

# TOWARD A NATURALISTIC PHILOSOPHY OF EXPERIENCE

## I. THE PHILOSOPHIC USE OF EXPERIENCE

It is true that all ideas begin with experience, in a factual, temporal sense. It is also true that the validity of many ideas does not depend upon the observations of natural experience. "Experience" is used therewith in two different senses of the term, which cannot be fused by calling them different modes of experience. The difference between the inductive and the deductive, or the empirical and the formal, is involved. It has been one of the supports for the doctrine of a priori knowledge. The difference between direct experience, in which one is "at the mercy of the object," and reflective experience, which is regarded by some philosophers as more adequate and independent, has also been prominent. It has led to the doctrine of transcendental knowledge, in response to the understandable wish to be emancipated from the natural conditions of experience. Curiously, it does not seem to be realized that an emancipation from nature would also

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

involve independence from all conditions of human culture. That the direction of flight is away from the limitations of the natural world is evident. Not so evident is the goal, which hardly offers the desired haven of refuge in a nonnatural world that is devoid of culture as we know it.

All philosophers appeal to experience, but they do so in diverse ways. The one blanket term obliterates distinctions sufficiently to permit conflicting goals to be instated. It has its strict cognitive function, as treated by empiricism and positivism. In some cases, there is a severe restraint, with no talk of anything beyond the data of experience. But experience has also been converted into an ontology, with a resulting strain upon its interpretation, all the way from skepticism to absolutism, or a convenient but sterile "neutralism."

In the present discussion, the terms "naturalism" and "materialism" are used interchangeably. The term "naturalism" is used in the title because it has the advantage of flexibility, without signifying a nonmaterialistic point of view. Because of the different uses and commitments of naturalism and materialism, not much is said by the adoption of either designation. The real significance has to be shown. Historically, "materialism" has been conspicuously used in an uncompromising way, both in its criticism of idealism and spiritualism, and in its conception of the nature of existence. "Naturalism" has been associated with agnosticism and a spirit of compromise. On the other hand, a mechanistic version of materialism can go along with social and economic conservation or even with a reactionary view; and "naturalism" can be used in the sense of the most exacting methodology, along with the concrete recognition of social facts and conflicts. In short, the usage is merely a general, direction-giving indication, and the full import of the position in question must be provided.

In recent philosophical literature, the traditional opposition between materialism and spiritualism, or between naturalism and subjectivism, has been obscured by the various types of "extential" philosophy, which include covert forms of subjectivism. The appraisal of the claims of subjectivism as a philosophy of experience has become a leading concern of contemporary philosophy. An ambitious philosopher of experience is not likely to restrict his inquiry to experience. He is more likely to press on to a uni-

versal philosophy. That distinguishes the speculative philosopher from the methodologically controlled inquiry of a scientific (naturalistic) philosopher. For the latter, speculative interpretations are recognized for what they are, and are subject to the canons of logic. Thus, it is not the mere use of speculation that distinguishes naturalistic from subjectivistic philosophers. Everything depends upon the way in which speculation is used. A subjectivist is not likely to place his conception of speculation on the same level with that of naturalism. For it is a common practice to characterize naturalistic philosophies as “dogmatic.”

## II. ON DOGMATISM AND RADICALISM

Dogmatism, meaning philosophical dogmatism, is a relative term; its meaning is relative to a point of view in philosophy. To affirm the independent existence or preexistence (with respect to experiencing beings) of a world is “dogmatic” for a subjectivist. For a naturalist or materialist, it is simply a statement of a basic fact.

