THE SOURCES OF DOUBT

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Das Höchste wäre: zu begreifen,

dass alles Faktische schon Theorie ist.

Goethe
(Maximen und Reflexionen 575)

Chapter One

An Exercise in Thought

Introduction

This is a book of problems not of answers. The reader is advised to approach it not as statement of doctrine but as a series of exercises in thought. Truth is difficult to speak, and the pretense of giving an ultimate statement of truth deserves to encounter suspicion. The presentation of these chapters as intellectual exercises may relieve them of the burden of appearing to offer a summary of facts. These essays contain no 'truth' or 'fact', scientific or other; a reader in search of dogma will be disappointed. On the other hand, their appearance as exercises may invest these essays with an unexpected effectiveness. The student who becomes familiar with them learns more than the particular exercise before him. If they were musical exercises, the student who practiced them would be the better prepared to perform many comparable compositions. Likewise, if these exercises fulfill their promise, they will help to expand the power of thought on topics extending far beyond the problems specifically discussed here. Musical exercises frequently exhibit rhythm and melody that reappear as the substance of more ambitious compositions. The essays here presented likewise concern themselves with a set of problems that recur in various forms and combinations throughout the entirety of our thought. Perhaps practice and proficiency in the arguments here outlined will prove valuable also in investigations further afield. That

these essays are exercises in thought will justify occasional repetition. An argument that follows accustomed patterns is less likely to be misunderstood and requires only a simple exposition. Ideas that are new and startling must be demonstrated in different contexts and from numerous angles before they begin to be credible.

The topics considered are among the most familiar. Indeed, they are immediate to our experience, and largely for this reason an explicit review of our conclusions concerning them seldom seems worthwhile. It may seem trivial to consider such questions as the characteristics of self, the nature of reality, the structure of knowledge, and the qualities of virtue and beauty. We rely greatly upon these concepts both in thought and in practice. We presume that our knowledge of them is sufficient, although we have never really examined that knowledge. If then, on some unusual occasion, such as the reading of these essays may provide for at least some readers, we should critically examine these stock items in our intellectual household, we might be surprised how many of our assumptions were unfounded and how poorly they agreed with our experiences. We might, indeed, derive much worthwhile understanding from those experiences if only we would examine them critically. We ask the reader who would accept our invitation to fix firmly in his mind the idea that the problems which we investigate are realities of nature. Realities of nature exist independent of our thought and of our knowledge. Man is what he is, and nature is herself, regardless of the views that we might happen

to hold upon these topics. That nature must be independent of our thought is the initial and perhaps the most consequential reflection required of the reader. As the argument unfolds, he may become confused by a sense of intellectual giddiness, and much as in physiological vertigo, he may imagine the world about him beginning to turn and tumble. However, in one circumstance as in the other, the giddiness that makes reality seem unreal is merely the consequence of a temporary readjustment in the organs of sense or of intellect as the case may be. Reality cannot be altered either by our own thought or by that of anyone else. If change occurs it will be in our ability to see and to discriminate, and such change presumably would always be for the better.

With the publication of these exercises, the intellectual ownership of them passes to the reader. He must learn to become the judge of the argument. He must decide whether the appearances described are true, whether the analogies drawn are correct, whether the conclusions suggested are valid. Yet the reader will be an unhappy proprietor unless he takes care that his judgment is guided not by what he wishes to find nor by any desire to preserve a particular outlook upon the world that has become familiar to him. The argument requires a certain detachment and freedom of mind; it will get nowhere if it

is constantly pulled short by prejudice or presupposition. As the argument proceeds, the reader will discover that many of the questions that are put to him, though simple in form, are difficult to decide. He had always been taught to refer obscure questions to an appropriate specialist. He had thought that questions, for example, concerning the human mind should be the property of the psychologist. Problems about time and space were assigned to the physicist to unravel. The historian alone seemed to have the right to speak authoritatively concerning the past. And so it went with all significant questions. Therefore, when problems apparently belonging to various specialized disciplines enter into the circle of our exercises, the reader may begin to feel uncomfortable because he has never before taken such questions seriously enough to permit himself an opinion in his own behalf. Perhaps he will feel embarrassed to concern himself personally with problems to which thousands of studious men have devoted their lives, leaving us the fruit of their labors in the organized disciplines of science. Why should one not turn to science for its knowledge in any of these difficult topics? The minds of scientists are not accessible to us for examination. The summaries of their work with which the textbooks are filled are not science. Nor is the truth of science identical with the apparent meaning of the propositions

that pretend to summarize it. Knowledge cannot be so packaged or distributed. Probably there is only an occasional reader who himself could comprehend in its entirety the work of even a single scientist in a single field of endeavor; it is meaningless to suggest comprehending them all. Yet, as our own thought becomes cogent, the mere conclusions of science, the empty repetition of phrases with which we console our ignorance, the vacant shells of thought from which life and meaning have long since departed, no longer satisfy.

When one learns to recognize these facts, there is no choice except to broach for oneself questions that have traditionally been neglected on the assumption that they belonged to some scientific or religious discipline which would treat of them adequately and appropriately. Furthermore, it is a pertinent question to ask whether one man's theory can ever be accepted or borrowed, used or appropriated by another. A theory is a way of looking, and you can no more borrow another man's mind to look at ideas through it than you can borrow his eyes to see birds or trees with them. Your thought is your own and your theory is your own; another man's theory is as foreign to you as is his vision. As you do your own looking you must also do your own thinking. It is foolish to assume that someone else should be able to do it for you. It does make a difference

whether you read in a book some such sentence as "The gray ocean whose waves break at your feet extends further in all directions than the eye can see," or whether you yourself do actually stand at its edge and measure its expanse with your own eyes. And even though your guide possessed the clearest vision and the greatest gift of eloquence, your own standing in that place confronted with that reality should be infinitely more valuable, even if your eyes were almost blind and you could hardly see.

We would like to travel to wisdom on borrowed knowledge, and we tacitly assume that we may obtain title to wisdom by proxy. The price that we must pay to stand face to face with reality is the humiliation of learning that we do not possess it. We are not the creators of reality nor its owners, and our understanding of it is far from sufficient. Scientific and technical progress does greatly enlarge our field of vision. ~~Scientific thought~~ Science is an intellectual path that leads to great heights, but the territory that we see is if anything less accessible to our understanding than the simple objects and events at the foot of the mountain of knowledge that we were also unable to comprehend. Our scientific conquest of nature does not alter our basic intellectual relationship to it. Only in a very superficial and trivial sense does our knowledge

reproduce nature. When we become intoxicated with our scientific achievements we begin to dream that we possess power over nature, but when we become sober we realize that our discoveries only confirm the imperviousness of nature to our thought. Therefore neither embarrassment nor apology for the present inquiry is in order. Undoubtedly the problems that we are about to consider have at one time or another been the concern of minds keener than ours. If it were possible to graft the answers of the wisest of men upon our own questions, we should be fortunate indeed, but such grafts would not take. Each man must see for himself and no one can see for another, and no man can think another's thoughts.

