

IV.—THE HUMANIST THEORY OF VALUE: A CRITICISM.

BY OLIVER C. QUICK.

It is by this time the merest platitude that one of the subtlest dangers to philosophical reasoning lies in the ambiguity of simple words. The more commonly a word is used in everyday life the more liable to misunderstanding is its use in precise argument and the more careful the definition it demands. Pragmatists and humanists have now been occupied for some years in proving that truth is a species of value, and in so doing they have laid insistent stress on the value all truths have for our life. How far, however, a general admission that all actual truths are valuable can be held to prove the humanist theory of truth, is a problem which has not yet received adequate discussion; and it is probable that the omission may have been responsible for some misunderstanding in the course of controversy. Be that as it may, it is clear that no satisfactory judgment can be formed upon the internal coherence of the humanist position while the meaning of the term value remains ambiguous or obscure; and it is the purpose of this article to suggest that the time has come when humanism might with advantage pause in developing its theory of truth in order to explain more precisely its use of the term value. It is conceivable that once again there is some lurking misconception as to the meaning of the simplest term in the discussion.

Since no precise definition of value has as yet been offered either by pragmatists or humanists, it may perhaps serve the purpose of inquiry to start with a rough description of the most obvious meanings of the word and then consider what conclusions may be drawn therefrom as to its use or abuse by the new theory of truth.

In its primary sense the term value seems to stand for the idea of worth or importance, *ἀπλῶς εἰρημένον*, i.e. for goodness in general with special reference to its experience by and relation to a mind. It is in this "absolute" sense that Kant conceives the "value" of the individual, in his famous maxim

that every human being should be treated as an end in himself. Thus too with a psychological application it seems possible (superficially at any rate) to distinguish the category of value from the category of reality as that category through which the mind expresses its judgments of "goodness" as distinct from those of mere "being". This however is a highly controversial distinction which will be referred to again later, and is only here mentioned in order to avoid confusion between this wide use of the term and its secondary meaning.

This latter is the more usual one, and in it "value" stands for worth or goodness for some particular purpose of the mind. When we call a thing "valuable" we generally mean that it is useful for some end we desire to achieve. A coin's value, for instance, may be said to be or to represent its utility as a means to the interchange of commodities. In this sense "value" may be defined as that property of an instrument which constitutes its utility in attaining the purpose to which its use is directed.

In which of these two senses do Pragmatism and Humanism intend their use of the word in connexion with truth to be received? Chiefly, at any rate, in the second and narrower. For Humanism is usually both attacked and defended as that philosophy which identifies truth with utility, and certainly it claims to show that the difference between truth and error is purely a difference between degrees of usefulness.¹

Accepting then, temporarily at any rate, this more usual sense of the word value, it may be not unprofitable to inquire what conclusion may be drawn as to its use or abuse in connexion with truth. At the very outset it may be noticed that a value in itself is simply nothing at all apart from the means or instrument whose utility it constitutes. It is the relation of an instrument to a purpose, and as such, to use the Aristotelian phrase, *ἐν ἐλαχίστοις δύοιν*. It is indeed obvious that the value of an instrument cannot be identified with the instrument itself, and that if, for instance, benevo-

¹ More accurately, perhaps, between utility and active inutility or obstructiveness; between "forwarding and baffling an interest" or "satisfying and thwarting a purpose" (Dr. Schiller, *Studies in Humanism*, p. 6). This alteration in expression however makes no practical difference. All errors are "truth-claims" ("a claim to truth is involved in every assertion as such," *l. c.*, p. 145) and they must possess a certain degree of utility to have been formulated at all. These erroneous judgments are only bad and useless because others are more useful; hence their "obstructiveness" being purely relative, is only a low degree of utility looked at from the negative point of view.

lence is valuable in promoting the life of a community, benevolence itself must be something other than the value which is its utility in social life. Nothing, in short, which *has* value, can itself *be* value. Humanism on the other hand seems to assert sometimes that truth is that which has value, sometimes that truth is itself value. Thus for instance on page 7 of *Studies in Humanism* is stated the definition that truths are logical values, while on page 8 we are told that "all real truths must have shown themselves to be useful". Perhaps, therefore, it may serve to clear the ground if we start by asking the initial question, "In what sense can truth be said in humanist theory both to be and to have value?"

