The Control of Ideas by Facts. I

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THE CONTROL OF IDEAS BY FACTS. I

I

THERE is something a little baffling in much of the current discussion regarding the reference of ideas to facts. The not uncommon assumption is that there was a satisfactory and consistent theory of their relation in existence prior to the somewhat impertinent intrusion of a functional and practical interpretation of them. The way in which the functionalist logician has been turned upon by both idealist and realist is suggestive of the way in which the outsider who intervenes in a family jar is proverbially treated by both husband and wife, who manifest their complete unity by berating the third party.

I feel that the situation is partly due to various misapprehensions, inevitable perhaps in the first presentation of a new point of view, and multiplied in this instance by the coincidence of the presentation of this logical point of view[1] with that of the larger philosophical movements, humanism and pragmatism, which resulted in interpreting the logic partly in terms of additional misconceptions of these philosophies, and partly in terms which, even if pertinent with reference to them, were not exactly relevant to the less ambitious logical theory. In the hope that the atmosphere is now more favorable, I wish to undertake a summary statement of the logical view on its own account, hoping it may receive clearer understanding on its own merits.

In the first place (apart from the present frightful confusion of logical theories), it was precisely the lack of an adequate and generally accepted theory of the nature of fact and idea, and of the kind of agreement or correspondence between them which constitutes the truth of the idea, that led to the development of a functional theory of logic. A brief statement of the difficulties in the traditional views may therefore be pertinent. That fruitful thinking—thought that terminates in valid knowledge—goes on in terms of the

[1] 'Studies in Logical Theory,' University of Chicago Press, 1903.

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distinction of facts and ideas, and that valid knowledge is precisely genuine correspondence or agreement, *of some sort*, of fact and idea, is the common and undeniable assumption. But the discussions are largely carried on in terms of an epistemological dualism which renders the solution of the problem impossible in virtue of the very terms in which it is stated. The distinction is at once identified with that between mind and matter, or consciousness and objects, or the psychical and the physical, where each of these terms is supposed to refer to some fixed order of existence, a world in itself. Then, of course, there comes up the question of the nature of the agreement, and of the recognition of it. What is the experience in which the survey of both idea and existence is made and their agreement recognized? Is it an idea? Is the consistency ultimately a matter of self-consistency of ideas? Then what has become of the postulate that truth is agreement of idea with existence beyond idea? Is it an absolute which transcends and absorbs the difference? Then, once more, what is the test of any idea qua idea? What has become of the correspondence of fact and thought? Or, more urgently, since the pressing problem of life, of practise and of science is the discrimination of the *relative*, the *superior* validity of this or that theory, plan or interpretation, what is the criterion of truth within present non-absolutistic experience, where the distinction between factual conditions and thoughts and the necessity of some working criterion of their correct adjustment persist? Putting the problem in yet another way, either both fact and idea are present all the time or else only one of them is present. But if the former, why should there be an idea at all and why should it have to be tested by the fact? When we already have what we want, namely, existence, reality, why should we take up the wholly supernumerary task of forming more or less imperfect ideas of those facts and then engage in the idle performance of testing them by what we already know to be real? But if only ideas are present, then it is idle to speak of comparing an idea with facts and testing its validity by its agreement. The elaboration and refinement of ideas to the uttermost still leaves us with an idea, and to common sense and science while a self-consistent idea stands a show of being true in a way in which an incoherent one can not, a self-consistent idea simply *as* an idea is still but a hypothesis, a candidate for truth. Ideas are not made true by getting bigger. But if only 'facts' are present, once more the whole conception of agreement is again given up—not to mention that such a situation is one in which by definition there is no thinking or reflective factor at all.

This suggests that a strictly monistic epistemology, whether idealistic or realistic, does not get rid of the problem. Suppose, for

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example, we take a sensationalistic idealism. It does away with the ontological gulf supposed to exist between ideas and facts, and by reducing both terms to a common denominator seems to facilitate fruitful discussion of the problem. But the problem of the distinction and reference (agreement, correspondence) of two types or sorts of sensations still persists. If I say the box there is square, and call 'box' one group of ideas or sensations and 'square' another sensation or 'idea,' the old question comes up, Is 'square' already a part of the 'facts' of the box, or is it not? If it is, it is a supernumerary, an idle thing, both as an idea and as an assertion of fact; if it is not, how can we compare the two ideas, and what on earth or in heaven does their agreement or correspondence mean? If simply that we experience the two 'sensations' in juxtaposition, then the same is true, of course, of any casual association or hallucination. What we still have on the sensational basis, accordingly, is a distinction of something 'given,' 'there,' brutally factual, the box, and something else which stands on a different level, ideal, absent, intended, demanded, the 'square,' asserted to hold good or true of the thing 'box.' The fact that both are sensations throws no light on the logical validity of the proposition or belief because by theory a like statement holds good of every possible conjunction.[2]

