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PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

A SUGGESTED METAPHYSICS TO FIT A FUNCTIONAL
EPISTEMOLOGY

PRAGMATISM, especially that brand of pragmatism which is better called instrumentalism, has been much haggled over, yet the discussion has amounted to little more than a mutual misunderstanding of terms, even beyond that point where this failing, so needful in some small amount to give zest to discussion, has waxed to a deadly malady, so that it would almost seem well to forego the intercourse of ideas entirely, and allow that both the pros and antis leave their contentions to be judged by what they finally work out to. Perhaps it is not entirely without blame to itself that instrumentalism finds such odious misrepresentation to be its lot. That ingenious innocence of schematization and terminology, which has been no small aid to the theory’s attaining vigorous growth, certainly militates against its receiving fair and intelligent criticism. To find a metaphysic for instrumentalism might aid much in obviating this difficulty, though at the same time risking the loss of the doctrine in the uncertainty of the venture. The more especially so because any development of a metaphysic must border so closely upon the dialectic as to appear ill fitted to such a go-it-to-the-end empiricism as that upon which our theory bases its claims. Nevertheless, such is the adventure before this discussion.

But, before the final plunge into the problem, the warning is proper that the only logic to be expected is that in accordance with a functional interpretation of knowledge. There is to be no attempt at proof according to any static logic, but only a working together of ideas for mutual clarification, or else the elimination of those unfitted for participation. The whole may turn out to be a flagrant example of Petitio Principii, and be none the worse for it, if only the ideas do not quarrel one with another. Having thus severed the last mooring to responsibility of conduct, the discussion may now fare forth upon its chosen way.

Three words immediately assume leading rôles, experience, experiencing, and the unstatic, and the last is that which affords a keynote to the metaphysic, and this is so because of the wariness, which is
peculiar to instrumentalism, of all that comedy of analysis in which the well-worn and conventional masques of the harlot and the parasite, the intuition and the reason, cover the God-given features of the facts, and nothing remains to be done but to fit the characters with new witticisms of dialogue. The rather there is a reaching for the native stuff of living. And thus we tumble into the vortex of the unstatic, and are shut from easy recourse to words for the explanation of the unexplainable.

This thing the unstatic is a chaos of pure motion, activity, kinetic force. In it there is differentiation through force and direction alone, in every part of it is continual mutation through action between its elements, always mutual dependence in character. Complexity is the very essence of it. For absence of complexity means uniformity, fixedness of activity, change, motion. But there can be no differentiation into exclusive and categorical kinds. Hence the pluralism existent is only one of variation in function. And in such functioning there is mutation, perhaps microscopic, perhaps gigantic, but always continual. The only ever-present feature is that of direction, the only uniformity possible is that of direction. But no single direction is everlastingly the same, determined for one element, for every element exists amid an infinitude of other directive forces, it is dependent upon them for character, as each of them is dependent upon it. But this dependence is not to the exclusion of antagonism, for the very shaping of one element is through its being set over against other forces. The one primal fact is, however, motion, force. So the only sort of an element is a kinetic, and this may only be individual through present uniformity of direction. Every real is a kinetic.

In keeping with the force of this concept unstatic there are brought to light these dictums:

I. Two reals may not be exclusively and continuously different in kind.

II. Two reals, mutually antagonistic in direction, entering into a common situation, must be either mutually modified, or else merged into a new real.

III. The component directional elements entering into a real can not retain individual determination, but may be only aspects of one dynamic whole.

IV. No persistent element may exist independent of or unchanged by the boundless complex whole.

V. In every process there is present a creative possibility.

While such a statement of the nature of reality is not a propos merely to functional epistemology, it is perhaps most strikingly fitting as viewed in the light of this theory. The refusal of yes-and-no
demarcations of mental facts into sensations, percepts, and concepts; the emphasis upon the functional unity and mutual development of mental elements; and the constant suspicion shown towards any dividing of activities into continuous and antithetical sorts or faculties, as the objective and subjective; the emphasis upon the creative character of thinking; the considering of the elements present in thinking as themselves active, not passive to the manipulation of a mind, and also as continuous with reality, not set over against reality; all these make such an epistemology and such a metaphysic fit hand and glove.