The answer is as obvious as the question. There is an elementary distinction to be made between "truth" as general idea and a truth or particular judgment which is true. Every truth or true judgment is a valuable instrument whereby we attain a purpose and its truth (i.e., abstract truth) is its value. In the sphere of logic our instruments are all particular judgments or "truth-claims". We find out by a process of testing or "verification" which judgments are the more useful for our purposes and we call the relatively useful "true" and the relatively useless "false". For the humanist then, speaking *κατὰ τὸν ἀκριβῆ λόγον*, truth itself (i.e., the common property of particular truths in virtue of which they are called true) is not valuable, but value; while it is a truth or true judgment which *has* value and *is* valuable. In this sense it is maintained that all truths have value while truth in general is defined as itself a kind of value.

The emphasis of this distinction has at any rate the merit of bringing out clearly the difference between a method of determining what judgments are truths and what errors, and a theory of what truth and error themselves are. In more technical language, the difference is that between logical method and epistemological theory, and here is displayed a joint in the armour, which may be the most vulnerable point of the new philosophic system. For the sake of terminological clearness (even at the cost of a certain sacrifice of accuracy due to the over-lapping of the terms) it is convenient to restrict the term pragmatism to the logical method which asserts that the truth of all judgments is to be tested by the value they are found to possess, and to reserve the term humanism for the epistemological theory that truth itself is a kind of value. The possibility of this distinction may indeed be admitted by Humanism,¹ but it has hardly received the

¹ The distinction, as is natural, has not been clearly brought out in Dr. Schiller's books, since in his view it possesses no value. It does not cor-

attention which its importance demands. After all, an instrument's peculiar value is only the result or expression of its peculiar nature. It is difference in nature which causes difference in value, and it may be that the difference in value of true and false judgments refers back to and is caused by a difference in nature of true and false judgments *quod* true and false. There is therefore no validity in the inference which Humanism sometimes tends to make,¹ from the datum that the value of judgments varies as their truth to the conclusion that the truth of judgments is their value. To take an example from another subject-matter: Given that for every change of mental condition there is a corresponding physiological change in the brain, it does not follow that mental change is nothing more than a physiological phenomenon; though it is valid to argue from the latter to the former and even ultimately to infer that one is the cause of the other. Another illustration is provided by psychology. Given that the satisfaction of desire is accompanied by a proportionate pleasure it does not follow that the pleasure is the satisfaction of the desire; for then (since every desire is for its own satisfaction) there follows the further inference that the mind can desire nothing but its own pleasure. And yet in both illustrations taken, the false inference has been made, by materialism in the one case, and psychological hedonism in the other; so that there must be considerable plausibility in this kind of paralogism. Is it not possible that the difference between "true" and "false" causes and shows itself in difference of value on somewhat the same logical principle as mental change causes and shows itself in cerebral change or degrees of satisfied desire in degrees of pleasure? Does humanistic theory after all follow from pragmatic method?

Humanism would seem to have two reasons for maintaining that it does. (1) It may be contended that, once the prag-

respond to the distinction drawn between Pragmatism and Humanism in *Studies in Hum.*, ch. i., for that is between an epistemology and a wider philosophic orientation, which is yet not a metaphysic (see esp. p. 16). Pragmatism seems to be used indifferently for a method of *testing* truths by their consequences, i.e., the value they are found to have (p. 5) and a theory which defines truth itself as logical value (p. 7). The phrase "method of determining the nature of truth" (p. 5) is ambiguous.

¹ *E.g. Studies in Humanism*, p. 6: "If therefore the consequences of an assertion turn out to be in this way 'good,' it is valuable for our purposes and, provisionally at least, establishes itself as 'true'; if they are bad we reject it as useless and account it 'false' and search for something that suits our purposes better. . . . Thus the predicates 'true' and 'false' are *nothing* in the end but indications of logical value." (Italics mine.)

matic method is admitted, there is no further value in a sharp distinction between the nature of truth and the method by which it is recognised and tested in particular truth-claims. Hence the distinction cannot pragmatically be maintained. (2) There is the further argument that the distinction leaves the nature of truth and error unknowable and so results in an entirely avoidable and gratuitous scepticism.

