

Mises, Richard v., *Kleines Lehrbuch des Positivismus*, Einführung in die empiristische Wissenschaftsauffassung. W. P. van Stockum and Zoon. The Hague 1939 (xii and 467 pp.)

Russell, Bertrand, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*. W. W. Norton & Co. New York 1940. (445 pp.; \$4.50)

Mises' book is a kind of official textbook of modern positivist doctrine covering all branches of science and philosophy. The first four sections deal with the foundations of the "exact theories" and merely restate the well-known position of the protagonists of "unified science." There are, however, some differences in shading: for example, there is less hostility to the *Schulphilosophie* and metaphysic than there is in the *Wiener Kreis*, and a remarkable restraint has been placed on the demand that all scientific propositions be derived from *Protokollsätze*. Moreover, Mises suggests that the division of propositions into *sinnvolle* and *sinnleere* be replaced by a division into *verbindbare* and *unverbindbare* ones.

The primary criterion of a scientific statement is that it conform to the generally recognized rules which govern the use of every-day language. Mises himself stresses the far-reaching implications of this criterion, stating that the rules specified "include all conventions which determine the relations between spoken (written) words and the experiences (*Erlebnisse*) coordinated with these words—no matter whether or not such conventions have ever been expressly formulated" (pp. 332f.). *Verbindbarkeit* thus means much more than compliance with certain grammatical or stylistical rules,—it means that the propositions in which the world is interpreted must *a priori* conform to the whole body of acknowledged experiences which these rules express and perpetuate. No wonder that hardly a single proposition of Hegel's dialectical logic meets with this standard of "truth."

There is, however, another standard and another form of theory accepted by positivism, that of "tautological" propositions. According to Mises, logic and mathematics, for example, consist of tautological propositions which are "valid independent of all experience" because they do not state anything about reality but are merely new forms (*Umformungen*) comprising arbitrarily fixed rules of language (definitions) (p. 117). A tautological system cannot be examined as to its truth or falsehood, but only as to its consistency and utility (*Zweckmässigkeit*) in the presentation of observable phenomena.

The debasement of cognition that is so clearly reflected in these formulations distinguishes all the general methodological utterances of modern positivism. Unable to fulfill its quest for certainty and security, positivist thought seeks refuge in tautological definitions and the fixed conventions of every-day language. It orients knowledge to the ideal of providing an adequate description of that which is. This might still pass for a correct description of the aim of knowledge, were it not for the simple fact that the standard of *Verbindbarkeit* forbids any formulation that is critical in a genuine philosophical sense. For example, the totality of "that which is" is such that its adequate description must renounce the standard of every day language—which is itself an integral part of this totality. If the ends and interests of men are distorted to such an extent that the distortion pervades all human relations (of thought as well as practice) in a given reality,

then its adequate description must be *unverbindbar* in exactly the sense repudiated by the positivists; it must be contradictory to the prevailing conventions rather than compliant with them. This does not imply that the statements of such a critical theory are meaningless, arbitrary, and beyond conceptual control. Their meaning is defined in the theoretical context in which they appear. The theoretical context reformulates the historical content which the fundamental ideas have taken in, applies it to the prevailing situation, and relates it to the concrete potentialities derived from the analysis of this situation. The context itself is essentially other than that of exact positivist theory, for (1) it centers around such human interests and relations as freedom, right, happiness, reason, subordinating all other spheres of intellectual activity to defining and realizing them, and (2) it takes every single phenomenon as part of a definite historical totality of human existence and analyses it with a view to the potentialities of this totality.

It is surprising to find that Mises himself points to the essential limitations of his demand for *Verbindbarkeit*. He draws attention to situations in which the quest for enlightenment encounters a prevailing language that "was not created for such a task and was utterly inappropriate to it" (p. 303). He cites the controversy between Heraclitus and the Eleatics and the consequent elaboration of the concept Being and Becoming. In such a situation, he says, the new insights are at first *unverbindbar*, and this quality might very well be the mark of their truth. We may add that this is exactly the situation in which every genuine philosophy finds itself. Philosophical questions originate from and express a conflict between new insights and the "general usage of language." The "new" insights, also, may well be old ones that have been forgotten and have degenerated in the existential relations which the "general usage" perpetuates. So far the methodological part of the book.

The last three sections are particularly significant because they present a summary of the positivist conception of the cultural sciences. Notwithstanding all efforts to do justice to such "inexact" objects as art, literature, religion and right, these sections are extremely barren and abstract. There is a constantly renewed attempt to show that no essential difference exists between the procedures of the exact theories on the one hand and of the theory of society, art, morals, and right on the other. The common-sense approach here yields insights like this: "the poet communicates experiences on vital relations between observable phenomena by using certain conventions which must be counted among the rules of language" (p. 335). And the author reproaches Hegel's metaphysic for offending against the limits of "good taste!" A religious system is defined as "certain complexes of interconnected statements which aim at ruling (*regeln*) the behavior of large human groups in a definite sense" (p. 405). These statements are so remote from the actual subject matter they claim to be treating that they surpass all *unverbindbare* propositions of metaphysics.

