the validity of its special object, or the general fact of duty carries within itself any deliverance as to its source in reality. Helen of Troy, Hamlet of Denmark are instances of things that require as much attention from the philosopher as do molecules and integers: but their presence in experience does not guarantee that they are the same kind of things as the latter.

We must conceive the world in terms which make it possible for devotion, piety, love, beauty, and mystery to be as real as anything else. But whether the loved and

devotional objects have all the qualities which the lover and the devout worshipper attribute to them is a matter to be settled by evidence, and evidence is always extrinsic. Injunctions and prohibitions which are empirically unescapable, may be called categorical imperatives, and their existence may be quite as significant for a just theory of nature as is the law of gravitation. But what sort of objects beyond themselves they give evidence of, whether tribal taboos, a Kantian thing-in-itself, God, a political sovereign or a net work of social customs evolved in the effort to satisfy needs, is a question to be settled by the denotative method, by finding and pointing to the things in the concrete contexts in which they present themselves.

Even the classic empiricisms of philosophical history have been concerned almost exclusively with experience as knowledge, and with objects as known or unknowable. But, since objects are found and dealt with in many other ways than those of knowledge, a genuine empiricism will set out with all the adjectival groupings of macroscopic experience, starting from them as all upon the same level of worth; subsequent inquiry can review the starting point when it is found necessary. One can be insane without knowing he is insane and one may know insanity without being crazy; indeed absence of the direct experience is said to be an indispensable condition of study of insanity. Adequate recognition of the implications of such a fact as this might almost be said to be the chief contribution which empirical method has to make to philosophy.

For it indicates that *being* and *having* things in ways other than knowing them, in ways never identical with knowing them, exist, and are preconditions of reflection and knowledge. *Being* angry, stupid, wise, inquiring; *having* sugar, the light of day, money, houses and lands, friends, laws, masters, subjects, pain and joy, occur in dimensions incommensurable to knowing these things which we are and have and use, and which have and use us. Their existence is unique, and, strictly speaking, indescribable; they can *only be* and be *had*, and then be pointed to in reflection. In the proper sense of the word, their existence is absolute, being qualitative. All cognitive experience must start from and must terminate in being and having things in just such unique, irreparable and compelling ways. And until this fact is a commonplace in philosophy, the notion of experience will not be a truism for philosophers.

Inevitably our argument travels in a circle and comes back to where we started. Modern philosophy is openly, ancient philosophy covertly, a theory of knowledge, and of things as known. A theory of knowledge in the sense of how to know most economically, liberally, effectively, a technique of instructive and rewarding inquiry is indispensable. But what has gone by the name of theory of knowledge has not been such an affair. It has been a discussion of whether we can know at all, a matter of validating or refuting wholesale scepticism (instead of how to conduct doubt profitably); of how far knowledge extends, what its limits are, limits not at a specific time and place, but inherent and final. What has been said professes to give the explanation of this fact. It is due to failure to take the various phases of experienced things simply, directly, and impartially. It is due to bias of the intellectualist in favor of his own specialized professional experience.

Bias in favor of things in their capacity of being objects of knowledge, when it is yielded to, renders it impossible to distinguish between being and having things and knowing them. If *having* sweet, red, hard, pain, etc., is of necessity identical with knowing these things, then the classic problems of epistemology, and the necessity of defending science against wholesale sceptical doubts are inevitable. I mention in illustration the two traditional questions. First, there is the dispute between the epistemological idealist and realist. Are sweet, hard, solid pain, square, etc., psychical or physical? Empirically, the obvious answer is that they are neither. They are the unique qualities which they are, the things pointed to and had. But *knowledge* involves classification. If to have is also to know, then these things cannot "really" be simply the qualities they are; they must be related, subsumed, interpreted. And the two most general terms of classificatory knowing are physical and mental. Hence the dispute.