The days in which we live witness such remarkable progress in our control over nature as recorded history has never seen. The great scientific achievements of our age tend to determine our views of thought and nature alike. We attribute our success in manipulating and exploiting nature to knowledge. To knowledge we credit the abundant livelihood, the ease and the luxury that we have learned to wring from nature. And it is knowledge that we thank for our increasing physical security in the natural world. If practice were the proof of theory, we should indeed have no cause to be dissatisfied with our understanding of the world and of ourselves. We may be confident in our

achievements as such, but not infrequently occasions arise when the knowledge that has made them possible leaves us dissatisfied. We are not content with those achievements; we require of our knowledge more than successful practical application. We demand that knowledge should become the equivalent of nature in every detail, to the end that there should be nothing in nature that was not the property of mind as well. Then no element in nature would remain unexplained or inaccessible to mind. Then, intellectually, we should truly be masters of the world. Of course, so overbearing a presumption of mind is open to criticism not only from a religious but also from a purely practical point of view. Our knowledge is so far from complete that total universal knowledge is still beyond the range of reason. Yet, rational or not, knowledge itself through its very structure makes such a claim. By its implicit definition knowledge presumes to be absolute both in extent and in quality. To be sure, on the frequent occasions that knowledge is discovered to fall short of this presumption we reject what seems inadequate and incongruous. Then we promptly attempt to repair the apparent defect and substitute a new set of facts for the discredited ones, and we admire these until their inadequacies in turn are brought to light.

It is particularly significant that the learning of our time is helpless to explain the ethical valuation that we place upon our actions and the esthetic valuation with which we regard our environment. It is true that scientific explanations of ethical and esthetic experience are occasionally attempted. Such explanations, however, are invariably haphazard and incomplete; they fall far short of comprehending that which they seek to elucidate. In general, topics in ethics and esthetics are outside the realm of scientific explanation. Practically, such limitation of scientific knowledge seems relatively unimportant. We make moral decisions and we design our surroundings without scientific guidance, relying upon customs and habits long established. That our choice and our determination should remain unsupported by scientific explanation concerns us little. But the discrepancy that is trivial in practice may become intolerable in theory. The failure of science to account satisfactorily for the ethical and esthetic compulsion that plays so large a role in human life is one of its most disconcerting faults. The traditional scheme of knowledge is inadequate to explain what we mean by virtue or beauty. To recognize this limitation of knowledge is not to disparage its very impressive accomplishment. Indeed, the contrast between the practical efficacy of knowledge and its theoretical faults provides a compelling occasion to review the entire scope of our intellectual activity.

Inadequacies in one phase or another of our knowledge have often been recognized, and frequently isolated faults are successfully corrected. The failures of knowledge are usually treated as limited problems; seldom are they recognized as the reflections of a fundamental uncertainty about the ways of knowing and the reality of what is known.

The anomalies of our experience may perhaps be reconciled through a new hypothesis of our intellectual relationship to reality. These essays will seek to expound and to justify such an hypothesis. It holds that the world which is exhibited in our knowledge must be distinguished from the reality of nature. The world of our knowledge, according to this hypothesis, consists of a system of concepts and images distinct from the natural world. This system of concepts we call the conceptual world and distinguish it clearly from nature. The conceptual world has been elaborated in the intellectual society of mankind throughout the course of many centuries; it it the content of our education and of our scientific wisdom. The conceptual world and nature are separate; the individual mind is mediator between them. At each moment of its conscious existence mind is part of and in contact with nature. At each moment of its conscious existence also, mind is at work on an intellectual synthesis reflecting both the qualities of nature and the limitations of mind.

Evidently the desire is strong to identify knowledge with that to which it refers. To unite the conceptual world with nature is the surreptitious intention of much of our intellectual activity. A critical view of our experience, however, suggests that the distance between knowledge and nature is great. Knowledge is incomplete and fails to live up to its own presumptions. Knowledge fails to explain our desire to act worthily, our ethical consciousness. Knowledge ignores our esthetic consciousness, our concern for the integrity and beauty of our surroundings. Ethical and esthetic consciousness are not mere extravagances of the imagination. They are primary expressions of the relationship between self and nature. This fact explains why ethical and esthetic judgment should prove to be such unerring monitors of the pretensions of conceptual knowledge. They are the chief sources of dissatisfaction with the illusion that the conceptual world and nature should be one. Ethical and esthetic consciousness lead us to a critical review of our knowledge and of the conceptual world that it has built.

The Conceptual World and the World of Nature

It is a matter of intellectual custom that the world as we recognize it should be accepted without question as absolutely existent. Its apparent givenness and concreteness virtually never become problems for deliberate inquiry. The actuality with which the world presents itself to us demands neither to be investigated nor to be explained. In all historical and scientific research, the existence and intelligibility of a reality called world or nature is invariably presupposed. Against the background of pre-judgments so widely entertained, the task that we have set for ourselves appears extraordinarily difficult. Into this apparent givenness of actuality we must introduce a distinction: we must separate the world of nature itself from our conceptual apprehension of it. Here on the one hand is what we know; there on the other is nature, reality itself. Nature, then, shall no longer be considered necessarily coincident with the sum of our perceptions, memories, and mental images. Let things in themselves stand apart from the cognitive activity of our minds through which we apprehend them.

While the theoretical consequences of this distinction are very great, its practical effects ought not be overestimated. The distinction that we make is nothing more than the designation of thought and judgment for what they are. The reality

of nature remains unaffected, as does the power of thought that is indispensable to our intellectual function. Let it be recognized that this distinction remains entirely within the realm of thought: it alters neither nature nor the imagined world. Our mental activity is in itself a part of nature. As the growth and flowering of the plant are unaffected by the scientific analyses that describe them, likewise the ~~perceptive~~ perceptual and rational functions of mind are sovereign to theoretical considerations that designate their qualities. The analysis that we have undertaken will lead neither to the extinction of knowledge nor to its fulfillment.

The distinction between nature and the conceptual world, when it is first suggested, strikes us as trivial, both because it is so patent and also because it seems so inconsequential in practice. When we come to think of it, the contrast between nature and the conceptual world is everywhere apparent, and we readily recognize it in the specific example. Who would dispute that, for instance, my mental references and images of the tree in my garden ought in no ultimate sense to be equated with the tree itself? Nor for that matter, should the common consent of all men, whether about this tree in particular or about all trees in general, be considered an exhaustive rationalization of the natural tree in my garden. It is true

that such knowledge invariably refers to natural objects. But whatever I may know about this tree or whatever the knowledge of all mankind concerning such a tree might be (assuming that such common knowledge exists in a meaningful way) knowledge is never so complete that there will not be occasions time and again to revisit the object and to improve our ideas of it. The distinction between nature and the conceptual world is no idle fantasy. Does not the scientist himself in each experiment and in every observation abandon the closed circle of practiced thought for the open uncertainty of a new encounter with nature? Although the discrepancy between thought and reality is basic to our most significant intellectual efforts, we are seldom specifically aware that the world of concept and of nature fail to coincide. On the one hand, their disparity is an effective impetus to scientific analysis. On the other hand, the vigorous and self-confident scientific technology of our age serves everywhere to mask the antithesis. It is the persistent intention of our intellectual effort to narrow the gap between the thing in itself and our conceptual image. The more successful such efforts are, the easier it is for us to ignore the distinction. This is particularly true inasmuch as the most effective and consequential of our intellectual encounters with nature occur in a scientific setting. Thus the very efforts that we direct toward the intellectual apprehension of nature serve to conceal the distinction between nature itself on the one hand and our apprehension of it on the other.

Scientific conventions give an air of assurance to our cognitive processes. Nonetheless, the distinction between concept and reality would frequently become apparent except for the intellectual conventions that serve to mitigate and to conceal the discrepancy. In the first place, we are constantly at work correcting errors in our knowledge as they appear. Hardly do we recognize the practical inadequacy of one of our concepts, before we begin to amend, to revise, and often totally to transform it. Furthermore, for the inadequacies of our conceptual constructions that are not readily improved upon, we have long since invented plausible excuses. We blame the weakness of our senses, the fallibility of our judgment, or the uncertainty of our memory. The implication is that if only our intellectual faculties functioned to perfection and were applied with proper thoroughness, then the inadequacies of our conceptualizations would vanish.