These arguments require careful consideration. The only valid answer to (1) is that it seems clearly wrong upon the facts. At first sight it appears psychologically indisputable that many of our beliefs only have value for our lives in so far as they are held to be other than valuations and the truth which they claim other than value. This is perhaps most obviously true of religious beliefs. In the case of nearly all devout people it is just because their belief in God is held to express truth irrespective of its value for life¹ that that same belief has such enormous value for their life. It is just because they believe in a "next world" as a reality irrespective of its value for this, that they are able to shape their lives in this world by their belief in the world to come. And this truth is quite unaffected by the fact that men form their religious beliefs to suit their spiritual needs (*i.e.* by a pragmatic method) and verify them by finding out if they "work". For this actual process of verification (at least as it at present takes place) presupposes the nature of the truth-claim which it verifies to be other than a value-claim. And this is a vital point. For what does not work so long as we regard truth as other than value might work if we accepted the definition of truth as value, since one of the present conditions of its working, *viz.* that it should not be inconsistent with our belief that truth is other than value, would in that case be removed.

The same principle may be applied to our belief in historic fact. The whole value of historic fact-truths for life, whether or not they are *established* pragmatically, comes from our belief in them as truths apart from their value. Say their truth is value, and you destroy the value of the truths. Further, in the case of historic truth it is particularly obvious that at present one of the conditions of a judgment on fact "working" and "becoming true" is that it should prove consistent with the popular and scientific belief in the "inde-

¹ This does not of course mean that any other belief would do just as well, but that, granted it is the value of the belief which makes it held as "true," its value depends on its being held true whether it is valuable or not.

pendence"¹ of past fact, *i.e.*, the belief that historic fact as such happened once for all and remains entirely unaltered by our knowing or ignorance of it.² In other words, historic truths, as matters now stand, if they are to establish their claim must be found to square with the belief that their truth, as representing fact, is other than their value; for the value of a fact or truth is clearly altogether dependent on our knowledge of it. And this belief seems vital both to popular and scientific conceptions of history. No doubt to the mind embarking on any historic inquiry this doctrine of the "independence" of fact can only embody itself in a belief that the events about which it is to inquire happened *either* in one way *or* in some other, and it would be ridiculous to contend that such a belief—depending as it must on a state of subjective ignorance—could yield any canon for guiding historic search. Such belief in the independence of fact does not provide any guide for searching, but it does provide the motive for search and a condition of the value of the discovery when it is made and verified. Take away from the scientific historian the belief that something happened which he can at most only discover and never alter by discovering, and what motive is left for his search, what justification for his methods, and what value for his conclusions? Clearly this difficulty is quite unaffected by the suggestion that the historian's task is to decide which of several stories is the most probable. For "most probable" means "most likely to have happened," and the inalterability of what happened is implied for him in the use of the word "probable," whether or not he conceives himself able to arrive at absolute truth in the matter. A belief then that historic truth is other than a value is essential to the value of historic beliefs and is postulated by the methods of historic criticism. It might even justifiably be asserted that the historic conclusions now reached by the

¹The word "independent" is ambiguous but almost inevitable. It is not here used in the sense of "out of all possible relation to human knowing" but in the sense of "unalterable by knowledge". In the words of Dr. Schiller "Independent must mean at least that the relation to us into which a truth" (or a fact) "must enter when it is known does not affect its nature" ("The Rationalistic Conception of Truth," in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1909, p. 87). Why Dr. Schiller should proceed to argue on the next page that "if Truth is" (in this sense) "essentially independent of a knower, human or otherwise, verification may be dispensed with," I cannot understand. Even if truth is in this sense independent, it does not follow that we can recognise truth without verification.

²To object "but this sort of 'fact' is not knowable by us" begs the question, for the belief claims that all fact is of the same sort and remains the same whether known by us or not.

pragmatic method assume the falsehood of the humanist theory of truth, since they must square with the belief that truth is other than value.

A purely descriptive analysis, therefore, of the implications of religious and historic beliefs and the methods by which they are established seems sufficient to show that to maintain a clear distinction between the nature of truth itself and its "consequences" by which it is recognised and tested in particular "truth-claims" is of all-important practical value. And here perhaps it is just worth while to notice in passing a curious analogy between humanism in epistemology and hedonism in ethics. Hedonism having defined the good as pleasure, is often constrained to add as a practical limitation that the best way to attain pleasure on the whole is to aim at something else. So Humanism, having defined truth as value, seems bound to admit that the best way to get the full value out of truth is to believe that it is something else. Both systems seem to transport us into a kind of looking-glass world where we must turn our backs on any object we desire to achieve.