Another problem which is inevitable is the relation of immediate or "presentative" knowledge, sensory acquaintance or whatever, to reflective and inferential knowledge, to science. How is the reality of the proper objects of the latter to be "reconciled" with the reality of the things —whether defined as physical or psychical—of immediate sensuous or presentative "knowledge?" The problem is dialectically attractive, as is shown by the immense amount of ingenuity that has been expended upon it. But no generally satisfactory answer has ever been found and it is predictable that none ever will be. For the problem, empirically speaking, is unreal. There are not two kinds of knowledge whose objects have to be reconciled.

There are two dimensions of experienced things: one that of having them, and the other that of knowing about them so that we can again have them in more meaningful and secure ways. It is no easy matter to know about the things we have and are, whether it be the state, measles, virtue or redness. Hence there *is* a problem of knowledge; namely, the problem of how to find out what it is needful to find out about these things in order to secure, rectify and avoid being and having them.

But a problem of knowledge in general is, to speak brutally, nonsense. For knowledge is itself one of the things that we empirically *have*. While scepticism may be in place at any time about any specific intellectual belief and conclusion, in order to keep us on the alert, to keep us inquiring and curious, scepticism as to the things which we *have* and *are* is impossible. No one ever frankly engaged in it. Its pretentiousness is concealed, however, by the failure to distinguish between objects of knowledge where doubt is legitimate, since they are matters of interpretation and classification, (of theory), and things which are directly had. A man may doubt whether he has the measles, because measles is an intellectual term, a classification, but he cannot doubt what he empirically has—not as has so often been asserted because he has an immediately certain knowledge of it, but because it is not a matter of knowledge, an intellectual affair, at all, not an affair of truth or falsity, certitude, or doubt, but one of existence.

He may not know that he is ailing, much less what his ailment is; but unless there is something immediately and non-cognitively present in experience so that it is capable of being pointed to in subsequent reflection and in

action which embodies the fruits of reflection, knowledge has neither subject-matter nor objective. In traditional epistemologies, this fact has been both recognized and perverted; it is said that while we can doubt whether a particular thing is red or sweet, we have an immediate or intuitive cognitive certitude that we are affected by redness or sweetness or have a sensation of sweet and red. But as cognized, red and sweet are data only because they are *taken* in thought. Their givenness is something imputed; they are primary and immediate relatively to more complex processes of inquiry. It required a high degree of intellectual specialization, backed by technical knowledge of the nervous system, before even the concept of sensory data could emerge. It still taxes the resources of investigation to determine just what are "immediate data" in a particular problem. To know a quality *as* sensation is to have performed an act of complicated objective reference; it is not to register an inherently given property. The epistemological sensationalist and the epistemological rationalist share the same error; belief that cognitive property is intrinsic, borne on the face.

Because empirical method is denotative, it is realistic in the unsophisticated sense of the word. Things are first acted toward, suffered; and it is for the things themselves as they are followed up to tell by their own traits whether they are "subjective" or "objective." These terms, like physical and psychical, express classificatory discriminations, and there is no presumption of primacy on the side of the subjective. As a matter of historic fact, the primitive bias of man is all toward objective classifications. Whatever can be denoted is there independent of volition (volition itself occurring without volition), and its thereness, its independence of choice, renders it, for uncritical man, cosmic and fated. Only when vanity, prestige, and property rights are involved does the natural man tend, like Jack Horner with his plum, to employ a subjective or personal interpretation.

Subsequently, reflection attributes occurrences like disease, misfortune, and error to the individual person's own doings, instead of imputing them to gods or enemies or wizardy or fate. There is then an intelligible sense in which these things may be said to have been transferred from an objective to a subjective field. But there is even more sense in saying that they have been given a *different* objective reference, in those cases where they are referred to a personal subject as their seat and source. When we say that a man's illness is due to his own imprudence and not to a foreign substance magically projected into his interior by a subtle enemy, we are still discoursing within the realm of objective events. The case is not otherwise when we attribute error to something in a man's own disposition, instead of to the intent of hostile gods to blind him, or to the inherently illusory nature of things. Practically, the distinction thus drawn between subjective and objective, personal and impersonal, causation and locus is of immense importance. But for theory, it falls within a continuous world of events.