The distinction between concept and nature may readily be pointed out in the concrete instance, but in theory it is difficult to sustain and is ultimately always denied. This denial is the result not so much of a disrespect for truth, as of the awkwardness of mind in the face of the progressing accomplishments of positive thought. These accomplishments are impressive not only in the realm of natural science but in the convincing

conceptual fabric of historical theory as well. Precisely because of such achievements, on account of the sufficiency of our thought to itself and to our practical activities, the distinction between concept and nature is very difficult to maintain. Many thinkers have faced our problem and have begun to answer it. We may be encouraged by their attempts, but we cannot borrow their answers. We must ask again, because the answer is indispensable to our understanding of ourselves and of our world. From an historical viewpoint one might say that each cultural epoch has its own heritage and its own achievements; by the same token it creates also its own intellectual problems. The very success of our intellect in controlling nature has betrayed us into this dilemma of mind. That we should confuse concept with nature is perhaps an intellectual problem characteristic of our civilization.

Although evidence for the distinction between nature and concept is well-nigh ubiquitous, the description and analysis of this distinction are disproportionately difficult: our intellectual training has always been directed toward concealing the discrepancy and removing its presumptive cause. It is contradictory to assert that we should speak of nature itself as distinct from our apperception of it. If all our apprehension is distinct from nature, then nature itself ought to be wholly

inscrutable to us. How then should we recognize nature when we encountered it? How can we possibly ever face anything other than our own conceptions of nature? And if we cannot, what right have we to speak of nature itself? At the core of our argument lies this apparent contradiction. If we designate all that we may 'know' about an object as conceptualization, what other contact with the object do we have? If we postulate access to a reality thus defined, must our relationship to it not become a transcendental communion entirely without the realm of our rational understanding? This is the contradiction that most frequently blocks an investigation into the distinction between nature and concept.

This contradiction is illusory, as more detailed consideration of consciousness, perception, and knowledge will show. It is not difficult for us to discriminate the physical interaction of ourselves as animate beings with nature on the one hand, from the hierarchy of perceptions, rationalizations, and inferences that we have become accustomed to make, on the other. Logically, we have ample cause to separate the object perceived from the perception, the perception from its recognition in consciousness, the recognition in consciousness from the historical or mythical interpretation. Each of these stages of our apprehension of the object represents an interpretation of our encounter with

it according to our particular intellectual disposition and capacity. Whenever we designate an object itself as distinct from these interpretations, we extrapolate toward the reliable cause in nature of the perceptive process. This extrapolation in itself bears witness to the limitation of our perception. Such extrapolation may be facilitated by limiting our consideration of the object of perception to the moment of consciousness. When we do so, we are able to exclude to a large extent the interpretative logical elaboration that our mind is accustomed to exercise upon our perceptions. Thus it is true that nature itself can never enter our imaginative contemplation or our logical designation directly. However, its existence is the unavoidable and indispensable inference of our perceptive and cognitive faculties.

Initially the distinction between nature and concept appears unjustified and unconvincing; once this distinction is established, the duplicity that it seems to create appears redundant. To separate nature from concept seems to cause superfluous duplication of the object of experience. There will be on the one hand, the thing in itself which our thought cannot fully comprehend; and on the other hand there will be the concept that dwells in our minds but is only circumstantially related to reality. Neither nature nor concept separately, but only the combination of both, will give adequate explanation of our relationship to the natural world.

We will do well to attempt to avoid those pitfalls that have obstructed other attempts to separate concept from nature. Many such attempts have foundered because of the inadvertent tendency of thought to attribute to each of the two elements of the division the same quality of reality. Surreptitiously the conceptual scheme is elevated to a reality that competes with nature. Then an analysis that began auspiciously as a logical elucidation of experience issues altogether differently in the illicit postulate of a double reality. The error involved lies not, however, in the attempted distinction, but in the implicit presumption that our concepts should be 'real' in the sense that nature is real. It is an error to assume that reality might indeed be established through the intentions of our minds. To attribute reality to our concepts is a disastrous misconstruction of the power of thought. We cannot overemphasize the fact that reality can never be created by thought. Reality exists independent of thought; our apprehension of it is always recognition rather than construction. Accordingly, none of our logical distinctions may ever be considered adequate copies or models of reality. At best they are psychological devices. They are the logical tools that enable our minds to solve the various ambiguities of experience.

Our perceptions and rationalizations occur within a framework whose particular dimensions are characteristic of mind. The object that we are able to perceive depends in size, in duration, and in its very structure upon the sensitivity of the brain and its sensory organs. If, for example, instead of a fraction of a second, the minimum interval perceptible by us were a month or a year, then we should never be able to observe leaves falling from their branches; within the twinkling of an eye as it were, the trees would then become bare. We would not recognize the alternation of day and night; we might not even know the cycle of the seasons. Such limitations of our perception are in themselves conducive to the hypothesis of a reality in nature independent of our mind's capacity to apprehend it. When these limitations are recognized, the distinction between nature and concept will cease to be tautologous and will become meaningful.

Nothing will earn more criticism for our theory than the implicit aspersion that it casts upon knowledge and science, upon the theoretical understanding for which we pride ourselves, and upon the practical judgments with which we have learned to control our environment. There is no way in which we can avoid identifying our knowledge, be it technical or scientific, with that conceptual world which we propose to distinguish

from nature. If we must be critical of knowledge, and if our criticism of what now appears so successful multiplies the difficulties of our task, by the same token it adds to the consequence of and significance of any conclusions at which we might arrive. There are two characteristics of knowledge that in particular deserve our attention. Our knowledge has achieved a high degree of reliability not only about familiar objects and situations but also about remote and inaccessible ones. If we attribute constancy and reliability to nature, we may do so without implying that the laws of nature are definitely known to us. There is no reason why we should not accept the phenomenon of constancy in nature as a fruit of empirical knowledge. The achievements of science may be understood as a discovery of the coincident rules of mind and of nature. To put it differently, the consistency of science may be taken to represent the successful construction of a hypothetical necessity attributable to nature. The laws of nature, themselves inscrutable to us, must be presumed parallel to the laws of mind. At the same time, we should beware of exaggerating the reliability of our knowledge. In the first place, the constancy that we attribute to nature is only inductive; it is never absolute. Furthermore, scientific certainty, such as it may be, is susceptible to accident and error no less than other intellectual efforts.

The second noteworthy characteristic of knowledge is its ultimate deficiency with respect to nature. No matter how effective or complete our knowledge may become, it will never be ultimately exhaustive of nature. In the face of the technical fecundity and sophistication of our age, it is difficult for us to become fully aware how fragmentary knowledge is even in its totality. No matter how many logical provisions we may make for completeness and certainty, there is no way in which knowledge can ever be more than the sum of our present experience of reality, our memory of past encounters with it, and the verbal propositions in which both present and past encounters are preserved and communicated. Evidently, this sum of our 'knowledge' of an object will always remain but a fraction of its potential meaning for us. Always we will require time to become familiar with an object; our understanding of it will be progressive. If nothing else suggested the distinction between the object and our knowledge of it, these facts themselves would do so. Whatever understanding of an object we may entertain can be sufficient only to the requirements of our present relationship to that object. The inevitable emendation of our knowledge implies the discrepancy between what the object itself is and what we know of it.