But most of all do they agree in the forsaking of all word-entities. The ding-an-sich, the merely potential, the mind, the ego, and all such beings as most bedevil thinking are at least prayed against, though they may surreptitiously creep in through the weakness of language. It is strange what fond reverence the enlightened among us still show towards this old crop of thought hindrances. They can behold any single activity fading away into an infinite regress, but to think of it they must block that endless unraveling of things, they must tie the loose ends together with a word. Ask them the force of the word and it resolves into an activity, but still the sound of the phrase "static term" is the only solace to their mental dilemmas. Or they may refuse every intelligible, though superstitious, meaning for the word mind, and yet they leave the mystical word there to come valiantly to the rescue of any fact in distress. Such a shortcoming is undoubtedly due to domestic tidiness in thought, but for the seer of the unstatic it seems to shut the door against many a waif fact which, while not tidily fitting into place, has perhaps the secret of rejuvenation in it. And it is this attempt to eliminate word solutions upon which a metaphysic of the unstatic must rest for recommendation.

But the modification, due to the emphasis upon the unstatic, which is most important for the whole subject of epistemology, is that in the meaning of the term experience. Accepting that word to denote the realm within which experiencing takes place, we are brought to the question of the relation between experience and reality. As already noticed, the existence of any mutually exclusive, and persistently differentiated kinds of reals, is repugnant to the concept unstatic. Such an exclusion from reality would seem to smite hip and thigh any persistent subject-object relation in experience, while the mutual interdependence of reals would find little room in an experience which was the free offering of discrete data to a mind for arrangement. Hence even without the presence of the word-entity mind coming to question, such a conception of experience would seem to work poorly, when the unstatic was uppermost in the situation.
Finally, both the principle of mutual relatedness, and the principle of exclusion of categorically different kinds, refuse the idea of experience being a realm within reality. Experience must be co-extensive with reality. The total complex of interrelated reals which makes up the world, this is experience. But within the whole there occur particular series of interactivities which may be called experiencings. But the whole may not be considered as an active entity, it is a sum total which may not be added. Nor in it are the various kinks and incongruities of the particulars smoothed out in a unity of higher purposefulness. It is simply an ever widening hodge-podge of contradictory reals. To this plexus of kinetics, the word experience may not be applied as definitive of its character or structure, but only as marking the-everywhere-present-in-it-potentiality of relationship in some experiencing, and the always actual continuity of interaction between any experiencing and its utmost bounds. When, then, the relation between an experiencing and experience is spoken of, the term reality might equally well be used, except that it would hint at a discontinuity, which suggestion is to be avoided. The connection, however, between experience and any particular experiencing, it is necessary to realize.

Most emphatically important in this connection is the serial character of experiencing. It, itself, is not an activity, totally distinct and self-characteristic, to be set over against some other generically different sort of activity. On the contrary any real may enter into a situation wherein it acquires an aspect which renders it a part of an experiencing series, while every real in such a series works over into participation in other sorts of series. But what does give experiencing, or any other process for that matter, continuity, is localization, and community of function among the elements entering into it.

In ordinary living, and in the treatment of experience from the physical and physiological standpoint, experiencing is recognized as taking place in individual centers. But the stuff which is individualized in experiencing is not limited to the individual centers. It is independent and self-constituted, common to all individual experiencings inasmuch as it may enter into any of them. And it does enter into them and become individualized for the sake of readaptation to a special end. This individualizing process is one of acquiring a purpose and fulfilling it. It takes place in all animate centers from the simplest protoplasmic cell to the human being. And the purpose acquired and fulfilled when the process is successful is the continuation of that part of the world stuff belonging to the special animal complex. In this total individualizing process, every animal functioning, whether digestive, ratiocinative, or what not, plays a part. But experiencing being considered from the epistemological side, the
most important activities of the experiencing series are those which function in consciousness.

So, experience is the total of reality, and that within which any particular experiencing occurs, and of which every element in any experiencing series is an integral part.

Experiencing is that functional continuity of reals in an individual center through which experience becomes modified for the sake of continued animate existence.

Formidable as this latter may sound, yet when stated in an unguarded way, it means only that by experiencing is denoted whatever it is to be animate, not gaseous, nor mineral, nor in any way dead. It is just what each of us has when he is alive and wriggling.

However, in this treatment of the relation between experience and experiencing, a most traitorous word has found harborage. The term consciousness, if left unchallenged, might with ease betray the whole discussion. It must be rendered innocuous. Above all may it not convey the picture of a Tibetan realm, presided over by the grand lama, mind. The aforementioned aversion to word entities would object strongly to the referring of consciousness to the activity of a mind. But even if mind be taken as being but a class name for activities inherently different in kind, the distinction between activities as conscious, or mental, and non-conscious, or physical, would not be possible with a metaphysic of the unstatic as a background. That is, if such a distinction be taken as a categorical differentiation according to sorts.