The same problem recurs on a realistic basis. For example, there has recently been propounded[3] the doctrine of the distinction between relations of space and time and relations of meaning or significance, as a key to the problem of knowledge. Things exist in their qualitative character, in their temporal and spatial relations. When knowledge intervenes, there is nothing new of a subjective or psychical sort, but simply a new relation of the things—the suggesting or signifying of one thing by another. Now this seems to be an excellent way of stating the logical problem, but, I take it, it only states and does not solve. For the characteristic of such situations, claiming to terminate in knowledge, is precisely that the

[2] Mill's doctrine of the ambiguity of the copula ('Logic,' Bk. I., Ch. IV., § 1) is an instance of one typical way of evading the problem. After insisting with proper force and clearness upon the objective character of our intellectual beliefs and propositions, *viz.*, that when we say fire causes heat we mean actual phenomena, not our ideas of fire and heat (Bk. I., Ch. II. and Ch. XI., § 1, and Ch. V., § 1), he thinks to dispose of the whole problem of the 'is' in judgment by saying that it is only a sign of affirmation (Ch. I., § 2, and Ch. IV., § 1). Of course it is. But unless the affirmation (the sign of thought) 'agrees' or 'corresponds with' the relations of the phenomena, what becomes of the doctrine of the objective import of propositions? How otherwise shall we maintain with Mill (and with common sense and science) the difference between asserting 'a fact of external nature' and 'a fact in my mental history'?

[3] 'Studies in Philosophy and Psychology,' article by Woodbridge on 'The Problem of Consciousness,' especially pp. 159–160.

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meaning relation is predicated *of* the other relations; it is referred to them; it is not simply a supervention existing side by side with them as do casual suggestions or the play of phantasy. It is something which the facts, the qualitative, space and time things, must bear the burden of, must accept and take unto themselves as part of themselves. Until this happens, we have only the continuance of 'thinking,' not accomplished knowledge. Hence, logically, the existential relations play the rôle of fact, and the relation of signification that of idea,[4] distinguished from fact and yet, if valid, to hold *of* fact.

This appears quite clearly in the following quotation: "It is the ice which means that it will cool the water, just as much as it is the ice which does cool the water when put into it." There is, however, a possible ambiguity in the statement, to which we shall return in the last paper of this series. That the 'ice' (the thing regarded as ice) *suggests* cooling is as real as is a case of actual cooling. But, of course, not every suggestion is valid. The 'ice' may be a crystal, and it won't physically cool water at all. So far as it is already certain that this *is* ice, and also certain that ice, under all circumstances, cools water, the meaning relation stands on the same level as the physical, not being merely suggested, but part of the facts asserted. It is not a meaning-relation as such at all. We already have truth; the entire work of knowing as logical, is done. In other words, we have no longer the relation characteristic of reflective situations. Here again, the implication of the thinking situation is of some 'correspondence' or 'agreement' between two sets of distinguished relations; the problem of its nature and valid determination remains the central question of any theory of thinking and its relation to facts and to truth—that is, of any logic.[5]

I hope this statement of the difficulty, however inadequate, will serve at least to indicate that a functional logic inherits the problem in question and does not create it; that it has never for a moment denied the *prima facie,* working distinction between 'ideas,' 'thoughts,' 'meanings' and 'facts,' 'existences,' 'the environment,' and the necessity of a control of meaning by facts, if there is to be any question of truth and error. It is concerned not with denying, but with understanding. What is denied is not the genuineness of the problem and of the familiar terms in which it is stated, but the

[4] In other words, 'ideas' is a term capable of assuming any definition which is logically appropriate—say, meaning. It need not have anything to do with the conception of them as little subjective entities.

[5] Of course, the monistic epistemologies have an advantage in the statement of the problem over the dualistic—they do not state it in terms which presuppose the impossibility of the solution.

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value of the orthodox intellectualistic interpretation. What it insists upon is the relative, instrumental or working character of the distinction—that it *is* a *logical* distinction, instituted and maintained in the interests of intelligence with all that intelligence imports in the exercise of the life functions. To this positive side I now turn.

In the analysis it may prove convenient to take an illustration of a man lost in the woods, taking this case as typical of any reflective situation in so far as it involves perplexity—a problem to be solved.[6] The problem is to find a correct idea of the way home—a practical idea or plan of action which will lead to success, or the realization of the purpose to get home. Now the critics of the experimental theory of logic make the point that this practical idea, the truth of which is evidenced in the successful meeting of a need, is dependent for its success upon a purely intellectual idea, that of the existent environment, whose validity has nothing to do with success but depends on agreement with the actual state of affairs. It is said that what makes a man's idea of his environment true, is its agreement with the actual environment, and 'generally a true idea in any situation consists in its agreement with reality.' I have already indicated my acceptance, in a general way, of this formula. But it was long my misfortune not to be possessed offhand of those perfectly clear notions of just what is meant in this formula by the terms 'idea,' 'existence' and 'agreement' as have most writers on epistemology; and when I analyzed these notions I found the distinction between the practical idea and the theoretical not fixed or final, and I found a somewhat startling similarity between the notions of 'success' and 'agreement.'

