METAPHYSICS, PSYCHOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY: PROFESSOR DEWEY'S VIEWS

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FROM time immemorial, philosophy has been a compound of which metaphysics, psychology, logic, ethics and theology formed the ingredients, though in varying proportions. Professor John Dewey, as we have seen, regards philosophy as a branch of ethics, in a sense, and as a body of propositions and principles peculiarly fitted to play the role of reconciler, interpreter, guide and purifier of values. Philosophy is not, in Professor Dewey's opinion, a rival of science; it must, indeed, follow science, and take care to assimilate established scientific truths, in order to fulfill its own more general and more synthetic function. Yet, surprisingly enough, Professor Dewey's system of philosophy essays to correct and even revolutionize certain accepted propositions in more than one special science. This shows perhaps that no school of philosophy can escape the necessity of developing its own metaphysics, its own psychology and its own logic. Be this as it may, however, Professor Dewey's views on questions not *strictly* philosophical by his own definitions and delimitations are both arresting and important: they have influenced and continue to influence students of philosophy and metaphysics, and they are vital to the body of doctrines known as Pragmatism.

Let us begin with the so-called fundamental question as to "the stuff of the universe." Is this ultimate stuff material or psychical? Libraries have been filled up with volumes in which attempts have been made to answer this question. Professor Dewey and his school start by analyzing the question itself. How does it occur at all? What facts in nature and in human activity give rise to it?

To quote Professor Dewey:

"The vague and mysterious properties assigned to mind and matter, the very conceptions of mind and matter in traditional thought,

are ghosts walking underground. . . . The matter of science is a character of natural events, and changes as they change. Natural events are so complex and varied that there is nothing surprising in their possession of different characterizations, characters so different that they can easily be treated as opposites. Nothing but unfamiliarity stands in the way of thinking of both mind and matter as different characters of natural events, in which matter expresses their sequential order and mind the order of their meanings in their logical connections and dependencies. . . .

"That to which both mind and matter belong is the complex of events that constitute nature."

Of course, there is a process which we *call* thinking and operations we *call* mental. But "thinking is no different in kind from the use of natural materials and energies, say fire and tools, to refine, reorder and shape other natural materials, say ore." At no point or place is there any jump outside empirical, natural objects and their relations. "Thought and reason are not specific powers. They consist of the procedures intentionally employed in the application to each other of the unsatisfactorily confused and indeterminate, on the one hand, and the regular and stable on the other. . . ."

"The idea that matter, life and mind represent separate kinds of Being springs from a substantiation of eventual functions. The fallacy converts consequences of interaction of events into causes of the occurrence of these consequences. . . ."

In short, mind and matter are not static structures, but functional characters, and the distinctions between physical, psycho-physical and mental is one of levels of increasing complexity and intimacy of interaction among natural events."

It is hardly necessary to point out that modern science fully supports Professor Dewey's characterization of matter and of mind. And, as he observes, and as Spencer observed long ago, the quarrel between materialists and spiritualists has absolutely no meaning. We are getting rid of unreal problems, of problems created by arbitrary distinctions and misleading terms of our own invention, and the sooner philosophy and theology follow the example of science in dropping empty dialectics and attacking real problems, the better for their influence and for human progress.

In dealing with another ancient and troublesome question, namely, the "paralellism" of external and internal events, the relation of the brain to thinking, the mystery of what we call conscious-

ness of self and others, Professor Dewey is equally felicitous and convincing.

Not that he denies the existence of "mystery," or that he claims that science has explained or can explain everything in nature. He says: "The wonder and mystery do not seem to be other than the wonder and mystery that there should be such a thing as nature, as existential events, at all, and that in being they should be what they are. The wonder should be transferred to the whole course of things. . . . Since mind cannot evolve except where there is an organized process in which the fulfillments of the past are conserved and employed, it is not surprising that mind, when it evolves, should be mindful of the past and future, and that it should use the structures which are biological adaptations of organism and environment as its own and only organs. In ultimate analysis, the mystery that mind should use a body, or that a body should have a mind, is like the mystery that a man cultivating plants should use a soil, or that the soil that grows plants at all should grow those adapted to its own physico-chemical properties and relations."

