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## PHILOSOPHY

by

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A short time ago I requested Dr. Clark of Butler University to write for this column on some recent development in the field of ethics. He has kindly responded with a note on science and morality in the thought of John Dewey.

By the way, in responding Dr. Clark said he would welcome further discussion on his own philosophy of science. Are there any takers?

### A Note on Science and Morality

In his *Quest for Certainty* (p. 18; cf. *Experience and Nature*, p. 394) John Dewey suggests that the true problem of philosophy concerns the relation between science and morality. He may be right in identifying the problem, while at the same time his account of the relation may be untenable.

Running through a considerable portion of Dewey's writings is the theme that morality is or should be made continuous with science. Standards of conduct, he says (*Quest for Certainty* pp. 273 ff.), are to be had very largely from the findings of the natural sciences. Education and morals are to advance along the same road that the chemical industry has travelled (*Reconstruction*, p. 73). The success of science in limited fields is the promise of effecting integration in the wider field of collective human experience (*Quest*, p. 255). Do we put his thought too crudely if we say that moral values are to be formulated by the same processes by which we formulate a law of physics?

As Dewey works out this basic theme, he spends time stressing the relation of means to ends. Morality usually involves a struggle toward an end, and if the struggle is to be successful the means and the conditions must be taken into consideration. Inasmuch, however, as supernaturalism, which Dewey constantly berates, does not deny the relation of means to ends, Dewey's choler must indicate that his meaning passes beyond the simplest sense of many of his sentences. In fact, it is a characteristic of Dewey's style to begin with a statement so trivial or tautologous that no one can deny it and then to add subtle shifts of meaning until the conclusion is far removed from the premise. In this case the means which Dewey stresses are not merely means to produce a good result, but they are means which make the result good. For example, suppose that eating roast turkey is an enjoyment. If by chance I should happen in at a friend's home in time for dinner and found they had roast tur-

key instead of sweet breads which I do not care for, the eating would be an enjoyment, but it would not be a value. Yet, for my friend's wife, who carefully prepared the turkey and its accessories, the eating would be both an enjoyment and a value. Values, says Dewey (*Quest* p. 259), are enjoyments which are the consequences of intelligent action. If the enjoyment occurs just somehow, it is not a value.

For Dewey this way of putting the matter is essential to his construction; and to this extent any weakening of the point undermines his general position. As a preliminary criticism two interrelated remarks may be made. First, one may obstinately enjoy enjoyments however they may come. Dewey does not seem to have given any reason for the restriction he has laid upon value. He seems to have made an unsupported assertion. Indeed one may hold it plausible that the greatest enjoyments, or at least several important enjoyments, appear without intelligent calculation of results. They come unexpectedly. This leads to the second remark. Could it not be that Dewey's calculated enjoyments are less enjoyable than the unexpected enjoyments? Suppose one were to construct an elaborate method of obtaining a small amount of pleasure. This would satisfy Dewey's conditions, but conceivably it would not be worth the trouble. May not one conclude therefore that the greater the amount of work required, the less valuable the value? It is true no doubt that more enjoyment or more frequent enjoyment will result from intelligent action than from mere accident, and to this extent Dewey speaks the truth; but it is far from self-evident that the trouble of producing the result is the cause of its being good.

There is another and much more fundamental difficulty with Dewey's account of value. Let us grant that attention to scientific procedures is the surest method of guaranteeing desirable results. Health, comfort, and other interests can best be assured by a study of their causes and conditions. But health and comfort are not the only ends men choose to aim at. Some men make money their goal even to the detriment of their health. Others endanger their lives in order to win an auto race. There are those also who renounce comfort to build a political machine, engineer a revolution, and rule as a dictator. Science can instruct each of these as to the most effective means; but how does a study of means, causes, and conditions determine the choice of one end rather than another? Is it not rather the previously chosen end that determines the nature of the scientific investigation? Science is a servant; it does not control.

Repeatedly pragmatism or instrumentalism has been criticized as being entirely subjective. Each man chooses what he likes, and his theory is true if it works to get him his desired end. But it is meaningless, so

the criticism goes, to assert that one end is better than another; or at least it is meaningless to assert that all men ought to choose the same ends.