This follows immediately upon the first dictum stated as dependent upon the characterization of the unstatic. But the application of this corollary here is so important that a consideration of its atoneness with the concept of the unstatic is enforced. When the fundamental fact of things is considered to be motion, change, force, no qualification of elements would be in keeping which was not describable in terms of direction or force. Any positing of a mystical specificity as a distinguishing feature of one thing as against another would be unfitting. But the only distinction which would apply to difference of function would be as to direction, since difference of force, or velocity, would be merely in intensity. Then no two elements could be permanently differentiated, since the direction of either would be subject to at least small variation through existence among other forces, and so there would be the possibility of mutual transformation into similarity.

Therefore a conscious real may not be marked off as one having a specific quality consciousness, but must be defined in terms of whatever peculiarity of function is common to such reals. This is what most marks a piece of reality as being included in an experiencing
series rather than a brute physical one. Only does a real become conscious when for it there is hesitation in direction. It must be not merely uncertain, but hesitant in a selective situation in which the general directive force of the experiencing series takes part in the determination of the final direction which the real assumes in the series. This might be expressed in the terms of vitalistic biology as meaning that a real becomes conscious when there is selective reaction to it, and only then. So, in a stone, light does not act as a conscious element because the meaning of light for the stone’s existence is unquestioned. But for the animate complex there is just that question of direction between this way and that. Does this light mean to come near or draw off? In every such coming to consciousness there seems to be a genuine indeterminism as to final upshot, and a drawing into the suspense of the rest of that centered reality which is the center of experiencing. Always the question affects, to some small extent at least, the possibility of further comfortable experiencing and future successful meeting of such perplexities.

Consciousness, then, is the quality of hesitation in direction present for all reals in their higher functioning within the experiencing series.

There is thus in every conscious functioning of experience in experiencing, a quality of uncertainty, which might lead to the statement that every element entering into an experiencing is liable to a subjective phase, if the adjective subjective were to be taken in the commonly found sense of shady, questionable. This subjectivity may consist in a question as to the element’s own proper directive force, or, if its own direction be not in immediate question, subjectivity may be referred to it as it enters into the determination of some other element’s bearing, and is thus modified in its own direction or force. However, this subjectivity forms no inalienable characteristic of any element such as to make it distinct in kind. For no matter how uncertain an element may be in one situation, it may in another be a factually determining member. The dream hallucination, though instantly discounted as meaning a thing to be yelled at, may become of grave factual importance for a Freudian analysis of one’s subconscious. On the other hand, no element is so determined in its force as not possibly to be rendered uncertain, particularly if it be so unfortunate as to be functioning in a philosopher’s mind.

Yet there is something inexplicable in this subjectivity found in the experiencing process, just as there is something inexplicable, that is, which escapes complete causal description, in a physical process. But to posit here the activity of such an entity as the subject, in order to furnish a stop-gap for thinking, is a purely gratuitous piece of word worship. The subjective may only belong to a subject in the
sense of being referred to an interrogation point. But far from invalidating an element as a part of experiencing, this interrogatory character enhances it. It is in this way that it functions for the adaptation of its meaning and other meanings it meets to the needs of any particular situation.

With this final flourish of its decapitating scimitar against a word entity, this metaphysic of the unstatic may rest content as at least having exhibited in the rough its most dangerous traits. Probably it was not entirely fortuitous that the word unstatic instead of some such positive term as dynamic was taken as the center of this conception of things. For its procedure is for the most part from the negative side of the question to the weeding out of artificial terms, if they be equated to existential entities. Also the method used was influenced by a feeling against arbitrary classification and too categorical distinctions. On the positive side, this discussion offers a tentative sketch for a background to instrumentalism, the chief craving throughout having been to develop coherently the metaphysical hints gleaned from Professor Dewey's various works. The whole feeling of Professor Dewey's thought, as understood here, calls for continuity of interactivity, and universal dynamic effectiveness throughout reality, while frowning upon any over-rude anti-intellectualism. This suggested metaphysics will be best understood, then, when looked upon as a working out of these thought factors into amicable relationship.

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PRIMITIVE IMPROVIDENCE

ORESIGHT is one of the virtues civilized man never tires of arrogating to himself. He is civilized, in fact, he declares, just because he is foreseeing, because he is self-denying, saving, provident. "Our commerce, manufactures, education, culture,—everything is for the satisfaction of future needs. It is this sense of to-morrow which stings us to work. The haunting specter of possible wants, even when we are needing nothing, the hope of future rewards, the confidence of success, of fear of failure,—these are the stimuli which carry us along from savagery to civilization. The savage at first has no sense of them,—or at least but very little."

There may be something in these assertions, but I have always been inclined to think them at least exaggerated, and based not only on cultural egotism, but on ethnological ignorance. Having just returned from a rain dance at Zuñi, New Mexico, I find myself of an even more emphatically challenging disposition.

1 Shotwell, J. T., This JOURNAL, Vol. XII., page 201.