Most of the things that have been called subjective by philosophers have an even more obvious objective status. Political institutions, the household, art, technologies, embodied objective events long before science and philosophy arose. Political experience deals with barriers, mountains, rivers, seas, forests and plains. Men

fight for these things; for them they exercise jurisdiction; they obey and rebel. Being and having, exercising and suffering such things as these, exist in the open and public world. As we digest foods derived from the extra-personal world long before we study or are aware of processes occurring in our own bodily tissues, so we live in a world of objective acceptances and compulsions long before we are aware of attitudes of our own, and of the action of say the nervous system, in bringing us into effective relationship with them. The knowledge of our own attitudes and of the operation of the nervous system is no more a substitute for the direct operation of the things than metabolic processes are a substitute for food materials. In one case as in the other we have become acquainted with an added *object;* and by means of this added object further active relationships with the extra-personal world are instituted.

When we speak of esthetic experience we do not mean something private and psychical. The choir of heaven and the consent of the earth are implicated, as are paints, brushes, marbles, chisels, temples, palaces, and theaters. Appreciation is appreciation of some *thing*, not of itself. We are lovingly and excitedly aware of the objects long before we are aware of our own attitude; and the acquisition of ability to distinguish that attitude marks only an increase of distinctions in original subject-matter. Although contemporary theory emphasizes the psychologic and personal aspect of religion, historic religions have always had their holy places, times, persons and rites. One may believe that these objects did not have in the order of objects of knowledge the qualities ascribed to them in belief, but the testimony in behalf of the natural

objective reference of the subject-matter of experience then becomes only the more impressive. Myths would not be taken to be on a level with physical facts were not the bias of experience toward the objective. Recognition of objects of worship and prayer as ideal or as "essences," treatment of them as poetic or esthetic, represents a late achievement of reflection, not an original datum. If research into religious phenomena has proved anything it is that acts, rites, cults, ceremonies, institutions, are primary, emotional beliefs then clustering about them. Even religious experience does not escape the objective compulsions which inhere in the more direct experience where man tills the soil with the sweat of his brow and woman brings forth in labor. The objects that are auxiliary and hostile to success in these acts affect the most refined and spiritualized sentiments and conceptions.

The notion that experience is solely experienc*ing*, a succession of personal sensations, images and feelings is wholly a recent notion. There is a genuine and important discovery implied by it. But it may be asserted that no one ever took it literally; it has been only a starting-point for dialectical developments which are sufficiently interesting to obscure the absurdity of the basic conception. The discovery is important; for it marks the discovery of operation of organic attitudes and dispositions in the beliefs we hold and the necessity of controlling them if beliefs are to be effectively controlled. The literal isolation of processes of experiencing, as if they were actually something solid and integral, is absurd; because dispositions and attitudes are always towards or from things beyond themselves. To love and hate, desire and fear, believe and deny, are not just states of mind in

nor states of an animal body; they are *active* performances to and about other things,—acceptances and rejections, assimilations and forth-spewings of other things, strugglings to obtain and to escape things.

The fact that the characteristic structure and function of these acts, in complexly organized animal forms, can be detected, shown, and in turn made the subject of new modes of responsive action expresses one of the most valuable philosophic uses of empirical method. It undermines rigid dogmatism, while it also changes scepticism from a wholesale and barren possession of a few aloof thinkers into a common and fertile method of inquiry into specific beliefs. The things which a man experiences come to him clothed with meanings which originate in custom and tradition. From his birth an individual sees persons about him treat things in certain ways, subject them to certain uses, assign to them certain potencies. The things are thereby invested for him with certain properties, and the investiture appears intrinsic and indissoluble. The potency of custom over beliefs never received a fatal wound until physiology and psychology showed how imitation, suggestion, stimulation, prestige, operate to call out certain responses, and how habit confirms and consolidates the responses into apparent matter-of-course unquestioned necessities.

