THE ULTIMATE VALUE OF EXPERIENCE.¹

BY PROFESSOR STEPHEN S. COLVIN,

University of Illinois.

In a brief article appearing in this REVIEW last November, I pointed out what seemed to me to be certain essential characteristics of experience, emphasizing particularly the thought that experience is the ultimate essence of the universe, and as such is subject, and never object. Hence it follows that this most fundamental of all activities cannot be known, since we can know only objects. The experience of the moment is pure being, immediate and underived, while objects experienced are always conditioned being, mediate and derived; yet only through these, can experience as such be described or comprehended.

This experience, however, as subject, while thus distinguishable from the objects of experience is not something separable from them. Without them it could not exist as experience. It is not something left over and above them, but becomes an actuality only through its objects. Just as light is invisible where there are no objects for it to illuminate, so experience vanishes when the objects of experience are no more. Yet, although experience becomes actual only in its objects, it is not merely a logical shadow of these objects themselves. It actually *is*, although itself it is incapable of being experienced. To give it a mere formal existence to satisfy the demands of thought would be absurd. It is more actual than any or all of its objects. It belongs to another order of being, unknowable because unmediated, final, undefined.

Nothing, then, can be said of this experience except to deny to it certain qualities which its objects possess. Its objects flow and develop; they are limited by temporal and causal categories. With them nothing is final; all is relative and incomplete.

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They have no values in themselves, but possess worth only in terms of their origin and goal. Their significance is acquired in the process of their development into and integration with other objects of experience. Experience as ultimate being, however, cannot be limited, or dependent on anything else for its value. If it possesses worth and significance, this cannot be because it leads anywhere, nor because it serves any ulterior purpose. If it has value that value must be ultimate and complete.

Little satisfaction, however, can come from such negative determinations as these, and we might well let the whole matter drop here, were it not for the fact that among the objects of experience there exists a group which, although clearly derived and secondary in their nature, still in a way function for this unknowable, absolute experience, and come to take its place. This group of experienced objects which I refer to, forms the core of our objective existence. They reside largely in those sensations that are at the basis of instinctive expressions, that lend color and warmth to more external objects — they combine into emotions, and give the notion of the self as a feeling and active being; they are subconscious; they suggest a beyond; they point, as they vanish from a world of conscious objectivity to a realm of completed being which contains all and conditions reality.

These subconscious experiences, then, functioning for an absolute into which they seem to recede and from which they appear to be derived, may be studied by the psychologist, analyzed and defined, and this analysis may be taken in a certain way as representing the pure, subjective experience of which they are symbols. These concrete experiences, however, should never be identified with the subject of experience, as is often the case. They are subjective only in a relative sense. Even the self-experience itself is an object among other objects and cannot be considered as anything more than a phase or aspect of experience, certainly not the experience as such.

This relatively immediate aspect of this group of objects of experience is, I take it, the psychological entity to which Professor James has given the name of 'pure experience'; it is the

part which may be called simple sensation, mere feeling, undefined longing, objectless impulse. It is as such an abstraction, because it never exists in its purity, or if it does so exist it is essentially unknowable. This pure experience is that part of the total experience which is least objectified, that tends the least to develop; that, however, as far as it does develop, gives up its original character, and passes into something quite different. In so far as it remains undeveloped, however, it resists analysis and hence comes to be regarded as quite apart from the clear-cut objects of experience in the center of consciousness. Thus, vaguely defined and relatively unknowable, it has been the fruitful source of mysticism and absolutism in philosophy. Here is found, for example, Fichte's Absolute Ego, which refuses to reveal itself completely in the personal me, and of which no assertion can be made.