For a “radical” subjectivist, the existence of the world is questioned, just as all statements are to be examined for their evidence in terms of the direct experience of an individual knower. The definition of dogmatism that develops depends upon this “radicalism”: any affirmation of existence, or of validity, that is not based upon such direct experience, is “dogmatic.” The “radicalism” involved here is a radicalism of questioning. It is well to go along with it on the basis of the proposed method, in order to test its potentiality. The outcome could be a series of passing experiences, and that would not be altered if “essential” or “eidetic” analysis is preferred. The thickness of the “dogmatic” view has been eliminated in favor of the thinnest of possible contents of experience. Any advantages that may accrue are purchased at the cost of the independently real world. They can only be safeguarded by another type of dogmatism that endows the subjective realm with stability and validity. The alleged “radicalism” evaporates in the face of the need to validate the subjective processes themselves; for it is necessary to connect the process of experience and its world.

On the other hand, there is a spirit of radicalism expressed in the strictly applied methods of empirical or objective knowledge. Dogmatism is ruled out by the recognition of the fallibility

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

and tentativeness of empirical knowledge. The assumptions in this case are acknowledged explicitly; and they are to be justified by their consequences. There appears to be nothing in the way of "radical" knowledge that could not be achieved by means of methodologically controlled inquiry, by way of descriptive philosophy of experience on the ground of the world. The existence of the world may be affirmed as a basic fact while questioning its evidence for an individual knower and for a society of knowers, in all possible and pertinent ways.

For a radical subjectivist, the existence of another knower (an *alter ego*) presents a problem. For a radical objectivist, the affirmation of an individual knower under any conditions is something to be justified. There is right on both sides. The contentions, the claims, and the questions raised may be methodogenic, i.e., they may be due to the point of view, the method that has been adopted, and the assumptions that are accepted. Even if a "radical" program is adopted, there is always the need for special assumptions. That applies both to subjectivistic and objectivistic points of view. Explicitly formulated assumptions present no serious problem. It is the use of tacit assumptions, at times masquerading as truths, or buttressed by confused arguments, that presents unrewarding difficulties.

There is a danger besetting "radicalism" in philosophy in the paralysis of activity that substitutes reflective analysis for the realities of experience. As a result, there is a tendency to neglect important phases of social existence. For the rest, a "petty bourgeois" is petty whether he wears a philosopher's cloak or wends his way through life a sausage merchant.

### III. THE FUNCTION OF PURE REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

Pure reflective analysis is a specialized procedure, capable of dealing with selected aspects of experience. It cannot be self-sufficient; it would be worse than naive to suppose that it could deal with experience in general. This is not an objection to the use of reflection for descriptive analysis, for reflection is indispensable. But "pure" reflection is merely one of the modes of reflection.

Remembering what is known about the actual place of man in the cosmos, and the place of experience in the cultural world as

well, one can attend to his own processes of reflection for special purposes. Those purposes include the clarification of basic ideas, such as meaning, truth, and evidence, within the framework of "inner" experience. Such ideas are considered without regard to confirmation in an empirical sense. "Seeing" is all that can be appealed to, with this procedure. The system of knowledge that is opened up therewith can be used as a standard of reference for the purposes of natural experience. But the findings of "pure" description must be undertaken in connection with the facts of experience. Not even the clarification of an "essence" stands completely alone. The relevant system of natural knowledge will help us to decide whether a given clarification is plausible. No "absoluteness" of knowledge may be claimed on the purely reflective level. Even though there is less likelihood of error than in ordinary experience or in empirical knowledge, mistakes could be made, and descriptions could be misleading. They could be faulty in their application to the natural world, if not devoid of application.

The strictly "neutral" field of descriptive knowledge opened up by the procedure of pure reflection may serve all scholars, regardless of their special interests or ulterior philosophical preferences. This descriptive discipline is intended to be free of all commitments, whether metaphysical, epistemological, or logical, insofar as a theory of logic is meant. That is an ideal, of course, which may well never be completely realized. No denial of ontological theses is involved. There is merely an abstention from all theses, in the interest of the ideal of description. This would be questionable if an ontology were to be constructed on the basis of pure reflective analysis, which only an idealist would be likely to undertake.