Man lives by expectation, but the content of expectation, *what* is anticipated, depends upon memory; and memories are group affairs before they are personal recalls. The tradition that controls belief, expectation and memory, is limited and usually perverted. Not even wood always burns; seeds do not always grow, nor foodstuffs always nourish; water in quenching thirst may

bring a malignant plague. In complex matters the frustration of conduct based upon expectant belief is still more pervasive. The man enmeshed in labor accounts up to a certain point for these unaccountable behaviors of things by noting further qualifying conditions that affect efficacy; soon reaching the end of his tether, he then falls back upon mysterious potencies, concealed personal agencies and magical counteractions. The thinker who enjoys leisure and is removed from the immediate necessity of doing something about these predicaments, seeks certitude in a higher, more metaphysical realm of Being, and defines as mere "appearance" the region of actual and possible frustrations. Or he turns disillusioned sceptic, and will abstain from all intellectual commitment to objects. The first method creates superstitions; the second is sterile, because it affords no solution of the actual problem, that of regulating specific beliefs about objects, so that they take account of what is ulterior and eventual. The finding and pointing out of the rôles of personal attitudes and dispositions in inference and belief as well as in all other relationships with things (a discovery that constitutes psychology as it becomes systematic), is an indispensable part of this art of regulating ideas about objects; and this art is an indispensable factor in liberation.

Philosophers however misinterpreted the discovery. The old confusion persisted; the identification of direct having with knowing seemed to be the one sound and permanent part of the classic philosophic tradition. "Having" these personal dispositions being in a sense basic to other "havings," it was translated into the belief that they were the first and primary objects of knowledge, possessed of the attributes of reality attributed by classic

philosophy to *its* prior and primary objects of knowledge. Meanwhile men of science and affairs *used* the discovery; it was to them an assurance that by taking better care of the generation and employment of these personal attitudes, mankind could attain to a more secure and meaningful regulation of its ineradicable and coercive concern with things of the environment.

Thus the value of the notion of experience for philosophic reflection is that it denotes both the field, the sun and clouds and rain, seeds, and harvest, and the man who labors, who plans, invents, uses, suffers, and enjoys. Experience denotes what is experienced, the world of events and persons; and it denotes that world caught up into experiencing, the career and destiny of mankind. Nature's place in man is no less significant than man's place in nature. Man in nature is man subjected; nature in man, recognized and used, is intelligence and art. The value of experience for the philosopher is that it serves as a constant reminder of something which is neither exclusive and isolated subject or object, matter or mind, nor yet one plus the other. The fact of integration in life is a basic fact, and until its recognition becomes habitual, unconscious and pervasive, we need a word like experience to remind us of it, and to keep before thought the distortions that occur when the integration is ignored or denied.

The denotations that constitute experience point to history, to temporal process. The technically expert are aware how much ingenuity has been spent upon discovering something which shall be wholly present, so completely present as to exclude movement and change. There are *phases* of things to which this search is pertinent. There are moments of consummation when before and

after are legitimately forgotten, and the sole stake of man is in the present. But even such objects are discovered to arise as culminations of processes, and to be in turn transitive and effective, while they may be also predictive or cognitively significant. The legitimacy of timeless absorption is no argument in behalf of the legitimacy of timeless objects. Experience is history; and the *taking* of some objects as final is itself an episode in history. The testimony of an absorbed consciousness that at last it rests upon something superior to the vicissitudes of time is of no more cognitive worth than the testimony of any other purely immediate consciousness. That is, it is not testimony at all, it is a having, not a knowing. And hence when treated as cognition, it is never natural and naïve; it is suborned in the interest of a sophisticated metaphysics. There is no testimony in such moments just because of absorption in the immediate qualities of the object. There is enjoyment and possession, with no need of thought as to how the object came or whither it is going, what evidence it gives. And when it turns evidence, it always testifies to an existence which is partial or particular, and local.