Such, then, is this phase of objective experience which may be studied by the philosopher and psychologist as representative and symbolic of the unconditioned subject of experience, or experience as such. One of its most striking and interesting characteristics is that it in a certain sense possesses an ultimate value. This core of our objective world does not readily pass over into the more fleeting objects to which it gives value and degrees of worth; it tends to remain in itself and to be satisfied with itself. Its worth, like that of the absolute experience, is in the moment, non-temporal and in a sense eternal. *Its value is simply because it is*, not because it grows into something else. It is not good or bad because it is pleasurable or painful. As experience, it is good; it can be bad only in the sense that it is not as rich an experience as might be possible. The good of the universe from this standpoint is not summed up in the thought more pleasurable experience, but rather more experience. Common sense recognizes this fact in often cherishing those experiences that have been full of pain and trouble because they have given glimpses of realities unknown to more mild and pleasurable states of mind. "To have loved and lost is better than never to have loved at all," for the experience itself with all its bitterness has an ultimate value because it is an experience.

In these days, however, we seem to be in danger of losing sight of this fact, not in our practice probably, but very possibly in our theorizing. We see this tendency to forget that immediate experience has a value in and for itself exemplified in the modern theory of utilitarian and prudential ethics, and in its companion theory, in intellectual philosophy, twentieth century pragmatism.

This is perhaps somewhat striking when we remember that utilitarianism is the legitimate offspring of hedonism, which in making pleasure the norm of action, affirmed the ultimate value of experience. For pleasure is pleasure of the moment. It is the eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die variety. Only when it began to rationalize pleasures, put some above others as more worthy or satisfying, did hedonism and modern utilitarianism depart from its original position and seek values not given in the experience as such.

The same seems to be true of pragmatism to an extent. It also starts with immediate reality in the pure experience of James, and seems clearly to reaffirm this principle of immanence in the doctrine that truth is satisfaction. My purpose here is not, however, to dwell on this phase of the inconsistency, but rather to point out that in the rational development of these two philosophies they seem at times to have very thoroughly forgotten the immanent basis from which they alike originated. To emphasize this latter point we may consider more definitely modern utilitarianism in some of its teachings.

The essence of this doctrine may be summed up, I believe, in the statement of 'voluntary general altruism' (so called), that the end of virtuous striving is to secure the greatest good for the greatest possible number on the whole and in the long run. This demands that any act, if it be truly ethical, shall consider all the consequences that may flow from it, and thus justify or condemn itself. On the surface there seems to be no possible objection to such an ethical philosophy, except perhaps the difficulty of securing any satisfactory criterion on which to base an evaluation of conduct. This, however, is no real objection to the theoretical bearings of the system. If we look more closely, however, I believe we can detect an inherent weakness

in the doctrine, which relates itself to the general topic under discussion in this paper, and which shows this school of ethical theorizers to have been better logicians than they were psychologists. I can perhaps make my point clearer by a concrete example.

Let us suppose that a person has fallen into the water and is in danger of drowning. Someone standing on the bank may have an impulse to jump in and attempt at the risk of his own life to rescue the other. Now if the man on the bank chances to be an utilitarian philosopher he must consider the consequences of his deed in terms of the general good. Perhaps the man that is drowning is of little value to the world, while the person who feels moved to risk his own life in order to save the unfortunate in the water may occupy an important place in the affairs of men. Then he should refrain from the attempt, since the greatest good demands his own safety be considered as of primary importance. This seems a simple case of logic, but I am persuaded that it is too simple. In the analysis something has escaped that is more valuable than that which has remained, an act of heroism and a heroic impulse have perished. Clearly this has worth — a worth arising not merely from the consequences that flow from heroic deeds, but a worth in itself. It is good to be heroic. As an ultimate experience heroism has value; considered in a mere timeless relationship it is good.

So the utilitarian philosopher must revise his reasoning in this particular emergency. He must include in his calculations of ultimate benefits this impulse of heroism and find its place in his scale of values. He must see to it that it finds its due place. Now this readjustment may seem to satisfy the demands of the situation. Logically the system may be thus justified; but psychologically such an attempt would prove an absurdity.

For let us assume that the utilitarian philosopher attempts in the evaluation of his act to consider the worth of the impulse that prompts it; let us suppose that he brings into his focal consciousness his instinctive heroism. In that moment the impulse vanishes, the instinct dies. No one can be heroic if he analyzes his heroism. As has already been pointed out it is impossible to bring these subconscious tendencies and feelings into attention and have them remain in their true value.