The world is what it is. Mind has developed in it, just as life has developed in it. It is arbitrary to separate life from nature, mind from organic life, and then marvel at the mysteries of their union. Rational advance, says Professor Dewey, or recovery from present confusion and madness, "depends upon seeing and using these specifiable things as links functionally significant in a process. To see the organism *in* nature, the nervous system *in* the organism, the brain in the nervous system, the cortex in the brain is the answer to the problems which haunt philosophy."

We may observe here that Professor Dewey would not object to purely scientific, experimental efforts to ascertain just what change, addition or readjustment and recombination convert what we call dead matter into living tissue, for example, or to ascertain all the conditions under which the mystery called "thinking" takes place, and exactly where it takes place. His position is that philosophy, as such, is not concerned with such problems, any more than it is concerned with the question of diminishing returns in agriculture or with the soundness of the quantitative theory of money.

The question of the reality or function of "consciousness" is naturally discussed in connection with the body-mind organism which nature has evolved in man and which in turn observes nature, accommodates itself to the environment and, when possible, modifies environmental factors to suit its realized needs and interests.

Professor Dewey doe not waste time, space or ingenuity in dealing with verbal objections or prejudices against old terms charged with theological or unscientific connotations. Thus he finds use even for the term "soul," and his definition of that word should be quite acceptable to irreconcilable Agnostics. The term consciousness has wrought much mischief in psychology, but Professor Dewey would not outlaw it on that account. He insists, however, on a very careful definition of it. His own definition is as lucid as it is adequate. "Consciousness in a being with language," he says, "denotes awareness or perception of meanings; it is the perception of actual events, whether past, contemporary or future, *in* their meanings—the having of *actual ideas.*" The field of mind is enormously wider, of course, than that of consciousness; "mind is, so to speak, structural, substantial, a constant background and foreground; perceptive consciousness is process, a series of heres and nows. . . . Consciousness is, as it were, the occasional interception of messages continually transmitted, as a mechanical receiving device selects a few of the vibrations with which the air is filled and renders them audible." "Consciousness, an idea, is that phase of a system of meanings which at a given time is undergoing redirection, transitive transformation. . . . Consciousness *is* the meaning of events in course of remaking; its 'cause' is only the fact that this is one of the ways in which nature goes on."

The attempt to separate consciousness into two phases, Professor Dewey regards as futile. "Immediate consciousness, he says, cannot be described, not because of any mystery behind it, but because "it is something bad, not communicated and known." We cannot tell what consciousness is, but thanks to speech, a thing had may be had in a particularly illuminating way. Because of words, consciousness is focalization of meanings. We become aware of relations of the thing had to other things and other events. Consciousness is not an entity which *makes* differences; it is the difference that is in the process of making, and that process is due to awareness of new meanings, unperceived connections, mental discoveries, the warnings and criticisms of others, self-criticism.

And what is it we are aware of when conscious? The distinction made between objects and events is valid enough, if not stretched. Says Professor Dewey:

"Objects are precisely what we are aware of. For objects are *events with meanings;* tables, chairs, stars, the milky way, electrons, ghosts, centaurs, historic epochs, and all the infinitely multifarious

subject-matters of discourse designable by common nouns, verbs and their qualifiers. . . .

"Events are present and operative *anyway;* what concerns us is their meanings expressed in expectations, beliefs, inferences regarding their potentialities. . . . Events have effects or consequences, and since meaning is awareness of these consequences before they actually occur, reflective inquiry, which converts an event into an object, is the same thing as finding out a meaning which the event already possesses by imputation."

A mere shock is an event, but not an object, illustrates Professor Dewey. We have to interpret the shock, to assign a meaning to it, to connect it with other events, and in doing all this we convert the event into an object, a significant thing.