The assumption that the ultimate and the immediate object is timeless is responsible for one of the insoluble problems of certain types of philosophy. The past and future are rendered purely inferential, speculative, something to be reached by pure faith. But in fact anything denoted is found to have temporal quality and reference; it has movement from and towards *within* it; it is marked by waxings and wanings. The translation of temporal quality into an *order* of time is an intellectual arrangement, and is subject to doubt and error. Although past-

ness and futurity are qualities of everything present, such presence does not guarantee the date at which Columbus discovered America nor when the next eclipse of the moon will occur. For these things are matters that require measurements, comparisons, connection with remote occurrences. But objects of present experience have the actuality of a temporal procession, and accordingly reflection may assign things an order of succession within something which non-reflectively exists and is had.

The import of these remarks is anticipatory. Their full meaning can be had only when some of the denotations summed up in the notion of experience have been followed out and described. A justification of recapitulation of our prefactory considerations in the fact that experience has so often been employed to designate not a method but a stuff or subject-matter. It then gains a discriminatory and selective meaning and is used to justify, apart from actual experience and antecedent to it, some kinds of objects and to disparage and condemn others. "Experience" becomes a theory, and, like all theories as such, dialectic and *a priori*. The objection that the alternative notion of experience is so catholic and universal in application that it no longer has any distinctive meaning is sound in principle. But in the face of historic philosophies and the reigning tradition, the alternative notion is instructive and useful. It serves as a caution against methods that have led to wrong conclusions, and a reminder of a proper procedure to be followed.

In the first place it guards us against accepting as original, primitive and simple, distinctions that have become familar to us, that are a customary part of our intellectual inheritance—such distinctions for example as that of

the physical and mental. It warns us that all intellectual terms are the products of discrimination and classification, and that we must, as philosophers, go back to the primitive situations of life that antecede and generate these reflective interpretations, so that we re-live former processes of interpretation in a wary manner, with eyes constantly upon the things to which they refer. Thus empiricism is the truly critical method; it puts us knowingly and cautiously through steps which were first taken uncritically, and exposed to all kinds of adventitious influence.

In the second place, the notion of experience reminds us that, prior to philosophic reflection, objects have fallen into certain groupings, designated by the adjectives we readily prefix to the word experience:—adjectives like moral, esthetic, intellectual, religious, personal, political. The notion thus warns us against the tradition which makes the objects of a certain kind of experience, the cognitive, the fixed standard for estimating the "reality" and import of all other kinds of things. It cautions us against transferring the qualities characteristic of objects in a certain mode of organization to objects in other modes. Knowledge itself must be experienced; it must be had, possessed, enacted, before it can be known, and the having of it is no more identical with knowing it, or knowing it with having it, than is the case with anger, being ill, or being the possessor by inheritance of an estate. We have to identify cases of knowing by direct denotation before we can have a reflective experience of them, just as we do with good and bad, red and green, sweet and sour.

In the third place, the notion cautions us that we must begin with things in their complex entanglements rather than with simplifications made for the purpose of effective judgment and action; whether the purpose is economy or dialectical esthetic or moral. The simplifications of philosophic data have been largely determined by apologetic methods, that is by interest in dignifying certain kinds and phases of things. So strong is this tendency that if a philosopher points to any particular thing as important enough to demand notation, it is practically certain that some critic will shift the issue from whether the denoted thing is found to be as he has described it to be, to the question of value. For example, I have asserted that all denoted things possess temporal quality. It is reasonably certain that this statement will be taken by some critic to indicate a preference on my part for change over permanence, an implied statement that it is *better* that things should be in flux. It has been stated that objects are primarily denoted in their practical relationships, as things of doing, suffering, contact, possession and use. Instead of being discussed as a question of denotation, the philosophic tradition is such that the statement will be taken as an eulogy; as implying that practice is better than theory. It is then "refuted" by pointing out the superior charm of the contemplative life.