Thus it happens that utilitarianism can never evaluate this element. It falls into an obvious dilemma. If the impulse is to exist, it cannot form a part of the ethical scheme, which thus becomes inadequate; if rational analysis attempts to place it in the scale of values it disappears from experience. Its value as an ultimate reality precludes the possibility of its entering into the mediate world of rationalized and clearly objectified experience.

Of course it would be quite possible in retrospect to evaluate this impulse. This, however, would not give it a place in the realm of ethical values in the moment of their existence, and would not help, therefore, in the actual situations of life. Further this evaluation, in retrospect or in prospect, of impulses tends to destroy these impulses as such. If we lay bare our affective life it becomes deadened and mechanical. The real enthusiasm, the spontaneity of expression, fail us; sympathy becomes mere prudence; courage, rational foresight; just indignation, calculating expediency, and so on. This is one of the greatest faults of the practical ethics of our present age; over-analysis has often eliminated the 'Schöne Seele' and even the 'Categorical Imperative.'

If we turn from a consideration of utilitarian ethics to utilitarian epistemology we find a parallel difficulty. It is here in the noetic realm exactly on a level with hedonism in the conative realm; for hedonism says pleasure is the norm of goodness, pragmatism says that satisfaction is the measure of truth. So any pleasure that is genuine is good; any satisfaction that is real is truth. Here is pure immanence, a genuine absolute, self-contained and unconditioned. Yet soon we find these two philosophies seeking to go outside this immanence to distinguish between pleasures and satisfaction in order to rationalize their view-points and organize their thinking. Naturally such a procedure is necessary if a system is to be built up. My sole criticism here would be that their immanent starting point would never in itself have developed into such a system without the injection of something quite foreign to it in its original form. Hedonism and pragmatism can be attitudes of feeling and action, but never in their original forms ethics or epistemology.

Although in the discussions on pragmatism which have appeared during the last few years truth has been often spoken of as a feeling of satisfaction, the pragmatist has not actually held to this description of the experience without soon going beyond it. Ethical utilitarianism was long ago forced to depart from its immanent starting point to evaluate goodness; so, too, pragmatism has continually sought justification by measuring satisfaction in something outside of the immediate satisfaction. It has recognized that it could not consider satisfaction as such the badge of truth, but only that satisfaction which is based on wide experience and clear intelligence. Otherwise the satisfaction of the unthinking dogmatist would stand for a greater truth, generally speaking, than the more mild and less permanent contentment of the critical seeker after reality. Clearly this further evaluation is quite desirable and necessary. It is not, however, in accord with that aspect of pragmatic philosophy that has its basis in pure experience.

In its growth pragmatism like utilitarianism has gone very far from a subjective basis; it has become indeed the complete opposite of absolutism, whether subjective or objective. It is a philosophy of development, it has no finality, no abiding, no permanence. Its only universal truth is that there is no universality to truth. What is good in the scheme of utilitarian ethics to-day may be bad tomorrow; what is true in the fabric of utilitarian epistemology to-day may be false tomorrow.

The parallelism between the two doctrines may be carried still farther. It has already been pointed out how the ethical utilitarian in attempting to evaluate conduct and to arrive at the greatest good, leaves out of necessity the very impulses from which good actions spring, which impulses are of themselves of final worth, not because they lead anywhere but because as immanent experience they have an ultimate value. So, too, intellectual utilitarianism in carrying out its principle that truth depends on relationships is compelled to ignore that factor which gives truth its final value, namely that sense of conviction that comes with every conclusion. This impulse to assert that the truth we arrive at is not a merely relative affair, and to believe that in some way it has a transcendent value is charac-

teristic of all thinking that ends in a proposition. There is a feeling that in some way an abiding fact has been reached.