Abstention from all ontological commitments is the only sure way to proceed, if description is not to be interfered with, or if it is not to be exploited for the purposes of a "standpoint." But such abstention can be carried too far, or misused. The clues to be followed out here are provided by our knowledge of facts, transmitted and current; but also by the problems which are brought to us in the primary process of experience. Thoroughgoing reflection requires a degree of detachment sufficient to examine all beliefs and assumptions, and to appraise the evidence

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

claimed for all assertions. This method of approach is at its best in attending to the contributions made by the knower in the process of experience. Idealization and the use of fictions are prominent among the contributions of the knower. They are not of interest for the purposes of ontology, however, and are to be regarded as tools for inquiry, or as devices for ordered experience and knowledge.

### IV. EXISTENCE AND THE TRANSFIGURATION OF EXPERIENCE

Experience is merely an abstraction and is artificially conceived if it is not located in the realm of existence. There is however an unlimited number of so-called philosophical views of existence, although they can be reduced to a few basic types. If existence is regarded as contingent or accidental, and if the philosopher begins with the *ego cogito*, a hopeless problem is engendered.

The philosopher who proposes to account for everything goes beyond the special sciences, which accept the independent existence or the occurrence of the process of physical events. As in the case of the man of common sense and of everyday practical experience, all thinking is "on the ground of the world." An antecedently existing world is at the basis of all inquiry. Much of our established knowledge supports the thesis that there is an antecedently existing world. This basic fact underlies experience of the knowledge of reality. Doubts and reservations concerning the evidence for the existence of the world are either the consequences of assumptive reasoning, or are due to the adoption of an artificial standpoint and procedure. The reasoning is assumptive and initially misleading if it is supposed that one can really begin in philosophy as an isolated knower, or that it is meaningful for a knower to ask how or why there is a world, and how or why there are other experiencing persons. That is a case of being assumptive contrary to fact; for a single, isolated knower is a real impossibility. Although a knower must be an individual, a human individual is descended from and thus "presupposes" other human individuals. His life is bound up at all times with the society in which he lives; and he derives his sustenance from the natural world. Hence the question of the existence of an external world is simply bizarre; and either it is based upon assumptive

reasoning, or it follows from the adoption of a nonnatural method of inquiry, which has its own conditions. In other words, it becomes a *methodogenic* problem.

This is strangely forgotten, if it was ever understood, by many writers who wonder whether the human mind will ever be able to establish the existence of a world, or whether it can attain to the knowledge of a real world. Such writers fail to see themselves in their self-imposed limitations. They fail to see that an artifice—the philosophic mind, has been substituted for the real human knower, whose knowing is a function of an organism.

The question of the existence of an external world arises in philosophies that begin with experience or an ego. If there is a sufficiently well-defined procedure, as in the case of pure phenomenology, this question is seen to be methodogenic, for it arises once the acknowledgement of the world is suspended. To retire to “immanent” experience for the study of the structures of experience cannot be sufficient for most types of inquiry. It may appear to be disarming enough, to be asked to follow the course of experience descriptively, with no talk of an antecedently existing realm of events. The entire proposal would be assumptive, in that it would cut us off programmatically from our actual knowledge of the facts—in short, from the very lessons of our experience. A methodogenic question is not necessarily assumptive, for it may be formulated precisely, with all assumptions explicitly indicated. But such a question could be discussed with tacit and unclarified assumptions, adding to the traditional fog shrouding the talk of the existence of an external world. The very expression “external world” suggests that there is an “internal world,” and if that is meant either existentially in a unique sense, or epistemologically, one faces the perennial problem of “external” existence. The outcome may either be an unspecified but alluring transcendence, or an external world whose status is viewed as problematical. An unwarranted distortion of ontology, and a restriction to experience that carries with it a disregard of the most pertinent factual knowledge about experience and the world—these are the usual props of the question of external existence.