This bias is so strong and so persistent that it testifies, I suppose, to a fact of importance, to the fact that most philosophical simplifications are due to a moral interest which is ignored and denied. Our constant and inalienable concern is with good and bad, prosperity and failure, and hence with choice. We are constructed to think in terms of value, of bearing upon welfare. The ideal of

welfare varies, but the influence of interest in it is pervasive and inescapable. In a vital, though not the conventional, sense all men think with a moral bias and concern, the "immoral" man as truly as the righteous man; wicked and just men being characterized by bents toward different kinds of things as good. Now this fact seems to me of great importance for philosophy; it indicates that in some sense all philosophy is a branch of morals. But acknowledgment that the ultimate ground of reflection is to enable men better to make choice of things as good and bad is in truth the opposite attitude from that which immediately converts traits of existence into moral qualities, and which transforms preferred qualities into properties of true and real being. For the former concerns action to be performed, the direction of desire, purpose and endeavor. The latter is an affair of existence as it is found to be; material, it may be, of choice and action, but material, not goal or finished object.

For reflection the eventual is always better or worse than the given. But since it would also be better if the eventual good were now given, the philosopher, belonging by status to a leisure class relieved from the more urgent necessity of dealing with conditions, converts the eventual into some kind of Being, something which *is*, even if it does not *exist*. Permanence, real essence, totality, order, unity, rationality, the *unum*, *verum*, *et bonum* of the classic tradition, are obviously eulogistic predicates. When accordingly we find such terms used to describe the foundations and proper conclusions of a philosophic system, there is ground for suspecting that an artificial simplification of existence has been performed. Reflection determining preference for an eventual good has dialectically

wrought a miracle of transubstantiation. Here if anywhere it is needful that we return to the mixed and entangled things expressed by the term experience.

The occurrence of the moral fallacy is obscured and disguised in subtle ways. That having the greatest power of self-deception springs from the conventional associations of the word moral. When a thinker has escaped from them he fancies that he has escaped morals. His conclusions are fixed by a preference for a reflective "good," that is to say by preference for things which have a quality of goodness that satisfies the requirements of reasonable examination and judgment. But overtly he may contemn the moral life, on the ground that it involves struggle, effort, disappointment, constantly renewed. Hence he asserts that the true good is non-moral, since it includes none of these things. According to special temperament and to accidents of education, due in turn largely to social and economic status, the true good is then conceived either esthetically, or dialectically, or in terms borrowed from a religious context. Then "reality" as the object of philosophic research is described with the properties required by the choice of good that has occurred. The significant thing, however, is not the thinker's disparaging view of moral life as conflict and practical effort; it is that his *reflective* idea of the good, which after all is the essence of morals, has been converted into a norm and model of Being. His choice of what is good, whether logically conceived or instigated by cultivated taste, is the heart of the matter.

The operation of choice is, I suppose, inevitable in any enterprise into which reflection enters. It is not in itself falsifying. Deception lies in the fact that its presence is

concealed, disguised, denied. An empirical method finds and points to the operation of choice as it does to any other event. Thus it protects us from conversion of eventual functions into antecedent existence: a conversion that may be said to be *the* philosophic fallacy, whether it be performed in behalf of mathematical subsistences, esthetic essences, the purely physical order of nature, or God. The present writer does not profess any greater candor of intent than animates fellow philosophers. But the pursuance of an empirical method, is , it is submitted, the way to secure execution of candid intent. Whatever is employed as subject-matter of choice, determining its need and giving it guidance, an empirical method frankly indicates for what it is; and the fact of choice, with its workings and consequences, an empirical method points out with equal openness.

The adoption of an empirical method is no guarantee that all the things relevant to any particular conclusion will actually be found or pointed to, or that when found they will be correctly shown or communicated. But the empirical method points out when and where and how things of a designated description have been arrived at. It places before others a map of the road that has been travelled; they may accordingly, if they will, retravel the road to inspect the landscape for themselves. Thus the findings of one may be rectified and extended by the findings of others, with as much assurance as is humanly possible of confirmation, extension and rectification. The adoption of empirical, or denotative, method would thus procure for philosophic reflection something of that cooperative tendency toward consensus which marks inquiry in the natural sciences. The scientific investiga-

tor convinces others not by the plausibility of his definitions and the cogency of his dialectic, but by placing before them the specified course of experiences of searchings, doings and findings in consequence of which certain things have been found. His appeal is for others to traverse a similar course, so as to see how what they find corresponds with his report.