Of course in the next moment, the thinker may find his assertions unsatisfactory and incomplete, and thought may develop toward a new resting place. However, in the moment that we have an experience of truth, we possess a feeling of conviction. This conviction is quite at variance with the attitude that holds to relativity and incompleteness. This intellectual emotion does not thrive well under pragmatic logic. Enthusiasm for truth does not tend to abound and spread over the earth, when it is made known that truth as such is not to be gained. The utilitarian who confidently asserts that a situation is true because it works (or because you can work it), is not apt to realize that the very reason why the situation works is because there goes with it a feeling of conviction. Action does not develop in uncertainty. To hesitate is here as elsewhere to be lost. The feeling of certainty is necessary but is not easily included in the pragmatic scheme; here it tends to lose its instructive force and immanent value; for like the tendency toward right action, this impulse toward true action vanishes as soon as it is forced into the world of partial and conditioned values. The instinct of certainty will not work if it is valued only as a thing to be worked; but, since it is at the basis of all workable propositions, nothing will work without it being present; yet no pragmatist may say, — "Go to, I need this certainty, in order to have my situation work out truly, therefore I will possess myself of this feeling in order that I may work it to my practical advantage." And even if the pragmatist could accomplish this impossibility; even if by such a means he could make his situations work as best satisfy his demands, he would have failed to have gained that ultimate experience of truth, which knows no relativity in the moment of the experience and which in the scale of human values has a final and abiding worth.

Such a humanizing experience can never come to the philosopher nor scientist who believes that the truth he now possesses, at this moment, is merely a relative affair, and true only in the sense that it fits temporarily into a scheme of workable relations. As in ethics speculation on a moral impulse helps to

destroy it, so in logic reflection on the instinct of certainty tends to remove all certainty, and thus to hinder intellectual progress. The result is the same in either case, a moral or an intellectual sophistry.

To sum up the foregoing:

Ultimate experience as such cannot be known, since only objects can be known; yet such ultimate experience is an actuality. Of it as such nothing can be said, except to deny to it the characteristics of the objects of experience. There is, however, in every experience a group of objects that function in a sense for the ultimate experience (the subject of the objects experienced), and which may be taken as symbolic of the pure experience that does not reveal itself. One of the most important characteristics of this relatively subjective and immediate aspect of experience is that it seems to have an ultimate value and finality in itself. In modern times two philosophic creeds have arisen out of this immanent experience, the one utilitarianism and the other pragmatism. Both have in a sense assumed the validity of this immanent experience, the one in the doctrine of pleasure as the ultimate end of striving, the other in the assertion that satisfaction is the badge of truth; yet in the development of their philosophic beliefs both have departed at once from the immanent point of view, thus ignoring their origin. Further, these two systems in their evaluation of goodness and truth have not taken account of the goodness that is good in and for itself, and the truth that is self-contained and unconditioned. They have in other words, disregarded the ultimate worth of that part of our experience that is relatively subjective and which ordinarily does not enter into the flux of a constantly changing world.

The true point of view seems to be that there are elements in our experience that have what may be termed a final value in the moment of that experience, that point back to no conditioning reality, nor forward to a growing system of facts. Here are found impulses and feelings that lie at the basis of our moral and intellectual judgments and give all experience its significance, not only because of that which is to follow, but also because of that which actually is. These impulses and

feelings are necessary for our right living and true thinking. They give a final worth to action and an abiding value to truth. An utilitarian philosophy should evaluate them, and find a place for them in its world of contrasts and relations. This, however, it is singularly incapable of doing, since when it attempts such an evaluation the very being of these impulses vanishes. Thus there must always be an inadequacy in this philosophy. It can never give more than a partial view of the world because it ignores one of its most essential constituents. On the other hand, an intuitive ethics and an absolute logic, while not free from errors, both consider the immanent aspect of experience in which these impulses are found. Here a moral impulse and an intellectual thrill are given their worth. Rightly or wrongly, too, they are held to function for a pure experience, outside of the objective flow of consciousness, that contains absolute worth and abiding truth. Here is the psychological basis for a philosophy of permanent values and transcendent significance.