Reviews.

Dewey, John, *Theory of Valuation.* International Encyclopedia of Unified Science. Vol. II, No. 4. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Ill. 1939. (67 pp.; $1.00)

Faced as we are today with a thoroughgoing positivist repudiation of metaphysical concepts and transcendental principles, it may be well to recall the original relation of positivism to such concepts and principles. Ideas like natural law, the rights of man, the quest for happiness first gained momentum in the context of a positivist and not of a metaphysical philosophy (Locke, Montesquieu, the French enlighteners),—they could not be, and were not meant to be, verified by observation, because the reality they indicated did not belong to matter-of-fact reality, but presupposed the operation of certain laws and standards that contradicted those governing the matters-of-fact. It was of such laws and standards that the concept of reason was composed. Reason was an opposing force to the state of affairs as given; it asserted its own right as against that of authority. To think and to act according to reason was almost identical with thinking and acting in opposition to accepted norms and opinions. Reason was held to be the result of free and autonomous judgment, and the rational was that activity which followed this judgment. Appeal to the facts was meant to corroborate reason, not to override it; if the facts were at variance with reason's dictate, the former were "wrong" and had to be changed in conformity with the latter's demands.

The idea of reason which animated positivist philosophy in the 18th century was a critical one, in the sense we have just outlined. Within that same period, however, positivism began to relinquish its critical function and to replace it with a conformist and apologetic one. Both tendencies combine in Hume's philosophy, but the force of his struggle against oppressive religious and metaphysical concepts is attenuated by his concessions to "custom," which takes shape as the basic operative element in reasoning. Comte's positive philosophy completed the process of altering positivism's function. The principle of verification through facts, instead of serving to illuminate a truth which ought to be and yet is not, reenforced the truth of that which is. Reason was rendered subordinate to the observation of facts, and "facts as they are" became the final criteria of truth.

This apologetic form of positivism swept the second half of the 19th century. It did not stand alone in the struggle against autonomous and critical thought. After the breakdown of German idealism, metaphysics tried to outdo positivism in its apologetic for the given state of affairs. Freedom, critical reason, spontaneity were all relegated to a realm of "pure knowledge" where they could do no harm and generate no counter-drive against man's actual condition in empirical reality. In the latter reality, anti-positivist philosophy bound men as strongly to the authority of matters-of-fact as did positivism. In the current interchange of arguments concerning the supposed affinities between positivism and authoritarianism, one general misconception among many requires correction. The claim has been made that it was not

positivist but anti-positivist philosophy that held sway in the intellectual cultures of the authoritarian countries prior to the advent of fascism. This is correct, but anti-positivist philosophy was itself everywhere saturated with positivism, in Germany as well as in Italy. It may suffice to refer in this connection to the positivistic tendencies in *Lebensphilosophie* and Phenomenology, and in the psuedo-Hegelianism of Giovanni Gentile.

Even so, it is meaningless to ask whether positivism contributed to the rise of authoritarianism. Positivism cannot take active part in producing a change that involves and establishes total oppression, total warfare, total control and total intolerance. In a certain sense, indeed, freedom is of the very essence of positivism, the freedom to investigate, to observe, to experiment, to refrain from premature judgment and decision,—even the liberty to contradict. All this freedom, of course, occurs in the realm of science, and a scientific behavior is the condition of positivistic freedom. The truth which is to be verified by observation is, in principle at least, based upon free consent; recognition and not compulsion is its standard.

There is another reason why positivism cannot be held responsible for fascism. Positivism does not affirm anything unless it is an established fact. The positivist judgment hangs in the balance until a scientific verification has been provided. Positivism is of its very nature *ex post.* The conditions that prevail in matters-of-fact point the direction for numerous experiments, and positivism follows this lead: its approach is not an acquiescent but an experimental one, and it does not sanction change unless the experiment has been successfully completed.

It is precisely in this light that we must reformulate the question of the relation between positivism and authoritarianism. Experiments can be applied in the social as well as in the physical world. If the fascist experiment has been completed, if fascism has succeeded in organizing the world, does positivism possess any right to deny it sanction and acceptance? Is positivism not compelled, by its own principles, to comply with this world order and to work with, not against it? And, should we arrive at an affirmative answer, we can venture the further question: does not positivism "reflect" a reality in which man has surrendered to the authority of facts, in which reason, autonomous and critical thinking, is actually subordinate to observation of facts? Does the term "positive" in positivism not really imply a positive, that is to say, affirmative attitude towards the matters of fact—whatever they might be?

Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* provides an appropriate occasion for discussing the social function of positivism. Such discussion requires an analysis of positivism's attitude to value judgment, especially since positivism refers to experiments in the field of human behavior, and "human behavior *seems* to be influenced, if not controlled, by considerations such as are expressed in the words 'good—bad,' 'right—wrong,' 'admirable—hideous,' etc. All conduct that is not simply either blindly impulsive or mechanically routine seems to involve valuations" (p. 3). The experiment to create a new social and political order can be adequately described in a system of propositions about observable facts, but the description will be adequate only insofar as it contains "value concepts." Human desires and interests inevitably enter into an experiment that aims to create a new order of life, for such an experiment presupposes the judgment that the experiment is desirable. Valuations "occur only when it is necessary to bring something into existence, which is lacking,

or to conserve in existence something which is menaced by outside conditions" (p. 15). To a considerable extent, the impact of John Dewey's work and personality may have been responsible for the fact that positivism no longer maintains the ideal of a social science which is void of value judgments, but attempts to treat such judgments "in verifiable propositions." This attempt is based upon the fact that desires occur within definite "existential contexts," namely, those indicated in the last quotation above, and that they can be investigated with respect to the empirical possibility of their fulfillment and the consequences involved in it. This existential context places the propositions containing valuations in the relation of means-ends or means-consequences (p. 24), and the "continuum of ends—means" is the continuum in which the positivistic testing of valuations takes place.

Here, however, the limits of positivism have already been reached. For positivism is unable to state anything "scientific" about the desirability of the ends themselves. The positivist can weigh the ends against the means necessary to achieve them, he can investigate the conditions of their realization and ask whether it is "reasonable" to realize certain ends, he can show the consequences which are implied in this realization. But this is about all he can do. His analysis stops short at the prevailing desires and interests of men, which are the given facts, and therefore stops short at the multitude of ends prevalent in these desires and interests. He recognizes that desires and interests can still be submitted to the question as to whether they are reasonable or unreasonable (p. 29). This question is precisely the decisive one. For, if positivism measures human desires and interests according to whether they are or are not reasonable, then positivism, at least on one most fundamental point, aims at that which ought to be rather than at that which is. If the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable desires is meaningful at all, it cannot be derived from the given existential context which provoked the distinction. The standards of reason must somehow lead beyond this context,—nay, even question this context in its totality.

What are the standards according to which desires and interests can be classified as reasonable or unreasonable? Certainly not the accepted standards of custom, the current social taboos and awards—if this were the case, the very idea of real experiments in society would be destroyed; nor metaphysical norms and dogmas, which cannot be placed into an observable existential context. The positivistic answer leads definitely back to the given existential context. "The difference between reasonable and unreasonable desires and interests is precisely the difference between those which arise casually and are not reconstituted through consideration of the conditions that will actually decide the outcome and those which are formed on the basis of existing liabilities and potential resources" (p. 29). The distinction thus comes very close to what common-sense considers to be reasonable and unreasonable—a happy and successful adaptation to existing conditions, a thorough weighing of means and consequences, of liabilities and resources. The problem of the validity of the ends is replaced by the problem of the adequacy and consequences of the means. "Valuation of desire and interest, as means correlated with other means, is the sole condition for valid appraisal of objects as ends" (p. 29). If we accept this "sole condition" of appraisal, we also accept the ends that are reasonable in this sense, those

that take full account of the risks involved and of the "existing liabilities and potential resources."

Now it is obvious that desires and interests may be found that are reasonable on this ground and still aim at oppression and annihilation. The desires and interests that produced the fascist order might be such. They are frightfully reasonable if regarded in the continuum of ends and means; they did not arise "casually," and they were formed on the basis of existing liabilities and potential resources. Is there any way left for positivism to deny affirmative appraisal by applying scientific standards?