(2) Moreover it seems at least doubtful whether from a humanistic point of view it does follow that to insist in the sense indicated on truth itself "transcending" or being "independent" of the process by which it is verified and established must lead to utter scepticism. Even if such a conclusion appeared inevitable it would ill become Humanism to purchase logical consistency at the expense of ignoring the real needs of the human personality. But a very little reflexion seems to show that the sceptical conclusion only follows if the validity of the pragmatic method be denied. For all that is required to avoid it is the postulate that what we find best to suit our needs does ultimately represent something of real and eternal truth. So long as we make this assumption (our right to which only a denial of pragmatic method can dispute) the impossibility of attaining absolute truth can never drive us into absolute scepticism; for we can always argue from the value to the at any rate partial and representative truth of our beliefs.¹ Scepticism will thus be left to the pessimist. No doubt such a very tentative and halting pragmatism must leave the nature of truth and error

¹The application of this principle to religious belief is obvious, see Tyrrell, *Lex Orandi*, pp. 57, 58 and *passim*. The value of historic truths at first sight does no doubt appear to depend on a claim to absolute truth or nothing, but this ceases to be so when the metaphysical assumptions (e.g., the reality of time) implicit in the simplest statement of fact are fully realized.

as such undefined, but this need not be an insuperable objection so long as the argument from the value to the truth of particular judgments is admitted; for then we are not left wholly powerless to distinguish truths from errors. Nor is this admission tantamount to an identification of truth and value; for no small part of the value of those "claims" which by their value establish themselves as true, will be derived from the fact that they square with our belief that truth in itself is other than a value. After all "indefinable" is not quite the same thing as "meaningless". The apparent indefinability of moral good, for instance, is not generally held to render all moral discrimination between good and evil meaningless and impossible.

To discuss further, however, the possibility of rival theories of truth based upon the pragmatic method is outside the present purpose. The question to be answered is, granted that the foregoing criticism of Humanism is in itself coherent, has it rightly apprehended the meaning of the humanist definition of truth as value? It should always be remembered that Humanism never defined truth as value in general but as a specific kind of value, *viz.*, logical, and it may be pertinently argued on the humanist side that such criticisms as the above on the nature of the value possessed by truth in certain spheres of thought fail to distinguish logical value from other different species, especially moral.¹ Does not the whole plausibility of these arguments which seek to prove that truth if it is to have value must itself be other than value, really rest on a confusion between logical and moral values? Our religious and historic beliefs no doubt cease to have *moral* value for life unless their truth or *logical* value is held to be in a sense independent² of the moral and can be verified to some extent at any rate apart from it: but then Humanism never contended that logical value ought to be *proved* by moral.³ As the greatest of all logicians insisted, *οἷκ ἔστι μετα-*

¹ "Thus the predicates 'true' and 'false' are . . . indications of logical value, and as values akin to and comparable with the values predicated in ethical and æsthetic judgments. . . . Of course the special nature of the testing depends on the subject-matter" (*Studies in Hum.*, p. 6). (Italics mine.)

² "If we insist in preserving the word (independence) . . . it must, at least, be interpreted pragmatically as a term which discriminates certain behaviours, which distinguishes certain valuations within the cognitive process" (*Stud. in Hum.*, p. 182).

³ It is not quite clear how far Dr. Schiller wishes this principle to be applied; *cf.*, *e.g.*, *Stud. in Hum.*, p. 369. "As against all such attempts" (on the part of rationalistic monism) "we must hold fast to the principle that the truest religion is that which issues in and fosters the best life." (Italics mine.) Of course it would be absurd in an

πάντα δείξαι. All that is really required to satisfy scientific and popular belief in the independence, *e.g.*, of historic truth is the clear distinction of its logical from its moral value. The most rigid principles of "truth for truth's sake" may thus in practice be upheld, and the value of scientific methods and conclusions is amply justified when once it is recognised as strictly logical and independent of their bearing upon morals. Moreover, it may now be urged, there is danger of scepticism if truth is held in any sense to "transcend" the process by which it is recognised and verified in particular truth-claims. For in proportion as we assert that truth in itself is other than value while admitting that it is validly proved in particular cases by the value which it is found to possess, the validity of the argument from value to truth becomes itself incapable of *logical verification* and rests entirely on an optimistic or moral assumption; though of course Humanism is the last philosophy to contend that our "arbitrary" choice of optimism invalidates the conclusions we derive from it.