It is a puzzling and confusing characteristic of our minds that we assume that our knowledge, remarkably fragmentary though it be, should nonetheless encompass the reality and the 'being' of the object. If we were to make rigorous application of this conviction of ours that knowledge encompasses the reality of the object, we would quickly be caught in the contradiction of a relative reality. Our knowledge is demonstrably imperfect and relative; if knowledge were exhaustive of reality, then we should have to postulate that reality also was relative, a manifest absurdity. Our attitude, however, is practical: we are always ready to amend our knowledge whenever momentary experience confutes it. Whatever theoretical claims we make for its certainty, ~~to practical ends~~ in practice we are always prepared to accept the temporary provisional quality of what we know. We may find it difficult to admit that we have become well-adjusted to the fragmentary and transient qualities of knowledge. Knowledge summarizes what we have learned about the object in the past; it suggests what we may reasonably expect of it for the present; it never excludes what we will learn about the object in the future. And how often we are surprised! An unexpected phenomenon about the object startles us; then we attribute the unanticipated quality that it reveals to us, literally, to a new object. Then for a moment, we realize the discrepancy between our image

of the object and what we must call the object itself or nature. Then there occurs that vital moment of learning, the instant when we encounter reality with our conceptual thought, the reflection that reveals to us that we know nothing. Soon thereafter the pattern of our thought recrudesces to a familiar complacent dogmatism. We confuse the knowledge that we possess with the object to which it refers, which in itself is so utterly beyond our comprehension. Our continuing readiness to amend our image of it sustains the presumption that our knowledge concerns the reality of the object itself. Our image of the object always conforms to our most recent experience; we anticipate as best we can the experience to come. The logical inadequacy of our knowledge is suggested by the very openness of mind; our willingness to learn is the implicit admission of our ignorance.

On the face of them, our efforts to distinguish between reality and the conceptual world appear meddlesome and vain. It seems superfluous to describe in such detail what on the one hand seems self-apparent and on the other seems remote from practical decisions. That nature and our ideas of nature are distinct one from another strikes us as self-evident. The discrepancy seems trivial, particularly since all our intellectual endeavor strives to make our ideas the equivalents of nature. The more intense and devoted our scientific investigation,

the less needful the establishment of the contrast will appear. On the other hand, there will be discovered numerous uncertainties and ambiguities of knowledge that receive adequate explanation only through a theory such as ours. This distinction that we make seems prerequisite to all cogent theory of knowledge. Nor may we, in a final analysis, consider the purpose of knowledge to be entirely practical. Our desire to know receives gratifications other than those that stem from our adjustment to the world of nature, from its consequent domination and exploitation. Besides being an instrument in our struggle for survival and for a more secure existence, our knowledge is at the same time an indispensable constituent of our image of ourselves as human beings. Our knowledge is one of the primary ingredients of our consciousness of self. The self which we designate with the pronoun 'I' implies more than the conceptual complex that occupies consciousness at that moment. A valid theory of knowledge will contribute decisively to the image that we have of the human mind. It cannot but color our notion of ourselves as human beings. These facts will become particularly relevant when one considers the dependence of religious experience and belief upon the pattern of knowledge. Some knowledge seems to sustain religious belief; other knowledge appears to compete with it. What soul may or may not be, and what God may or may not be, are implications of thought that will not be divorced from the structure of the theory of knowledge.

When we trace the sources of our scepticism concerning the conceptual world, we discover that the most compelling occasions to doubt its validity arise when consciousness is preoccupied with ethical or esthetic phenomena. Whenever my desire for ethical value constrains me, whenever an object of beauty fascinates me, then I turn to my conceptual schemes in vain for an explanation. This inability of conceptualization to account for ethical and esthetic quality is a further justification for the distinction between nature and concept. Indeed, many of the problems that have become classical in our intellectual tradition may well be re-examined in the light of the new criteria. What is soul? What is reality? What is knowledge? What is virtue? What is beauty? Because these concepts have so often been asserted or denied in trivial formulas, the inquiry concerning them may look foolish. These questions all take on a new significance if they in their intransigence are construed as monuments to the discrepancy between nature and the conceptual world. Ethical and esthetic consciousness are especially cognizant of this discrepancy. For this reason ethical and esthetic consciousness are preeminent sources of criticism of the conceptual world. Thus it is not by accident or by design but by the very structure of the problem that our argument represents the intersection of ethical, esthetic, psychological, and

epistemological considerations. Here converge investigations concerning the pleasures of beauty, the imperatives of virtue, the implications of knowledge, and the structure of mind. Thus the distinction between reality and concept opens the gate to numerous new paths of thought, some of which we will have occasion to follow in subsequent chapters.

Methods of Inquiry

If the scope and the validity of the problems are granted, disagreement may arise about the method by which they might most advantageously be pursued. The casual reader will suppose that the study and the analysis of experience should be the task of some particular science such as anthropology or psychology. Else, if he recognizes the limitations of all hitherto developed disciplines, he may assume that this investigation should be the task of scientific method in a specialty not yet defined. Scientific procedures, he should like to believe, will be more accurate and trustworthy than such apparently random considerations as ours. It is argued that just as science has defined the structure of the physical world, it will some day explain the nature of experience, of self, and of reality. Once science shall have made sufficient progress, no question of import need remain closed to its investigations. This confidence in science is based upon a decisive historical interpretation of what science is and what it has accomplished in the past. It is our choice not to accept this interpretation; we prefer not to share the faith in scientific method which it implies. The reasons for our choice will become apparent as we proceed. Scientific principles may not be presupposed by us, nor may scientific methods be employed in our analyses, because the structure and the implications of science are themselves

topics to be scrutinized in the context of our study. Various scientific disciplines, to be sure, have an interest in the problems we discuss, but we must deny their jurisdiction over our investigation and reject their eager offers of help. Closer inspection will show that what science can contribute to topics such as ours contains too many contradictions and inconsistencies. While these may properly be ignored in the pursuit of purely technical goals, they would introduce irreparable confusion into our present undertaking, were we to admit them. However invincible scientific knowledge may be within its own frame of reference, from our point of view scientific method has irretrievable faults. These faults of scientific thought weaken its foundations, and the weakness of the foundations limits the dimension and the weight of the edifice they can support.

Contrary to the tacit assumption of superficial erudition, knowledge is not self-explanatory and its limitations are not self-evident. All knowledge would be unintelligible, except in the context of inapparent presuppositions. It would be ineffective if it were not sustained by unconscious habits of thought. Those presuppositions make us receptive to knowledge; those habits enable us to use it. Their nurture and transmission is the chief function of education among us. They constitute the very core of our culture. These structural and functional

presuppositions of knowledge must be made explicit if knowledge itself is to be understood and if its errors and inadequacies are to be explained.

The inadequacies of knowledge, its errors and gaps, are apparent most of all to the scientist himself, and he has learned to exploit them as occasions for emending his theory. It is a significant capacity of the scientific method (in contrast for example to theology) that its errors should systematically become the sources of its revision. It is all the more remarkable that this revision far from threatening should confirm the theoretical basis of science. The self-correction implicit in scientific thought makes it invulnerable to criticism, all the more so when the errors corrected are trivial and emendations superficial. Corrections are occasioned by a specific insufficiency and content themselves with repairing an apparently circumscribed defect. Scientific theory is incapable of initiating or sustaining an investigation of the scope that we intend, committed as we are to questioning both the foundation and the structure of scientific theory. Science is the logical refinement of 'common sense,' and both are self-satisfied with themselves in their conceptual world. If we are to be successful in our inquiry we must leave behind the conventions of traditional thought.