Dewey is incensed at this charge of subjectivism. In his *Reconstruction of Philosophy* (pp. 146, 157) he repudiates the implication that instrumentalism makes thinking a means of attaining some private advantage, and he asserts that a personal end is repulsive. Now, it may be true that an instrumental view of science does not necessitate subjectivism in morals; but if science and morals are continuous instrumentalism cannot exclude such a subjectivism. An instrumental science can be the means of achieving a private personal, selfish aim. But such an aim Dewey calls repulsive. However, in the course of history many men have not agreed that personal or even selfish ends are repulsive. Dewey here and there tries to dispose of these opponents by calling them irresponsible and morally deficient. All honest men, he says in his *Ethics* (revised ed. pp. 265, 292), agree that murder and wanton cruelty do not have beneficial consequence. Contrary to his usual emphasis on change and diversity, Dewey here insists on a large moral uniformity among men, at least among 'honest' men. But the vituperation he bestows on his opponents shows that not all men are 'honest' (i.e. agree with him), and it also shows that he has failed to convince them by argument. Surely a theory that professes to establish values by a scientific procedure ought to be able to produce arguments as persuasive as those of the natural sciences. Possibly moral science is not yet so far advanced. In his *Problems of Men* (pp. 178, 179) Dewey expresses the hope that a scientific study of the causes of desire will produce a technique by which the more enlightened portion of the community can make the dishonest men have the right desires. Since the time Dewey wrote this, the Chinese communists have made progress with their brain-washing technique.

And here lies the basic problem: which men are honest and which desires are right? There is no such moral uniformity among men as Dewey alleges. Although vague and general terms, like the good and the desirable, may be agreed upon, the concrete desires of men are heterogeneous. The items some men call good, other call evil; what some men call repulsive, other men eagerly embrace. And were we able perfectly to produce and control the desires of our victims, this scientific instrumentalism would afford no basis for choosing one end rather than another. The conclusion therefore seems to be that scientific ethics, in spite of the denials of its exponents, does not escape subjectivism and moral anarchy.

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## Letters

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Dear Friends,

It is good to see that the desire to be missionaries is finding its place in the thought of young doctors, who have come out to Hong Kong in the Army. One of these took care of my clinics, and thus gave me a short holiday in July, which was most acceptable. An old missionary friend from Honan, came and took morning devotions for the Staff and patients, and the young doctor was interested to see how it was done. May the missionary seed sown in his heart bear fruit, when his time in the Army is finished.

A few miles from Hong Kong there is another island, on which is a high mountain, and being on the top was like having a week in Scotland, and I enjoyed it thoroughly. My only regret was that my dear wife was not there to spend the time with me and with our friends Archdeacon and Mrs. Donnithorne. Duties and responsibilities at home in England necessitated her return in Many, and so after some enjoyable months together, we have had to part again for a time.

After my return from the mountain, the Rev. Eric Hague asked me to see a man, Cheo-Tzu-Long, who had had both his feet blown off. He was a beggar walking on his knees, and Mr. Hague wanted me to fix him up with legs. Money, perseverance and the surgical fashioning of new stumps were all involved. After eight months the task seemed completed, and to our delight Tzu-Long walked about on his artificial limbs like a new man. How to find him a job had caused much thought and correspondence. By last Friday we seemed near the end of our task, but when a policeman met the transformed Tzu-Long on the street, he recognized him as being a lapsed deportee, transported five years previously for begging! How the policeman remembered him is more than I can fathom. His trial took place two days ago, and I am glad to report that a letter from me, and the presence of Mr. Hague procured his release. The judge was most considerate. How one could muse on the price of a soul. If it costs so much in this life, no wonder that Heaven had to be robbed of its greatest treasure to save you and me. Tzu-Long has learned this for he has given his heart to the Lord.

Mrs. Yung has been brought to the clinic by her daughter Nancy. I found that Nancy was being influenced by the Roman Catholics. She and Gordon her fiance, both speak English, and we have had many talks together. The question of their decision for Christ has been settled, and now they are realizing their need for Bible study and prayer. When Gordon