Such a defence of the humanist position may not be entirely conclusive, but it seems undeniable that the insistence on the distinctive character of logical value represents Humanism in quite a fresh aspect which has so far received too little consideration from its critics. A strict analysis, however, of the use of terms is necessary before the legitimacy of this defence can be admitted. If "value" means "utility" then a specifically logical value must imply a specifically logical purpose: for utilities can only differ in kind in relation to different purposes. What then is this distinctively logical purpose? Humanism has been so occupied in treating logic as a means to human ends in general that all too little has been heard of it. If there be any such end at all, it must in some sense be "knowledge," *i.e.*, the attainment of truth, whether truth be identified with a correspondence, a coherence, a harmonised experience, or any other of the definitions which have been put forward.

Here then, if the humanist definition of truth is to stand, since "utility" can only be predicated of means and not of ends as such, the strict identification of "value" with "utility" breaks down, and reverting to the first definition suggested at the beginning of this article we must take "value" as "goodness" with special reference to its experience by the mind. Regarded subjectively this definition

article like this to raise the problem of religious truth. I only mention it throughout as a convenient illustration of the senses in which the general definition of truth as value is and is not to be understood and criticised.

comes very near to "satisfaction," nor would it seem repugnant to the humanist position, for Dr. Schiller has himself asserted that truth and error may be tested by their "satisfying" or "thwarting" a purpose.¹ There seems no warrant for the hasty conclusion that Humanism means to identify truth with utility in any sense which would exclude the conception of truth as end. If however "value" is after all to be identified with a satisfaction or satisfactoriness (to use a barbarous but more accurate term), we have only further to equate "logical" with "intellectual" (a very natural step if no figment of "pure" intellect is intended) to reach a view of truth which appears to be verbally much the same as that lately advocated by Mr. Bradley.² How then does Humanism retain the distinctive character of its theory? Not even Plato would have attempted to deny that truth was good and satisfactory, and certainly an intellectualist would be the last person to contend that it was not logical. And it is no answer to point out that Humanism alone asserts that truth consists solely in intellectual satisfaction and nothing more. The question still remains, "What does or would satisfy the intellect?" No appetite of man can be satisfied simply by satisfaction. Some further account must be given of what the appetite is *for*, and in what the satisfaction consists.

Until therefore Humanism has further expounded its use of the term value and clearly stated what it considers the exact differentia of logical value to be its right to insist on the specific character of that value is at least open to objection.

But perhaps a juster idea of the humanist use of logical value may be gained by going back to the psychological facts on which the doctrine has always professed to base itself. It was suggested at the beginning of this article that the term value in its primary sense might be taken as expressing the fundamental attitude of the mind towards goodness in general. It is admittedly in a psychological doctrine of the ultimate character of the "value-attitude" of the mind (as distinct from the mere "fact attitude") that the roots of the humanist philosophy really lie. It has pointed out that our æsthetic, ethical and directly sensational judgments are all expressions of the fundamental value-attitude in specifically different relations;³ that is to say that the concepts of fair and foul, right and wrong, pleasure and pain, which such judgments predicate are in their essence specifically different.

¹ *Stud. in Hum.*, p. 6.

² *MIND*, Oct., 1909, *cf. esp.* p. 490.