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

### V. ON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN PHILOSOPHY

For logically ordered knowledge, there are no detached or isolated questions. A question involves a system of knowledge, whether implicit or explicit, complete or incomplete; and it is not exempted from this requirement by labelling it a "metaquestion." There is always reference to a system of knowledge, whether it be based upon direct or reflective experience, or upon factual or formal knowledge.

Questions pertaining to experience and knowledge as a whole, the limits of knowledge, the temporality of experience and existence, and value are philosophical in the sense of radical reflection. The system of knowledge involved comprises all reflective statements about our knowledge of experience and existence.

To every system of direct knowledge or experience there corresponds a reflective system, consisting of statements about the system of direct knowledge and its constituent parts. Furthermore, there is a reflective system corresponding to all such reflective systems, and its subject matter is constituted by what may be called the "first-order" reflective systems. There would be no point in going beyond this "second-order" reflective system, because there would be little interest in the questions that might be formulated. An iterated series of reflective systems, *ad infinitum*, would be pointless.

When one considers the actual controversies of philosophy, including the proverbial warfare of the schools, it is apparent that there must be great latitude in the framing of questions. It would be naive to take all questions literally, at their apparent face value; it is necessary to inspect questions in relation to all the circumstances bearing upon them, in order to seek out their real meaning. Questions may be indirect and symptomatic, as in the case of the problem of transcendence in the recent literature. Motives prompting questions may result in evasion and subterfuge, in apologetics and misplaced faith, or simply in accommodation to the dominant interests of the existing social system.

It is the function of philosophy to exercise the most fundamental type of criticism and analysis. In order to be aware of itself, it must resort to a type of reflection more far-reaching than the "pure" reflection of transcendental philosophy. It cannot va-



validate its own inquiry without the aid of the special sciences and ordinary experience. The positive science which investigates the historical conditions and the motivation for ideas will assist in understanding the efforts of a given philosopher or trend of philosophy. The historical conditions, the avowed purposes, the conscious or unconscious motivation, evasion, and accommodation may be pointed out in scientific inquiry.

The spirit of hostility toward science occurs without interruption throughout the modern period and in our own time. There are always scholars who protest against the failures and shortcomings of science. That is done in various ways, from criticism of the unquestionable incompleteness of science (not only admitted but far more avowed by scientific spokesmen) to charges of falsification and pleas for special access to ultimate reality and values. Kant's effort to contain science was profoundly challenging even if his special assumptions were not granted. He was willing to have science go as far as his assumptions would allow. In making room for faith he was well aware of the importance of human desires for ultimate beliefs. There was no evasion or subterfuge. His effort was honestly conducted; it was inhibited alone by his historical limitations of scholarship, and by his special assumptions concerning the mind and its contributions to the world of experience. It is quite different with writers who have standpoint or institutional commitments.

## VI. THE ASSIMILATION OF SUBJECTIVISM

The ideal of a descriptive philosophy of experience has been given a rigorous expression in the literature of subjectivism. It represents the preference for a single method or explanatory pattern, as opposed to a plurality of methods and devices for inquiry. Is it possible to inspect all elements of the interpretation of experience reflectively; and does that mean beginning with the greatest conceivable ignorance? The technique of "suspension" (*the epoche*) is a helpful as well as necessary stage of descriptive inquiry. Many specialized questions are to be answered by such a descriptive procedure, including questions involving the clarification of basic ideas in terms of experience. As a purely reflective method, it is supposed to be free from the limitations of direct description,

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

which is ultimately dependent upon uncontrollable events. Is that possible? Are all the loose elements of the "lower order" of experience avoided by the adoption of a "higher order" level or reflective description? The limiting conditions of reflective description must be considered, in connection with the peculiar questions it is alone equipped to answer.

Reflection on the basis of natural, socially conditioned experience is not emancipated from the independent realm of existence. The "pure" reflection of phenomenology is designed to operate with eidetic forms and relations, with all ties to natural events placed in abeyance. It must be asked, however, whether "pure" reflection could be said to be "absolute" and "certain" if its subject matter must be supplied by realms not dependent on the mind. Although the mind has undeniably contributed to experience as one factor, there are other factors to be considered as primary, for the most part.