Just what is the environment of which an idea is to be formed? *i. e.*, what is the intellectual content or objective detail to be assigned to the term 'environment'? It can hardly mean the actual visible environment—the trees, rocks, etc., which a man is actually looking at. These things are there and it seems superfluous to form an idea of them when the genuine article is at hand; moreover, the wayfaring man, though lost, would have to be an unusually perverse fool if under such circumstances he was unable to form an idea (supposing he chose to engage in this luxury) in agreement with these facts. The environment must be a larger environment than the visible facts; it must include things not within the direct ken of the lost man; it must, for instance, extend from where he is now to his home, or to the point from which he started. It must

[6] See Professor Russell's article, in this JOURNAL, Vol. III., p. 599, entitled 'The Pragmatist's Meaning of Truth.' (It should perhaps be added that this article was in manuscript before I saw the comment of Mr. Schiller on Professor Russell's article, in this JOURNAL, Vol. IV., p. 42.)

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include the unperceived elements in their contrast with the perceived, or else the man would not be lost. Now we are at once struck with the facts that the lost man has no alternative except either to wander aimlessly or to conceive this inclusive environment, and that this conception is just what we here mean by idea. It is not some little psychical entity or piece of consciousness-stuff, but is the interpretation of the locally present environment in reference to its absent portions, that part to which it is referred as another part so as to give a view of a whole. Just how such an idea would differ from one's plan of action in finding his way, I do not know. It is a map constructed, with one's self lost and one's self found, whether at starting or at home again, as its two limits. If this map in its specific character is not also the only guide to the way home, one's only plan of action, then I hope I may never be lost. It is the *practical* facts of being lost and desiring to be found which constitute the limits and the content of the 'environment.'

As to the *agreement* of the idea and the environment. Supposing the individual stands still and attempts to compare his idea with the reality, with what reality is he to compare it? Not with the presented reality, for *that* reality is the reality of himself lost; not with the complete reality, for that at this stage of proceedings is the idea itself. What kind of comparison is possible or desirable then, save to treat the mental layout of the whole situation as a working hypothesis, *as* a plan of action, and proceed to *act* upon it, to use it as a director and controller of one's divagations instead of stumbling blindly around until one is either exhausted or accidentally gets out? Now suppose one uses the idea—that is to say, the present facts projected into a whole in the light of absent facts—as a guide of action. Suppose, by means of its specifications, one works one's way along until one comes upon familiar ground—finds one's self. *Now,* one may say, my idea was right, it was in accord with facts; it agrees with reality. That is, acted upon sincerely, it has led to the desired conclusion; it has, *through action,* worked out the state of things which it contemplated or intended. The agreement, correspondence, is between purpose, plan, and its own execution, fulfillment; between a map of a course constructed for the sake of guiding behavior and the result attained in acting upon the indications of the map. Just how does *such* agreement differ from success?

I can hardly hope that this brief account will be as convincing to others as it is to me; its very simplicity and brevity will—such is the reputation philosophy has made for itself—be odorous with the suggestion of hocus-pocus. But before entering upon a more detailed analysis, let me summarize the situation as a whole. The

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import of the discussion is that the terms environment, idea and agreement are all of them essentially *practical* terms, denoting distinctive functions or operations, the term 'practical' having no reference to any *fixed* utility, but simply to certain values to be sustained or transformed through an operation.

Every reflective situation has the problem of discovering the intent or meaning appropriate to the management or development of a troubled situation, its pertinency being proved by its capacity to administer the difficulty through the use of the idea as a method or plan. The woods of the scientist and the philosopher, his paths and sign-boards and miscues, the unfamiliar surroundings into which he wanders, his home, his schemes for getting there—all of these differ infinitely in local color and setting from those of the wayfarer in question. But the situation in its diagrammatic features remains the same. Types of agency and response differ according to the different sorts of disturbed organizations, interrupted universes of value, that present themselves; but the category of the problematic; the contrast of the given and the intended; the use of the given to form a conception or hypothetical view of an inclusive situation in which both it and the wanted are contained; the use of this conception as guide to experimental activity in transforming, through degrees, the given into the intended; the use of the results thus obtained to confirm and revise the guiding idea; final verification (if at all) through actively instituting or bringing about a condition of affairs which 'agrees with' the intent of the situation because it fulfills it—these characteristics are found in every reflective process and are found only in a reflective process.

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A FACTOR IN THE EVOLUTION OF MORALS[1]

THE study of moral development requires a distinction between what we may call the objective side and the subjective side. Objectively considered, the moral life presents a series of actions, habits and practises. On the subjective side it consists of certain peculiar judgments, feelings and sentiments. Evolutionary writers have given far more attention to the objective than to the subjective side of the subject. Sutherland, for example, shows in a masterly treatise the gradual development of altruistic and sympathetic types of conduct, beginning with the first unconscious devices for the protection of offspring and leading up through the various stages of parental care manifested in fishes, reptiles, birds, mammals, and

[1] A paper read at the meeting of the American Philosophical Association in New York, December 27–29, 1906.

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