The relationship between thought and action is not so intimate as is usually assumed. The application of thought is often remote; the practice that it engenders is frequently inapparent. If the theories that are proposed in these essays possess logical priority in any respect, they ought not therefore be considered practical prerequisites of any particular course of action. We are too much committed to the fallacy that what we do follows directly from what we think. It is not so! What we do follows from what we are, and what we think likewise follows from what we are. (Thought is a kind of action.) Agreed, that what we are follows in part from what we do and think over a protracted period of time. Yet the causal relationship between thought and action, though it be real, is remote and circumstantial. Nations are governed, businesses are promoted, wars are fought, fortunes are made and lost, even the secrets of nature are discovered and demonstrated by men who have no time for problems such as ours; they deny them altogether or presume to do them justice with a single dogmatic assertion.

To the problems that we raise belong traditional answers. On the surface our intellectual tradition encourages questions; actually it interdicts all but the trivial ones. The very fact of inquiry implies doubt of the answers that have been given

and disrespect to the tradition that presumes to answer them truthfully. A summary of these traditional answers would be lengthy and involved. They are concealed not only in the traditional formulas of the textbooks, but they are implicit in patterns of thought and judgment that are inaccessible to inspection. If traditional answers discourage us, we must look elsewhere. We look to experience, reserving for this term a technical meaning that will require further explanation. If experience rather than tradition is to guide us, we must learn to ignore the precepts both of deism and of rationalism. They are the two popular metaphysical theories of our time, which seem to support the social and the scientific orders respectively. Their defenders will criticize us. They will accuse us on the one hand of being irrational when we fail to take the logical scientific catechism at face value. On the other hand they will blame us for being ungodly, when we find it unnecessary to assign to deity his traditional dominating seat at the head of the hierarchy of concepts. Without disparaging the cardinal roles that deism and rationalism have in our social and intellectual traditions, we may reject their demands upon our loyalty. Their insistent claims upon our minds are more than inappropriate. To demand reason where reason cannot apply is self-contradictory. To worship reason is to assert reason irrationally, and to deny in practice what one affirms in proposition. The reality of

God, let it be noted, would not need our assent. It is a mockery to propose a god so frail that his existence requires the constant endorsement of loquacious believers, or a god so fickle that he sulks whenever his name is not graced with flattering adjectives.

The misunderstandings discussed thus far arise for those who consider our questions superfluous, for those who are troubled that some of our answers might conflict with familiar beliefs. More disconcerting by far is the confusion created not by the unwillingness but by the inability to follow the argument. The foremost cause of this inability is probably the uncertainty about the function of language. Unwittingly one assumes that language can provide a logical image of reality. The structure and the processes of nature are thought to be exhaustively described by language. Conversely it is assumed that for all of the concepts that evolve in our pattern of speech, there ought somewhere in nature to exist a demonstrable prototype. Though rarely explicit, both of these assumptions are powerful determinants of our use and interpretation of language. For all their inconspicuousness, they are sources of much confusion and obscurity. Therefore it is all the more important to emphasize our conviction to the contrary: that language ought never be considered a copy of reality and that it is never

successfully employed in the descriptive reproduction of nature. Nor can we condone the inference that our concepts are reflections of a primary reality from which they derive their meaning. However precise or scientific it may become, language must never be accepted as an equivalent of any phase of nature. At best language may serve to guide our minds to an effective understanding of reality.

It is an academic fallacy that induces us to place too much stock in the absolute 'rightness' of our propositions., The virtue of language lies not wholly in its logical rectitude. The primary value of language is its ability to communicate intellectual experience from one man to another. Accordingly one may readily postulate a structurally impeccable thesis that fails for its incomprehensibility. Conversely even an imperfect argument may carry weight because of its peculiar ability to enter into the functional unity of the listener's pattern of thought. As a matter of fact, one may reasonably question whether any of those famous books that are read with such ceremony in our colleges receives today exactly that interpretation that its author intended. Without being cynical, one may realize that even though sublime, truth is impotent where it is inaccessible. By the same token, many an error may conceivably make a valid contribution to the intellectual life of mankind.

Problems of communication stand at the beginning of the argument both as practical and as logical presuppositions. Traditionally first principles have been sought in the widely accepted tenets of natural or historical science. For example, most authors presuppose that our world possesses duration in time and extent in space, that it consists of discrete and separable events linked to each other by unalterable bonds of causality, that it is constituted of objects in space, each of which though visibly changing, must be considered an entity distinct from all others. These presuppositions underlie most scientific theory and we shall have occasion to refer to them again. At this juncture nothing more need be said about the traditional assumptions of thought; we cannot dispense with them, but we accept them with reservations. In addition, we require two fundamental postulates of our own. The first postulate concerns communication and represents the practical presupposition of our argument. The second postulate regards experience and provides us with a theoretical presupposition. We must assure ourselves that these assumptions are understood by all participants to our discussion. If the presuppositions of the argument were not common to all, then each participant would actually be speaking about a different matter; then the greater the detail to which the argument unfolded, the greater would be the confusion that the argument created.

Communication

Much misapprehension concerning communication stems from the deeply rooted belief that language must possess an unambiguous existence independent both of the speaker and of the listener. It is commonly assumed that language upon being uttered and particularly upon being recorded becomes an entity of itself possessing a single fixed significance. This illusion of identity arises at least in part from the fact that the word returns to memory as the chief monument of times past. The written language of legal and political documents seeks to reconcile the diversity of remote occasions with a single purpose. The conventional rigidity of legal definition is intended to facilitate that almost impossible task. It is believed that language ought to possess but a single meaning, unconditionally binding upon all who speak and upon all who hear. Upon this single meaning the ultimate significance of language is thought to depend.

It seems strange, particularly in view of the many and flagrant discrepancies in the interpretation of historical documents and literary texts, that this mechanical construction of the process of communication should not have been questioned more insistently and more often. Inquiries concerning communication have indeed been instituted from time

to time. They have largely contented themselves with superficial analyses of the logical structure of language. I have found none that faced squarely the frequent occurrence of contradictory interpretation. The history of literary criticism abounds with examples of such contradictions. They are of such magnitude that unity of interpretation on any significant subject appears not only unlikely, but, in a sufficiently large frame of reference, virtually inconceivable. In practice, one of the interpretations is singled out as being correct; the others are discarded or ignored. The contradiction is ascribed either to inadequate expression on the part of the author or to faulty understanding by the reader. The possibility that conflicting interpretations might each be equally valid, that 'error' might not only be inevitable but even necessary is never entertained. Truth and fact are considered commodities, to be preserved, delivered, and accepted. The better part of experience confutes this theory of language.

Language is ~~much~~ more readily understood as a function ~~rather~~ than a product of mind. Many of the difficulties of communication will disappear as soon as we abandon the hypothesis that words possess independent meaning. It is true that our ability to remember, to repeat, to record and to read the written word makes it plausible ~~to believe~~ that language should

possess independent substance. Yet processes of interpretation that rely upon this hypothesis invariably lead to insoluble contradictions. On the other hand, a functional interpretation, improbable as it is on first thought, proves far more tractable in analysis and productive in its consequences. A functional interpretation of language is readily illustrated by the common experience of conversation. The authentic application of language is in speaking to one's fellow man. Understanding language is being led by his thought. The author's intention is always to address his audience, and to speak convincingly even when the audience is potential or anonymous. The original function of language is to obtain the agreement of two minds concerning actual or potential experience. It is an instrument that causes men to see and to think alike. Whenever language seems to represent what exists or what ought to exist, it has forsaken its original function. The desire to understand and the effort to be understood exert a subtle influence on the hearer and on the speaker respectively. Through their communication the two minds tend to become alike. The coincidence of mental function brings about an approximation of intellectual structure. The human mind, even more than the body, is determined by what it does. The way in which mind is shaped by its action becomes clearer when one considers how much the mind is able to learn by practice and how little, actually, the mind can accomplish without it.