Why does Professor Dewey prefer the compound term "body-mind"? Because, he answers, this term designates "an affair with its own properties," and describes "what actually takes place when a living body is implicated in situations of discourse, communication and participation. In the hyphenated phrase 'body-mind,' body designates the continued and conserved, the registered and cumulative operation of factors continuous with the rest of nature; while 'mind' designates the characters and consequences which are differential, indicative of features which emerge when 'body' is engaged in a wider, more complex and interdependent situation."

The old notions of the independence of the mind, the seat of ideas, and the like, must be abandoned. The body has much to do with perception. Much of what has been accepted concerning alleged "pure sensations," differences between peripheral and central origins of perceptions, etc., is obsolete, and the trouble with psychology, physiology and philosophy is that they continue to use a vocabulary which is appropriate to intellectual hold-overs or survivals, but which fails to express the conclusions of modern science.

It may be asked at this point what the foregoing observations have to do with the essential business of philosophy. We have already pointed out that we may accept all of Professor Dewey's theories in psychology, logic and metaphysics without indorsing his conception of philosophy. But it is only fair to recognize that Professor Dewey himself asserts and repeatedly effects a connection between his theories and propositions in other branches of knowledge and his deliberate definition of philosophy. We may fitly conclude our elaborate—and yet far from adequate—review of a re-

markable and significant work with a few quotations in which this connection is tacitly made or implied.

Thus after giving reasons for rejecting the doctrine of parallelism and the separation of body from mind, Professor Dewey says:

"If the problem is put as one of a more adequate control of behavior through knowledge of its mechanism, the situation becomes very different. How should we treat a particular meaning—as sound datum for inference, as an effect of habit irrespective of present condition, as an instance of desire, or a consequence of hope or fear, a token of some past psycho-physical maladjustment, or how? Such questions as these are urgent in the conduct of life. They are typical of questions which we must find a way of answering if we are to achieve any method of mastering our own behavior similar to that which we have achieved in respect to heat and electricity, coal and iron."

In discussing the distinction between events and objects, as defined by him, Professor Dewey says:

"Philosophy must explicitly note that the business of reflection is to take events which brutally occur and brutally affect us—to convert them into objects by means of inference as to their probable consequences. These are the meanings imputed to the events under consideration. Otherwise philosophy finds itself in a hopeless impasse. . . . Philosophy has only to state, to make explicit, the difference between events which are challenges to thought and events which have met the challenge and hence possess meaning. It has only to note that bare occurrence in the way of having, being or undergoing is the provocation and invitation to thought—seeking and finding unapparent connections, so that thinking terminates when an object is present: namely, when a challenging event is endowed with stable meanings through relationship to something extrinsic but connected."

Finally, in dealing with consciousness and resultant action, or the lack of appropriate, beneficial action when it might be expected to follow, Professor Dewey writes:

"We have at present little or next to no controlled art of securing that redirection of behavior which constitutes adequate perception or consciousness. That is, we have little or no art of education in fundamentals—namely, in the management of the organic attitudes which color the qualities of our conscious objects and acts."

"The world seems made in preoccupation with what is specific, particular, disconnected in medicine, politics, science, industry, edu-

cation. In terms of a conscious control of inclusive wholes search for those links which occupy key positions and effect critical connections is indispensable." . . .

"Clearly, we have not carried the plane of conscious control, the direction of action by perception of connections, far enough. We cannot separate organic life and mind from physical nature without also separating nature from life and mind. The separation has reached a point where intelligent persons are asking whether the end is to be catastrophe, the subjection of man to the industrial and military machines he has created."

The foregoing paragraphs make the claim that a true conception of philosophy and a correct understanding of the operations of the "body-mind" constitute not merely the beginning of wisdom, but also the first long step toward a rational and harmonious human society. Obviously, this claim grows out of a certain estimate of the role of intelligence and reason. Professor Dewey, as we have seen, promises no Golden Age, and does not overlook the influence of passion, of envy, of greed, of ambition, of fear and of antipathy in human affairs; but he does believe that if we knew ourselves, understood the body-mind, made allowances for habits and bias, and honestly endeavored to measure consequences and effects of hasty or impulsive acts, whether individual, group or national, many of our grave problems, so fraught with mischief and woe, would yield more readily to solutions in conformity with what we rightly call our better nature.