The case is explicitly stated by Dewey, and he points to a standard by which even successful interests and desires can be "revaluated." "On account of the continuity of human activities, personal and associated, the import of present valuations cannot be validly stated until they are placed in the perspective of the past valuation—events with which they are continuous" (p. 59). Such a perspective would show the continuous historical efforts of mankind to enhance and release individual potentialities, to widen the range of human desires and to provide the means for their fulfillment, without discrimination and in harmony with the perpetuation of the whole. In other words, it would show continuous striving for freedom. It would furthermore show that "a particular set of current valuations have as their antecedent historical conditions" the exact opposite, namely, "the interest of a small group or special class in maintaining certain exclusive privileges and advantages, and that this maintenance has the effect of limiting both the range of the desires of others and their capacity to actualize them (ibid.).

Should man become conscious of these antecedents, "is it not obvious that this knowledge of conditions and consequences would surely lead to revaluation of the desires and ends that had been assumed to be authoritative sources of valuation?" (ibid.) Unfortunately, it is not obvious at all. Dewey's optimism is characterized by a neglect of the existential contexts in which the authoritarian desires and interests live. The order that maintains the exclusive privileges of a "small group or special class" responds to deep-rooted human desires, desires that are spread far beyond the governing strata. The desire for strong protection, the perverse lust for cruelty, the enjoyment of power over an impotent enemy and of liberation from the burden of autonomy, and numerous other desires that shaped the individual in the prehistory of fascism have been fulfilled to such an extent that, in comparison, the desire for freedom seems to aim at some suicidal jump into nothing. The form of freedom that the run-of-the-mill individual has enjoyed in the past century must only strengthen the desire to abandon it, while the super-human courage and loyalty of those who carry on their fight for freedom in the authoritarian states is "unreasonable" according to scientific standards; all consequences and all existing liabilities and resources speak against their efforts. They cannot test and verify their values, because in order to do so they must already have won. Their existence is "good," "right," and "valuable" beyond test and verification, and if their cause loses, the world, and not their values, will have been refuted.

In the present situation of material and intellectual culture, the problem of values is, in the last analysis, identical with the problem of freedom. The

conditions of matters of fact have become so unified that the one idea, freedom, covers all that is good, right and admirable in the world. And all efforts to place the value of freedom on the same scientific level with other current valuations is an affront to freedom. For science is essentially in itself freedom, and cannot verify freedom through anything other than freedom. Freedom—and this is the profound result of Kant's analysis—is the only "fact" that "is" only in its creation; it cannot be verified except by being exercised.

This conviction distinctly motivates Dewey's attempt to save the scientific validity of values from annihilation. In doing so, however, he seems to gainsay the very basis of his positivistic method, for his faith in the power of "revaluation" presupposes a definite preference prior to all test and verification, namely, that liberty and the "release of individual potentialities" is better than its opposite.

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Wirth, Louis, ed., *Contemporary Social Problems*. A Tentative Formulation for Teachers of Social Problems. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, Ill. 1939. (IX and 68 pp.; $1.00)

This small book has a really great significance. If the program sketched in it were to be carried out, it might very well deeply affect the teaching of contemporary social problems. The book is the outcome of discussions among outstanding scholars in psychology, economics, political science, history, anthropology and sociology who were assembled to consider "contemporary social problems and issues in relation to social science education." The group had thus to determine the "criteria for the selection of the more significant problem"; the formulation of the problems; their classification; and the availability of scientific knowledge. The discussions were based on a statement which tentatively defined and classified the values of American liberal democracy and contained some methodological remarks on the distinction and the connection between "scientific" and "practical" problems. It insisted that the group discussions could only be fruitful if the many problems confronting America were reduced to a dozen or so "strategic social issues." The discussions "resulted in the formulation of a rough outline of the form that the analysis and presentation of a problem might have." This analysis distinguishes the nature of a problem (how the problem appears to the man in the street; whom it affects; why it is significant; what are the assumptions, divergence from which constitutes a problem); the method by which a social scientist formulates it; the etiology of the problem; the goals to be sought in its solution; the means for bringing about solution; and the best available sources for information. The present volume contains a brief but illuminating introduction by Mr. *Erling M. Hunt* of Teachers College (Columbia); a survey by Professor *Wirth* on the work of the study group; an article by Professor *Max Lerner*, entitled "What makes a social problem?" and a contribution from Professor *Louis Wirth* on "Housing." Further volumes are announced that will deal with "Freedom and Adequacy of Information furnished by Channels of Communication" by Professor *H. Cantril;* and one on "War" by Professor *P. E. Moseley* of Cornell.