³ *Cf. esp. Hum.*, pp. 162, 163.

value-attitudes of the mind, the function of the judgment being in each case essentially a valuation. Ought we not to regard our logical judgments (*i.e.*, those which predicate "true" and "false") as a parallel species of valuation and the concepts of truth and error as specific value-attitudes? Leaving on one side however the precise difference of meaning with which "value" is here used and the imperative need for a humanist definition of value, which its consideration would seem to indicate, such a doctrine appears to stand in need of much more defence, or at any rate explanation, than it has hitherto received. It may be granted that the categories of value and reality, or, psychologically speaking, the "value-" and "fact-attitudes" of the human mind are equally ultimate and so inter-connected that truth for the human mind must always contain implications of value.¹ It may be granted that the inter-dependence and inter-changeableness in actual practice of such epithets as "true," "good," "right," "pleasant," and "beautiful" should compel the attention of the epistemologist. It may be granted even that all "logical" truth-judgments have a value-aspect, since if there were literally no satisfaction or interest in making them they would never have been formulated.² But the main objection to the humanist doctrine on its psychological side arises from the concept of reality. The whole meaning of the specifically "logical" truth-judgment lies in its reference to reality as such. This Humanism has never denied, but, quite consistently, it claims to express reality itself in terms of value. Here however it seems to travel altogether beyond its psychological brief. It makes the highly disputable assumption that the category of reality, the fact-attitude of the mind, is less ultimate and fundamental than the category of value or the value-attitude. Why, it may be asked, is the attempt to express reality in terms of value any less arbitrary or confusing than the attempt to express value in terms of reality? Granted that "existence without 'appreciation,' fact without 'value,' is rather a figment of abstraction than a psychical experience";³ yet the exact converse seems equally true. The fact-attitude seems to be implied in the value-attitude at least as much as the latter in the former.

¹ It would surely take a very extreme intellectualist to deny *all* essential connexion between "truth," "good" and "right". For all satisfaction must represent itself to the mind as "good" in some sense, and it is hardly possible to deny that truth is ultimately "better" and "more right" than error.

² Cf. *Stud. in Hum.*, p. 9, "All meaning depends on purpose".

³ *Hum.*, p. 56.

Though no doubt reality for the mind is always essentially connected with "value" since it must possess some "importance" to be noticed or make an impression, *i.e.*, be experienced, still it is psychologically false to say that this importance *constitutes* the reality; for the mind is always and immediately aware that the importance is *derived* from the nature of reality as such—otherwise it completely vanishes. For importance is still a relation and *ἐν ἐλαχίστοις δύσιν*. This category of reality then being equally ultimate with that of value, is clearly presupposed in all predication and pervades all judgment and not "logical" judgment only; and so also does truth (as "claim") in virtue of its direct reference to reality as such. Indeed Humanism itself has insisted that all assertions claim truth.¹

No doubt the whole subject is far too complicated for treatment here, but in order to induce a clearer exposition of the humanist doctrine, two conclusions might be suggested on the strength of this very inadequate analysis. (1) Since truth is claimed by all judgments whatsoever, the term "logical" either does not constitute a *specific* differentia of judgments or is not applicable to truth as such. (2) Although truth is no doubt essentially and at every point connected with notions of "good" and "value," yet as distinct from all other eulogistic terms it derives its special meaning and value precisely from a reference to reality as such, *i.e.*, to reality as distinguishable from mere value.

Thus by a somewhat different road it seems possible to reach the same conclusion as before, *viz.*, that to define truth as value is to destroy the value of truth. In other words, is there not a fundamental confusion between the *nature* of truth and its *criterion* at the root of the humanist theory? No doubt as long as we admit the existence of a distinctively logical or intellectual appetite or purpose—no matter how inextricably connected with other appetites and purposes—we may and must apply the criterion of "satisfactoriness" or "value" or "consequences"; and the value of truth for all purposes cannot be too strongly insisted upon. But this does not answer the questions, what is that distinctive appetite for, what is the nature of the purpose, and wherein does its satisfaction consist? If we deny the distinctive purpose, truth is inevitably degraded to what is valuable for other purposes, and its own peculiar value inevitably vanishes altogether. "Salt is good, but if the salt have lost his savour . . ." Is it then, after all, so clear that a complete

¹ *Stud. in Hum.*, p. 145.

sympathy with the philosophic orientation of Humanism, and even an adoption of the pragmatic method, leads to an acceptance of the humanist definition of truth?

No doubt much apology is needed for the introduction of such complex and varied questions as have here been raised, where any approach to adequate treatment is clearly impossible. Such confusion and obscurity are however almost inseparable from an attempt to appreciate the central definitions of a new system of philosophy; and until the essence of Humanism is clearly understood, it seems premature for the critic to turn his attention directly to its bearing upon particular spheres of thought.