There is always an aim to be realized when one engages in descriptive inquiry; there are always leading ideas, however tentative they may be. If the structure of the various types of experience is in question, there must be, or there must have been, real experiences. If it is a "person" *per se* that is in question, there must have been, or there must be, real persons. The facts of ordinary experience are not denied by a reflective procedure; they are merely questioned for certain features of structure or relatedness.

For naturalistic reflection there is a preexisting world, and an individual person or knower is conditioned by his group, as well as by the natural world. Such a being has a history (a pre history so far as all reflection is concerned); he has antecedents, causal relations, and a place in society, whether prominent or humble. The importance of such reflection is shown by its function: it helps to make past experience and activity understandable, and it becomes a guide for future action. It stops when its purposes have been realized. In an epistemological sense it is not fully "radical," for it operates with assumptions, or with basic facts that transcend the scope of evidence of an individual knower.

An exponent of "radical" reflection in the epistemological sense may be a conservative in matters of socio-economic or political policy, and he may even be a reactionary. The basic ideas or fea-

tures of experience that constitute its subject matter are unaffected by the concrete problems of individual and social life. A more searching descriptive examination of our social system is not involved. What is ordinarily presupposed by experience and science becomes the theme for description and clarification: time, space, objects, statements, truth, existence, reality, meaning, evidence, value, the ego or person, and other basic ideas. However, a word of caution will be in place. Many of the concepts in question are bound up directly with scientific knowledge; and others have important relationships to ordinary experience and to the language of everyday usage. The "pure" philosopher can only ignore that at his peril. The "pure," "radical" type of description does not have to involve neglect of anything in natural experience. A "radical" glance at a miner or steelworker may not allow anything to be substracted from the realities involved. The wage scale will not be affected, just as a process of transcendental constitution would not increase or diminish the package ideal between capital and organized labor. To be sure, such interesting examples are not likely to be considered by transcendental questioners of experience. The transcendental practitioners are likely to allow all socio-economic realities to stand unquestioned, both because they may happen to have no philosophical interest in them (although they are by no means devoid of philosophical significance), and because they prefer the safer region of descriptive analysis on a level that makes no real difference in our lives.

It is always well to consider a concrete illustration; the steelworkers negotiating with the owners of the steel industry for a new contract will help to dispel illusions promoted by the conditions under which so many philosophers live. On the natural level, a definite historical event is described. It is unique as an event, while belonging to a class of events similar enough to be grouped together. On the "pure" level, the essential nature of such a wage negotiation to be outlined. Nothing that is singled out will conflict with the real event in question. There are two parties—labor and capital—and there are past agreements and practices; they are the interests of various groups affected by the proposed contract; there are legal relationships as well as considerations of the realization of human values; and there are the actual principles of human values that are acknowledged.

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

It is fair to ask what the philosophical type of “pure” reflection adds to the store of knowledge provided by the relevant sciences and ordinary experience. When philosophers, especially existentialists, refer to other types of experience, such as “anxiety,” the experiences in question may be so conceived that the senses and ordinary experience do not touch them. A whole region of such “untouchables” has emerged through the filtering process of purported philosophers of human existence.

There are natural events illustrating anxiety, with diverse causes; and no two of such events are likely to be identical. There is a range of variation, with sufficient similarity to warrant the use of the same term “anxiety.” Thus, the reference may be to possible dangers, such as loss of employment, illness, or the possible failure of one’s automobile. A state of anxiety with no concrete reference or cause would have the advantage of eluding scientific study. It would not be a part of the subject matter of science, and it would seem to qualify for special philosophical treatment. In short, it would be an “untouchable” for all naturalistic means of inquiry. The argument in defense of such a view would be completely assumptive. It would fall under the general heading of “Pure Subreption.”

