

TWO NOTABLE PHILOSOPHIC WORKS

BY VICTOR S. YARROS

I.—*Dualism After Thirty Years of Controversy*

NO more important or fascinating theme for a course of lectures on the Paul Carus foundation could possibly have been chosen than that which Professor Arthur O. Lovejoy undertook to discuss when afforded that enviable opportunity. Professor Lovejoy belongs to the very modern school of philosophy which has called itself for some years the school of Critical Realism, and his analytical power as well as sound scholarship have given him a place of distinction in that school.

He was eminently qualified to review and evaluate a movement in modern philosophy which for twenty-five years or more has challenged the minds of the most profound thinkers of Europe and America—namely, the attack upon Dualism.

That attack has not been confined to the Idealists of the old type. Thinkers truly and radically modern, men who are at home in physics as well as in metaphysics, and who are familiar with the latest revolutionary discoveries in all the realms of thought, have endeavored to overthrow Dualism by using the most improved weapons at their command. What are the results of the great battle to date? Is Dualism dead and buried, doomed to everlasting dishonor? Or has the terrific assault, frontal and other, failed, and Dualism still stands intact and solid?

Professor Lovejoy is satisfied that the attack on dualism *has* failed. The philosopher, he thinks, is bound to admit that Animal Faith, as Santayana would put it, or Common sense, as Professor Lovejoy would say, is still amply justified in adhering to the empirical idea of an objective world, with Man as part of it in a sense, yet a part capable of thought, of feeling, of judging, of contemplat-

ing the rest of creation subjectively, of looking even into his own inner self.

Nothing to be found in the works of Russell, Eddington, Whitehead, Jeans and other acute and profound contemporary thinkers, Professor Lovejoy affirms, and successfully shows, has undermined Dualism.

We may resolve matter and apparent objects into mere *events*; we may hold that the same process or phenomenon is physical at one end and mental at the other; we may say that the stuff of the Universe is neutral, or insist that it is mental. We may follow the new physics, the new metaphysics and the new psychology bravely to their revolutionary conclusions, but we have not disposed of Dualism, according to Professor Lovejoy. Relativity, indeterminism, uncertainty and doubt as to the relations between causes and effects, two-way time, and other startling developments in science and philosophy have perhaps obscured and complicated the issue, but it remains a stubborn fact as an issue, and must be faced by philosophers in a co-operative spirit.

Professor Lovejoy himself gives us a fine example of that spirit. He is not dogmatic, despite the irresistible logic of his argument at more than one vital stage. He is tentative and he briefly summarizes his own views in the form of modest observations.

There are those who hold that to criticise the revolt against dualism and convict the insurgents of inconsistency, confusion of thought, use of identical terms in various conflicting senses, is to repudiate Monism as well. But Professor Lovejoy has no quarrel with Monism properly defined and correctly understood.

The essence of Monism is the idea that the Universe is governed by one set of laws, and that its ultimate nature is single. That this has not been fully and conclusively established, is of course incontestable, but neither has an ultimate and essential Dualism been proved. Certain attempts at proof have been made by both sides, and it is Professor Lovejoy's task to show the inadequacy of the cause against Dualism in sundry forms.

Let us grant for the sake of the argument that he is wholly successful. Let us admit that no one has yet demonstrated the unity of the mental and the physical. What of this? It certainly does not follow that mind and matter never meet, never merge into something different from each, or that the laws governing the one have no application to the other.

Professor Lovejoy divides his analysis and review into two parts. The first phase of the revolt is traced to William James and G. E. Moore and the second to the alleged implications of twentieth century science. The conclusion or the verdict is rather *Not Proven* than *For the Defendant, Dualism*.

Philosophy has been warned by thinkers like Whitehead and Russell against leaving common sense and practical reason too far behind their abstractions. Naive realism is as impossible to reflective minds as naive idealism. But dualism is not synonymous with naive realism. Dualism proves that inference plays a large part in our apprehension, and no psychologist can deny this. But it does not take us very far.

Science can prove to the average man that the table or desk at which he sits is not as round or flat or green as he thinks it is. A few tests, instruments and demonstrations will convince him that his impressions are misleading. But he cannot be convinced that, when he turns his chair to the window, the table or desk vanishes into thin air, simply because he does not see it for the moment. He cannot be convinced by any strained subtleties that his friend in another part of the world does not exist when he does not see him or hear his voice over the telephone, or read a letter signed by him. And there is no reason why he should be. The distinction between subject and object is *given*, and there is no arguing it away. We cannot really think that there is no external world. But we do not know just what that world is.

There is, however, a constant action and reaction between the subject and object. Each somehow and in some degree colors and conditions the other. This undeniable fact makes for a Monistic interpretation—as far as it goes.

Again, it is perfectly plain that a given phenomenon may be physical at one end and mental at the other. And some phenomena are both physical and mental at the same time. This, too, is suggestive of a Monistic view of nature.

Yet these lines of argument or evidence are not incompatible with a critical and tentative realism.