More important, however, is the author's complete helplessness in the field of the social sciences. Here again, Mises is primarily interested in showing that the social sciences have the same conceptual structure as the natural sciences, that the various social theories contradict each other, and that all decision must be left open for future experience and observation. He reproaches Neurath for not stating clearly enough that "propositions

which are contrary to those of Marx and Engels are just as admissible from the standpoint of scientific logic" (p. 286). Discussing law and morals, Mises raises the question whether actions can be approved that run counter to prevailing legal and moral norms and aim to change them by force. He holds the question to be *unverbindbar* insofar as it involves a moral evaluation.

The bare vestiges of philosophical problems that can still be traced in Mises' book have completely disappeared from *Russell's* study of meaning and truth, which deals neither with meaning nor with truth, the approach and concepts being such as to render the notion of meaning and truth inapplicable to the subject matter treated. The problem of truth arose in philosophy in connection with the most concrete questions and interests of human existence, and it has philosophical meaning only insofar as it is definitely related to them. It is meaningful to ask for the truth in the context of the quest for freedom, reason, justice, of a rational society, but it is entirely meaningless to investigate the truth of such statements as "this is a dog," "the snow is white," "I am hot," meaningless not because the analysis of language is not important for philosophy, but because it is much too important to be oriented to silly propositions emptied of all problems. Russell's analysis is concerned with dogs and cats, cheese, butter and bacon, p , p^n and p^{n+1} . Frequently, however, human relationships, history and society enter the horizon of this "philosophy." For example, there is a lengthy discussion of the difference in meaning between the sentences "Brutus killed Caesar," and "Caesar killed Brutus," and the "ultimate source" of the distinction is found to be the difference between "x precedes y" and "y precedes x," where "x and y are events." There are such "decisive" problems as "if there were in New York an Eiffel Tower exactly like the one in Paris, would there be two Eiffel Towers, or one Eiffel Tower in two places?" There is the illuminating assertion that "we know that Caesar was murdered, but until this event occurred it was not known." And there is the warranted prediction that "if some one brings you, in the dark, into the neighborhood of a ripe Gorgonzola, and says, can't you smell roses? you will say no."

We do not think that we are unfair to Russell's book in selecting out these ridiculous illustrations. They indicate precisely the dimension in which his analysis proceeds. In its quest for certainty and security, positivism is compelled to formalize all propositions to such an extent that they either state nothing about reality (see R.v.Mises' thesis above) or state only things in which nobody is interested and which everybody knows anyway. The propositions cannot be disputed because all controversial content has been removed. The problem of meaning and truth, on the other hand, should begin only where there is a controversial matter, one on which no agreement can possibly be arrived at by going back to the "basic propositions" of the "object language." The problems of freedom, reason, justice cannot be discussed within a conceptual framework that centers around "basic propositions" because disagreement and the transcendence of sense-perception belong to their very essence. If meaning and truth are to be derived from statements such as "I am hot" or "this is red," then all philosophic statements are a priori meaningless and false.

The positivist reduction to "basic propositions" puts philosophic truth before the bar of common sense. Indeed, common sense plays an important

role in philosophy. Hegel, for example, has shown that if questioned in the appropriate manner, common sense itself yields the concepts that justify philosophy's going beyond sense-knowledge. The positivist appeal to such knowledge, on the other hand, stops short at the linguistic form of the statements of common sense and renounces the analysis of their content. Russell himself has shown the absurdity which results, in his brief but brilliant criticism of Neurath's doctrine (pp. 184f.).

Like von Mises' book, Russell's work contains insights which lead beyond the positivist position. His theory of a "hierarchy of languages," for example, starts from the fact (first formulated by Tarski) that "the words 'true' and 'false,' as applied to the sentences of a given language, always require another language, of higher order, for their adequate definition" (p. 75). Truth and falsehood really transcend all "given language" only insofar as they likewise transcend the given order of reality which this language expresses. No actual transcendence takes place when the truth of statements like "I am hot" or "this is a dog" are in question. The synthetic and linguistic difficulties implied in the question might easily be avoided by introducing a "higher" language, which in reality, however, is not other than the given language but a mere derivative of it. The case is quite different with respect to the truth of such propositions as "Freedom is the sole truth of Spirit" or "the realm of freedom begins beyond the realm of daily work." Such sentences are part of a language which is truly "beyond" the given, and they measure the given by standards that are essentially foreign to it. These standards cannot be reached, however, by constructing "higher" languages, and by removing the difficulties and contradictions that arise through a process of artificial formalization, terminating in an entirely consistent "scientific" language. The language to which judgments of truth and falsehood belong contains all the matters of fact indicated by the "given" language and all its inconsistencies and contradictions, but it comprehends them under the aspect of their transformation into another, more rational order. It is not the rationality reflected in the system of unified science but that which, in our days, motivates the struggle of men against authoritarian unification. The language of truth and falsehood is, in the last analysis, the language that bears witness to this struggle.

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