Thought and language are also fruits of practice. If language is to be understood, it must be judged by its effects upon the audience, for as an object in itself it remains incomprehensible. To consider language as the mutual interaction of two minds is not to imply that it is altogether unrelated to the natural world. What each author describes is a reflection of his own experience of reality; each reader understands him in the light of an experience that may approximate but cannot coincide with the original experience and intention of the author. If the individual had no relationship of his own to reality, he could neither create nor interpret language.

It is always easy to make an issue of terminology. In order to convey his particular meaning, each author must make appropriate alterations in the language that he was taught. The language grows through such emendations. It only obscures matters, however, to attempt to define differences in theory as discrepancies in terminology. Therefore the reader ought not be offended if our use of terms does not always coincide with what he had expected. Let him ignore that false conceptual reality to which terms are occasionally thought to belong as fixed and unalterable components. Our task is not to invent another occult scheme of terminology, but to communicate patterns of experience and methods of thought. The reader's task is to apprehend the

meanings that the terms are designed to convey. If he is dissatisfied with what he understands, he ought to object to the meaning rather than to quarrel with the terms. We do not expect him to accept our propositions as true; agreement is not necessarily our goal. Agreement is a rare and precious phenomenon which must not be demanded prematurely. Our minds being such as they are, we communicate most effectively in propositions. These propositions cannot reflect the tentative, exploratory quality of our judgment. We are prone to overvalue our statements, and the over-interpretation of propositions has become the bane of systematic thought. This dilemma is precipitated by the characteristics of language; we extricate ourselves from it only with deliberate effort.

When one is faced with difficulty in literary interpretation, one usually turns to historical considerations for help. One desires to find precedents; one inquires after causes, influences, and historical significance. Our judgment and our imagination have learned to rely upon an historical framework into which all new experience is fitted. The present is systematically reconciled to the past, to be modified and in turn to modify memory. The same historical awareness makes it customary for an author himself to attempt to evaluate his own work as continuation, improvement, or correction of a tradition or of

a predecessor. We shrink from such historical comparison, from humility and from the conviction that historical considerations are out of place in an essay that must include the structure and the implications of historical thought within the bounds of its criticism. Thinkers of note, Kant for example, have often remarked that philosophy must not be confused with its history. Yet Kant especially, hoping as he did to become the Copernicus of metaphysics, wanted to summarize the totality of past thought in order to be able to revise it and to define a pattern for all thought to come. By these historical pretensions, Kant violated his own maxim, much to his detriment. The task of an author is not primarily to append himself to a tradition, imaginary or real, but by taking account of all that learned and thoughtful men have said upon his subject, and meeting as it were their imagined objections, to accept the limitations imposed upon his thought by his historical environment. Then he may attempt to transcend the hazards of history to write a book which will be meaningful regardless of the year in which it is read.

Language must be understood as it escapes the ~~voice~~ lips that speak and as it enters the ear that listens. The timeless, unchanging quality of the established word is compromised both in the moment of expression and in the moment of understanding.

The fact that these moments may indeed be remote one from another, removed as is the speaker from the listener or the author from the audience, does not alter the circumstances. In the conversation of two minds we recognize the archetype of all communication, and in terms of this relationship we must understand the effectiveness and the meaning of various forms of exposition. In terms of this primary dialogue we must explain the solitary entry into a diary no less than the sentence uttered into a microphone to be broadcast, or composed on the typewriter for publication in thousands of copies. In all these circumstances, the individual speaking exhibits the contents and the facility of his own mind; in all cases the listener or the reader opens himself to the foreign message, whether it be specifically addressed to him by a partner in conversation or whether it reaches him as the member of a mass audience.

For the author of language, the spoken or the written word as the case may be represents an indispensable confirmation of thought. Quite apart from the reflection that is cast upon his person by a message famous or favorably received, the formulation of an idea in language is a manifestation of intellect that was until its expression merely potential. Aside from such expressions of its content, mind should be impossible to designate. For although mind may learn much in silence and although it may

be susceptible to many inapparent influences, yet what it has learned and what it has acquired, indeed the very fact of its existence, become evident and tangible only in the process of expression.

The actuality of the reader's mind is likewise determined by language. From moment to moment the content of the reader's mind is the sentence that he follows with ~~before~~ his eyes. What he reads invariably alters and displaces existing mental content. In following the thoughts that impress it, the mind implements them, modifies them, enlarges upon them, and becomes skilled and proficient in their expression according to its own qualities and abilities. Consequently there occurs an approximation between the mind of the speaker and that of the listener. If the speaker is to make himself intelligible, he must attempt to anticipate the listener's habit of thought; the listener must attempt to adapt himself to the speaker's intention. As a result of this contact, the two minds become significantly similar. To an extent greater or less a community of thought ensues.

If this interpretation of the process of communication is correct, its purpose can no longer be considered the establishment of 'facts.' Communication is the transmission of an ability, of a specific intellectual capacity. Understood in this sense, communication appears primarily pedagogical. Considering the

extent to which mind is dependent in its existence upon its function, one may fairly say that communication in effect is creative of mind. Quite literally the thought of a man who has just been engaged in discussion is wholly different from what it was before. To the extent that mind exists in thought alone, mind of new thoughts will be a new mind. If this construction is correct, clearly it will little matter whether the content of communication shall have been refined to an unequivocal logical definiteness. All that will matter is whether what one man has seen he somehow succeeds in showing to the other.

The more radical an innovation in thought, the more difficult it will be to communicate. The more unexpected a new idea, the more troublesome it will be to understand. The source of this difficulty is not far to seek. Our communication presupposes not only a comparable experience, but to an extent quite inapparent, a common conceptual basis as well. To be sure, we all have seen and heard and felt the same phenomena. Yet in order to discourse meaningfully about them, it is not sufficient that we should rely upon comparable faculties of perception. The conceptual language of which we avail ourselves must also become a common one. The experience that is determined by objects external to us is always generously supplemented by the

verbal and logical experience that our minds create, preserve, and represent to themselves as a conceptual world. Indeed, purely external experience comprises a relatively small fraction of our mental activity; the significance of external experience is always contingent upon a complex of symbolic thought that analyzes, expands, and organizes it. A new pattern of thought is difficult to communicate largely because the words upon which communication must rely are frequently exhausted. The desired connotations do not exist; the very terms available conspire against the successful communication of the new idea. Connotations deeply engraved in the mind of the reader and, indeed, not completely erased from the author's mind, subvert the thought to be communicated. They make to appear incongruous if not ridiculous, logical formulas that in the context in which they were developed were not only meaningful but perhaps even necessary. It is all too easy to forget that the structure of language and its implications never limit reality. There are many things real that we must yet learn to describe; there are many things for the description of which terminology is yet to be developed. Conversely there are many problems, hypotheses, and concepts that arise purely from the structure of language. They have no equivalent in reality and serve only to distract the mind from more important tasks.

The difficulties of communication are all too readily ignored. Probably it is inevitable that an author should underestimate the breadth of misunderstanding between the reader and himself. At least for a working hypothesis, he must assume that the meaning which he attributes to words is more proper than any other, and he must ask the reader to recognize it as such. This unavoidable dependence upon the good will of the reader lays every author open to ridicule and criticism. Words obtain meaning as we use them; no one is the discoverer of their authentic definition. All appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, concepts are never congruent with an objective reality; words refer not to the reality of a thing given but to the experience of a phenomenon recognized. This understanding of the relationship between propositions and phenomena is the thread that may ultimately lead us out of the labyrinth of our conceptualizations. It is not from the refinement of terminology that we must expect the resolution of misunderstandings. On the contrary we should cease to align our thoughts according to word patterns or the logical schemata which word patterns create. Instead we must look to the experience that is immediate and native to us all; we must learn to rely upon the binding and compelling qualities of what is accessible to every man. When we have learned to correct our thought by experiences

that are common and conclusive, we will have discovered the transition from logic to life. Then we will have built the bridge that binds thought to experience.