Professor Lovejoy has rendered a real service to philosophy and to clear thinking generally by his thoroughgoing but very fair and sympathetic survey of the great and protracted controversy over Dualism. He is not constructive in this work. But he has cleared the atmosphere; he has defined the terms of the problem; he has

disposed of fallacious explanations which leave the central issue unexplained. Let us hope that other philosophers as well equipped and as dispassionate as Professor Lovejoy will perform similar services for other unsolved problems in modern philosophy. The time for a new synthesis is not perhaps at hand, but philosophers should understand one another better than they have done in the past, and they should agree, at least, upon statements of fact and definitions.

Meantime Professor Albert Einstein, of Relativity fame, has announced further discoveries in physics which may greatly strengthen the case for Monism. He is working on formulas which, he hopes, will demonstrate the unity of all cosmic phenomena. Already he has correlated electricity and magnetism. He has also revised his original conception of space. He now regards it as primary, and matter as secondary. Space, he says, is devouring matter. What the genius of Newton began in interpreting space and giving it a physical character, Professor Einstein may finish by revolutionizing our ideas of space and matter alike. Thus what the new physics has failed to do, as Professor Lovejoy shows, it may yet achieve in the not distant future.

Philosophy and metaphysics have been admonished by Dr. Dewey and others not to sever their organic tie with science. In the discussion of Dualism, it is particularly important to keep one eye on the exact sciences. It will doubtless be their good fortune to give dualism the *coup de grace*.

II.—*The Vain Quest for Certainty*

Professor John Dewey, in his Gifford lectures, essayed a task of broader and bolder scope, but one that incidentally touches the particular problem dealt with by Professor Lovejoy. The lectures made a deep impression in England, where the instrumentalist theory of knowledge is not as well known as it is in this country. To Americans the ideas expressed by Mr. Dewey are not novel, and his method of approach has long been familiar to them, but even they will find the book in question, entitled *The Quest for Certainty*, highly profitable.

Professor Dewey does not hesitate to attack what he considers a vice common to all schools of philosophy, ancient and modern

namely, the assumption that thought and action are two distinct categories, and that certainty exists even if imperfect and mal-adjusted human beings have not as yet managed to discover it and make it their firm and cherished possession.

Professor Dewey pleads for a revolutionary reconstruction in philosophy—not only in its methods but in its aims and objectives. He does not want philosophy to continue a vain quest. Certainty is not to be had for the asking or thinking; the only thing certain is the instrumental and experimental method.

Professor Dewey repudiates the notion that the world of thought is radically different from that of action. Moreover, he contends, we do not seek knowledge merely for the sake of action. Knowing is continuous with action; he who thinks and knows is an active participator inside the natural and human drama. There is nothing antecedent or fixed in human affairs; we must inquire, observe, test and compare, to be sure, but knowledge implies action, change of conditions, adaptation of ends to means and means to ends. We make our own world by thought and action, and we never achieve perfection. We cannot use our thought to *escape* the world in which we find ourselves. There are no Eternal Forms or Final Truths; there are problems to solve by means of thought and of its applications. We may remove obstacles, clear up doubts here and there, improve our conditions, create a better world, our own point of view furnishing the standard of goodness, but our standard is itself subject to change in a world full of contingency and uncertainty.

Professor Dewey finds that the assumption of a certainty to be reached by thought plays havoc in politics, in economics, in ethics as well as in metaphysics, religion and philosophy. He endeavors to illustrate this proposition and to trace the evil consequences of the error in every department of human activity and human thought. Not all his illustrations are apt. The individualist will take vigorous exception to his assumption that the school of *Laissez Faire* in economics postulated the existence of fixed laws which men must discover and obey without demur. What the individualists, from Adam Smith down to Spencer and his disciples have maintained is that an "invisible hand" reconciles superficially conflicting commercial interests; that competition in a fair field is better than state monopoly or bureaucratic control of industry, and that liberty is the mother of order and harmony.

Now, all this may be true or it may be false. But the appeal of those who call themselves individualists is to experience, to common sense, to scientific generalization, not to any eternal principle of right.

Dr. Dewey is bound to find instances in support of his theory even where they do not exist. But even if we reject all doubtful illustrations, enough remains to prove the assertion that philosophers have divorced the world of action from that of thought and contemplation. And modern psychology supports the Dewey view of the unity of thought and action, with all the important deductions which he makes in the realm of philosophy.

The truth is, we do not know when or where thought ceases and action begins. We do not even know whether thought is not, as some Behaviorists assert, a form of action. We do not understand the process of thought; and can only analyze certain conditions or phases of thought. But we do know that action aids and stimulates thought, gives it purpose and direction. It would revivify certain schools of philosophy wonderfully if it could free itself of the vice pointed out by Dr. Dewey and make a fresh start from the new basis.

The instrumentalist theory has its limitations, no doubt, but these would be better understood under the Dewey concept of knowledge than they are now. Let us see how far that concept will carry us before complaining of its inadequacy and seeking to modify it. Certain it is that it would brush aside a number of unreal or paradoxical problems in philosophy and permit concentration, in the cooperative way favored by Professor Lovejoy, upon the real and legitimate problems of that department of human intellectual activity.