Dialectic thereby itself receives a designated status and office. As it occurs in philosophic thought its dependence upon an original act of selective choice is often not avowed. Its premises are alleged to be indubitable and self-guaranteeing. Honest empirical method will state when and where and why the act of selection took place, and thus enable others to repeat it and test its worth. Selective choice, denoted as an empirical event will reveal the basis and bearing of intellectual simplifications; they then cease to be of such a self-enclosed nature as to be affairs only of opinion and argument, admitting no alternatives save complete acceptance or rejection. Choice that is disguised or denied is the source of those astounding differences of philosophic belief that startle the beginner and that become the plaything of the expert. Choice that is avowed is an experiment to be tried on its merits and tested by its results. Under all the captions that are called immediate knowledge, or self-sufficient certitude of belief, whether logical, esthetic or epistemological, there is something selected for a purpose, and hence not simple, not self-evident and not intrinsically eulogizable. State the purpose so that it may be reexperienced, and its value and the pertinency of selection made in its behalf may be tested. The purport of thinking, scientific and philosophic, is not to eliminate choice

but to render it less arbitrary, and more significant. It loses its arbitrary character when its quality and consequences are such as to commend themselves to the reflection of others after they have betaken themselves to the situations indicated; it becomes significant when reason for the choice is found to be weighty, and its consequences momentous. This statement is not a commendation of the will to believe. It is not a statement that we *should* choose, or that *some* choices are self-justifying. It is a statement that wherever reflection occurs and intelligence operates, a selective discrimination *does* occur. The justification of a choice is wholly another matter; it is extrinsic. It depends upon the extent in which observation, memory and forethought have entered into making the choice, and upon the consequences that flow from it. When choice is avowed, others can repeat the course of the experience; it is an experiment to be tried, not an automatic safety device.

This particular affair is referred to here not so much as matter of doctrine as to afford an illustration of the nature of empirical method. Truth or falsity depends upon what others find when they warily perform the experiment of observing reflective events. An empirical finding is refuted not by denial that one finds things to be thus and so, but by giving directions for a course of experience that results in finding its opposite to be the case. To convince of error as well as to lead to truth is to assist another to see and find something which he hitherto has failed to find and recognize. All of the wit and subtlety of reflection and of dialectic find scope in the elaboration and conveying of directions that intelligibly point out a course to be followed. Every system of philosophy presents the con-

sequences of some such experiment. As experiments, each has contributed something of worth to our observation of the events and qualities of experienceable objects. Some harsh criticisms of traditional philosophy have already been suggested; others will doubtless follow. But the criticism is not directed at the experiments; it is aimed at the denial to them by the philosophic tradition of selective experimental quality, a denial which has isolated them from their actual context and function, and has thereby converted potential illuminations into arbitrary assertions.

All philosophies employ empirical subject-matter, even the most transcendental; there is nothing else for them to go by. But in ignoring the kind of empirical situation to which their themes pertain and in failing to supply directions for experimental pointing and searching they become non-empirical. Hence it may be asserted that the final issue of empirical method is whether the guide and standard of beliefs and conduct lies within or without the *shareable* situations of life. The ultimate accusation levelled against professedly non-empirical philosophies is that in casting aspersion upon the events and objects of experience, they deny the power of common life to develop its own regulative methods and to furnish from within itself adequate goals, ideals, and criteria. Thus in effect they claim a private access to truth and deprive the things of common experience of the enlightenment and guidance that philosophy might otherwise derive from them. The transcendentalist has conspired with his arch-enemy, the sensualist, to narrow the acknowledged

subject-matter of experience and to lessen its potencies for a wider and directed reflective choice. Respect for experience is respect for its possibilities in thought and knowledge as well as an enforced attention to its joys and sorrows. Intellectual piety toward experience is a precondition of the direction of life and of tolerant and generous cooperation among men. Respect for the things of experience alone brings with it such a respect for others, the centres of experience, as is free from patronage, domination and the will to impose.