The academic discipline of psychology is usually expected to resolve the numerous difficulties of communication and of understanding. This expectation is premature, and the logic that demands of psychology, or of any other established science, the resolution of such problems is circular. The definition and institution of psychology as a discipline already presuppose that these questions which psychology is called upon to answer have been previously resolved. When such questions are recognized to be as yet unanswered, the proper sphere and the appropriate methods of psychology become quite uncertain. Who is able to define what psychology as a science should investigate? Who can define the 'soul' of which psychology presumes to provide the 'logos'? Particularly in the modern philosophical tradition, psychology is thought to be logically prior to other sciences. Ever since Kant suggested that the form and the order of natural phenomena be considered an expression of a function of the human mind, solutions of the most fundamental of problems have been demanded of psychology. Its putative results have been desired as building blocks to other disciplines. To be sure, our knowledge of the world

must be considered dependent upon the structure of our minds, but it does not follow that our knowledge of the structure of mind is in any way explanatory of our knowledge of the structure of world. In order to be able to understand the function of mind in the first place, we must have adequate experience of world as the proper sphere of mental activity.

The quality of experience is particularly difficult to communicate inasmuch as we are not only dissatisfied with the common conclusions of thought but are also unwilling to accept many of its presuppositions. It is a simple thing to question conclusions when the premises are granted, but when both the premises and the conclusion require re-examination, then agreement will be difficult. Agreement however ought not be required at the beginning of an argument but at its conclusion, and perhaps not even then. When the issues are of sufficient magnitude and the methods by which they are discussed are of adequate precision, then agreement is often indicative not of the validity of the argument but of its triviality. Where the argument is valid, agreement often as not implies misunderstanding. Differences of opinion are inevitable; they are not evidence of failure of communication but opportunities for incisive thought. Furthermore, the significance of isolated differences of opinion is usually overrated. Often contrary

viewpoints are foolishly magnified to appear as irreconcilable conflicts. Constructively interpreted, many contradictions will be found to supplement rather than to destroy each other. Whether words, phrases, or sentences coincide is of little import. Time and again our argument must refer to the experience upon which it is based. Our concern must not be with the technical structure of the argument but with the realities to which it refers. Our description and our reasoning are never reality in themselves; at best they are only a reflection of reality. What we are able to know about reality is always qualified and often distorted by the individual mind. The task of all didactic conversation is the improvement and the correction of these conceptual interpretations of reality. With their improvement, the mind itself will be changed. It will be able to recognize what it had not hitherto seen, and it will be able to design what it had until now been unable to conceive.

Experience

To ascribe the difficulties of the argument to the inevitable unreliability of communication is not to resolve our problems but only to displace them. Traditionally the obscurity of a specific proposition was attributed to the inaccurate logical analysis of an experience whose sufficiency to valid knowledge seemed beyond question. For our part, we are inclined to consider the problems of logical analysis to be relatively trivial, asserting as we do that language serves not to copy or to exhaust experience, but merely to demonstrate it. We designate the obscure relationship of self and nature to be primarily responsible for the difficulties of knowledge. To us it seems not so serious a problem how mind communicates what it knows, but more important appear the questions in what knowledge consists and to what extent it is able to reflect the encounter of self and world in the first place. We reduce the multiple contacts between mind and nature to a single phenomenon: experience. Into this relationship of self and world that we call experience we transpose many of the difficulties that are traditionally held to belong to the theories of knowledge and of being. Experience may be defined formally as the relationship between mind and nature, limited in time to the occasion of consciousness and limited in space to the area of awareness. Experience, in other words, denotes my relationship to nature here and now, distinct from all that I have learned in the past to anticipate about this present moment, and distinct also from all subsequent reflection and interpretation upon it.

Experience will be difficult to identify in the specific instance because each moment of consciousness is so intimately colored by what mind has learned in the past or what it anticipates in the future. Thus the concept experience is an abstraction from the fullness of mental content. This abstraction is possible because experience remote in time and place is, compared with present experience, relatively inaccessible to our thought. Memory encompasses much: but that to which it refers is absolutely different in quality from here and now. Whatever meaning perception and cognition may have, they must possess in the present. Experience of past situations is forever inaccessible except where its vestiges are retained in memory and reappear in the present of consciousness.

Experience is both the theoretical and the practical basis of our investigation. Practical presuppositions are indeed required by every argument. The mind needs a standard to which it may refer, upon which it grounds its hypotheses, and upon which it may rely as being constant and accessible to its inquiries. An analysis so radical as ours will necessarily tend to be obscured by misunderstanding. In order to be able to reply to the many objections that we must reasonably anticipate, in order to provide our discussion itself with a sound and reliable basis, we require this definition of experience as

a clear and unequivocal situation to which we may properly refer all uncertain propositions for confirmation. Experience fulfills this need. By the systematic reference to experience as the presupposition of our thought, we hope to pursue our argument to a convincing close.

To designate experience as the basis of thought will not appear to be introducing a radically new argument. Tradition recognizes experience as a source of knowledge rivaling authority, and much has been made of the distinction between the two. It is a matter of historical record that this distinction arose from the interpretation of the writings of Aristotle. His interests ranged over so wide an area that his authority might be quoted on almost any topic. One group of scholars believed that Aristotle's writings were records of truth, and they believed that whenever they quoted him, his authority justified their position. Opposing schools of thought insisted that what Aristotle had said did not necessarily coincide with their own experience. They believed that this 'experience' was more valid and they asserted that science founded upon such experience would be more fruitful. Since that time, 'experience' has been considered the spring from which no false knowledge can flow. The apparently decisive resolution of this conflict remains one of the most significant, and at the same time one of the ~~least well~~ more poorly understood events in the intellectual history of Western society.

The faults of scholasticism, flagrant as they are, were recognized already by contemporary critics. However, even to the present day the basic problem which scholasticism presents has not been completely resolved either in practice or in theory. This problem concerns the valid interpretation of literary texts; it is not solved by the fashionable emphasis upon experience. With the invention of printing, literature of all kinds has played an increasingly important role in our intellectual lives, yet the theoretical question of how a text should be construed has been ignored by all but a small minority of critics. Consequently the problems of scholasticism are with us yet, and many misinterpretations current today, though unrecognized, are possibly as erroneous as those of the scholastics. Perhaps the diversity of intellectual cross-currents in our time makes such errors of interpretation cancel one another out. The processes by which the spoken or written language is accepted, understood, and applied are too complex to be analyzed here at greater length. Suffice it to say, that unless a proposition is merely mechanically copied, unless no attempt whatsoever is made to understand it, language cannot avoid but enter into experience. Its value to the individual will depend upon the quality of interpretation.

Traditional empirical theories fail to designate specific errors of textual interpretation. Likewise they fail to provide an unequivocal characterization of the 'experience' upon which they profess to rely. Experience as a source of knowledge is not nearly so unequivocal as empiricists would have us believe. Implicit in the assertions of empiricism is the assumption that the experience of any individual at any given moment in his life is qualitatively indistinguishable from the totality of his experience as a human being, from individual experiences of other members of his generation, and for that matter, from the collective experiences of all mankind. Only on the basis of such presuppositions does traditional empiricism become meaningful. Implicit in this concept of experience is the idea that all men are objectively similar and that only their common experiences are of concern. Furthermore it is assumed that there should exist in nature a constancy or a regularity by virtue of which the experience of any one man may be considered identical with that of any other, no matter how different the lives they lived. It is also presupposed that experience in one instance should be directly comparable with experience in another instance, for each man individually and for all men in common. Undoubtedly these postulates contain the germs of a highly productive and fruitful view of nature.

Yet it is important to remember that whatever effectiveness or usefulness such theory might have, it is not 'empirically' given. It is nothing which my immediate encounter with nature can demonstrate to me, but it is an hypothesis through which this encounter with nature attains an added significance, a clearer meaning, and a greater usefulness. Modern scientific thought has implemented and exploited this hypothesis to the utmost.

The postulates of traditional empiricism are complex and we must analyze them. The notion that the experiences of individual human beings must be comparable, we have already stated as our own. To deny this proposition is to condemn one's thought to solipsistic isolation. But it is not necessary or even desirable to assume that the experience which I have today should be equated with experience that I had five or ten years ago. Whatever theoretical equations may be formulated concerning the relationship of moments in time, for practical purposes all past experiences are inaccessible to me, and this present moment is incomparable with anything in the past. It would be more correct to speak of the cumulative experience as being always in the present and summarizing in its way all events of time past. It is also unjustified to confuse the subjective quality of experience with some of the

objective evidences of its occurrence. To be sure, in order to be able to communicate with my fellow men at all, I must assume that our experiences are comparable. Yet it is a patent error to assert that I 'know' what you are thinking or what you are feeling or seeing as well as if I were seeing it myself. Finally, most objectionable to what we consider genuine empiricism is the view that experience should be understood as the totality of scientific facts, on the premise that each of these facts would correlate with a potential instance of individual experience. Our knowledge of fact is always already a reflection upon experience. In view of the evident hypothetical quality of experience as it is postulated by science, the effectiveness of the hypothesis becomes all the more remarkable.

The popular concept 'experience' is inadequate to the requirements of critical thought. This insufficiency is reflected in the ambiguity that pertains to the concept experience itself. In theory it is generally assumed that the discrepancy between the experience of any one individual, of his fellows, of any number of them in a group, or for that matter of all of them as a community should be negligible. To be sure, for practical purposes discrepancies of experience are recognized. But these are considered temporary aberrations; they are attributed to

misunderstanding or to immaturity. Experience itself is never considered anything other than an objective scheme of reference that is potentially acceptable and convincing to all men. This scientific idea of experience remains in fact an ideal, realized to an appreciable extent only by a minority of human beings, and realized totally by none. Such an ideal of experience becomes useful and significant primarily where an homogeneous society flourishes. Evidently this purported common experience is nothing at which a man can arrive by himself: it is the total of reactions, judgments, interpretations to which the educational pressures of his society determine him. As such it is qualitatively haphazard and accidental no less than are all the other social pressures to which he conforms. ~~Investi-~~ Experience ~~gation~~, in this sense may be a useful foundation for scientific research; it is not however an adequate basis for a theory of knowledge.

In what way this objective ideal of experience exists and to what extent it might be employed as an effective source of knowledge interests us only in passing. Probably there is some justification in postulating such an experience, which would, however, exist far less by nature and far more by a most fundamental kind of social convention than its proponents would have us believe. From the point of view that we have chosen as our

own, the implicit transformation of all individuality of perception and judgment into a common pattern cannot be condoned. In the study of knowledge there is no justification for identifying the individual with his community. There is no compelling cause why his experience should be measured or corrected, valued or graded, either by comparison with experience of any one of his fellow men or with any sort of common experience. Consequently we must define experience in such a way that it shall remain an individual phenomenon, significant to the individual to whom it applies at the moment of its actuality. It will be necessary to dissociate from the concept of experience all requirements of community. It is proper to assume that the experience of each individual is separable from that of his society and that this experience is peculiarly his own. To be sure, we have reason to expect the experiences of two human beings to be comparable, but this is the case not because the experience of each is a fragment of a common experience, but because we recognize that men have many things in common, not the least of which are their experiences. In other words, the similarity of experiences need be thought no greater than any of the other biological similarities of human beings as members of a single species. The experiences of individuals depend upon the intellectual and emotional society that has

molded their minds. This relationship is variable and uneven. That two human beings should think so much alike that they would be able to agree about a complex cognitive judgment is the exception rather than the rule. Agreement, where it takes place, is usually not the result of a primary coincidence of experience, but of the creation of what is in fact a unitary experience by the simultaneous exposure of two or more minds to a single object of demonstration.

For the purposes of the present essay a narrower definition of experience will be desirable. We isolate and identify experience as the immediate and momentary relationship of the individual to reality. In this definition negative elements predominate: it deprives experience of many of the preconceptions that we have entertained about it. It refers experience solely to the unique relationship that I discover between myself and reality at this present time. It frees experience from the burden of accounting for the improprieties, approximations, and improvisations of memory. Experience is bound to time past only through the structure of mind which was formed by the past. Experience is my awareness of the action and the situation in which I am now involved. The power which the presence of this experience exercises over me is greater by far than all the memories of the past.

Accordingly, the method by which we proceed may justly be called empirical, and we may consider it more authentically so than those theories that traditionally claim this name. It is often assumed that experience might be summarized in 'the accepted opinions of mankind,' in 'common sense,' in 'the consensus of the marketplace.' But empiricism of this sort is not what we have in mind. Public opinion is not dependent upon individual experience; the received opinion of mankind is much more than my own opinion. It is all too easy for empiricism to become traditional and even dogmatic. As a foundation for a theory of knowledge our more narrow definition of experience is more meaningful and more productive. To be sure, experience is in a sense common to all of us; and we must assume that the experience of each one is comparable to that of another. But the hypothesis of comparable experience is one thing, and the derivation from experience consistent criteria of judgment and of reliable characteristics of description is quite another. In our search for a genuinely empirical basis for thought, we must beware of accepting that vulgar image of popular reality that each generation nourishes for itself and bequeathes to its successor as a valid model of reality. Our problem is one of definition: experience if we choose might indeed be thus defined. As a broad common denominator it would command the assent

both of the thoughtful and of the rash, of the articulate and the awkward, of the vocal and of the dumb. In this sense, experience is commonly accepted as a fruitful source of knowledge. It mirrors the intellectual life of the society to which it pertains. As such a common denominator of intellect, experience has its functions and it serves them well. But as there are many facts known and numerous skills developed by certain individuals that few if any of their contemporaries share, likewise there must be patterns and qualities of experience that only the individual can discover and describe. The common sense of the town meeting does suffice for many intellectual constructions, but by no means for all. The investigation that we have in mind requires that we dissociate ourselves, at least temporarily, from the community of thought to which we owe allegiance. Only through such dissociation will it be possible to clarify our understanding and our intentions. Having gained a more satisfactory comprehension of the powers and the limitations of our thought, we may then all the more surely and effectively return to participate in the common conceptions and in the common intellectual tasks.

Although experience as we have designated it is overtly immediate to our minds, its great methodological potential remains unrecognized and unexploited. The explanation for

this neglect of experience lies in the extraordinary fruitfulness of the familiar conventions of historical and scientific thought. Experience in its actuality will become a significant criterion of judgment only when its relationship to the more conventional patterns of thought becomes clear. In the following chapters the implications of the conventional notions of self, of reality, and of knowledge will be described. The intrinsic limitations of these concepts will demonstrate the propriety, perhaps even the necessity for introducing a new ~~the~~ notion of experience in order to resolve the contradictions of traditional belief. In the following chapters we shall analyze the great concepts of our intellectual tradition with this criterion of experience as our chief investigative tool.

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