This mode of thought has unlimited potentialities. Assumptively, man may have an “untouchable” essence that can be brought to an intuitive view. All the desired prerogatives can be packed away in this intuitively discerned essence, which is safe from the methods and concepts of the sciences. Guided by what Feuerbach has called the principle of sufficient wishing as the basis of belief, it would be possible to instate anything “doxically” in response to one’s hopes and fears.

### VII. THE PROGRAM OF A NATURALISTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

It is not suggested that “subjectivism” become a term of opprobrium, for it has its merits as well as its abuses. Continuing the best elements of the tradition of idealism, it is at its best in its attention to the contributive activities of conscious experience.

As has been indicated, the procedure of “pure” reflection requires specially defined conditions. One may reflect, within strictly controlled conditions, on the perception of that tree, or on this

man as viewed perceptually. It can be said generally that perception is essentially incomplete, and, reflectively, that the incompleteness is "given" completely. If one reflects upon one's experience of a man, for example, there will always be a particular situation in which he is involved. Thus he may be observed as engaged in an industrial conflict, or in economic competition. There is little to be gained in viewing the experiences reflectively in terms of the "essential" relations that were present. It would not be tremendously helpful to ascertain that there must be at least two parties to a conflict, for example. Such determinations could be safely neglected.

Reflection on one's observations, with all beliefs suspended as a matter of procedure, could, however, serve to make sure that nothing is taken for granted naively, and that all questions about evidence will be raised and if possible answered. The matter is much more simple if tables and trees are considered. Husserl's procedure in such cases is seen to be a direct continuation of descriptive analyses such as James reported. In the case of an industrial conflict, freedom from bias is necessary if an objectively true report is to be rendered. The report of one observer must be examined in connection with all the known relevant facts, and it must be compared if possible with the reports of other observer. If such reporting has its empirical limitations and difficulties, what can be said of the reflections about them? If one extracts the "essence" or attends only to what is "essential," he must be careful not to miss the full concreteness of living human beings in their actual social relations. The barrage of terms such as "noetic," "noematic," "intentional objectivity," "eidetic," etc., and the apparent depreciation of the factual level of experience, as "merely" consisting of the "this-here-now" which "could be otherwise," would seem to be most effective in evading the real problems of social experience.

The proper place of a specialized type of phenomenological analysis will not be denied; it amounts to a kind of static analysis. But whatever is "given" for it, in my experience, has been caused by an independently existing natural and cultural reality. There is no point in trying to "constitute" such a preexisting or independent world. The phenomenologist proposes to "clarify" the concept of being, or of existence, in terms of the direct experience

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

of an individual, as viewed in reflection. All concepts and meanings are to be clarified in that way, including being or existence. From the point of view of the phenomenologist, phenomenology is prior to metaphysics in a specially defined sense, in that he asks about the meaning of being in terms of experience. But if one is not to incur the use of a dogma that may be called "determination by initial clarification," declaring the clarified being to be only possible being, one must return to the actual facts. That is to say, to our knowledge of being, of existence, of the world, and of man and his activities, as provided by our common experience, direct and culturally inherited, and by the sciences. Taken all together, they provide an enormous amount of lore about existence, even though all of it may be declared to fall short of absolute certainty, and to be subject to possible future change. Reflection about such knowledge with respect to its degree of evidence is illustrated in all the sciences. Philosophy, in its function of synthesis, may have still more critical reflection to offer, on the basis of an independent realm of nature and culture, i.e., independent of myself as a knower.

If the phenomenological reduction to one's own conscious processes is performed, the way is prepared for the elaboration of a "first philosophy," or metaphysics as the fundamental study of being. The general suspension of all beliefs and theses is required for the inspection of all assumptions. That is the ideal. But the general methodological procedure need not detain us in the case of an industrial conflict. In that context we are not really afraid that we may have an experience of illusion or of hallucination. What really occurs may be far worse than the limiting case of the possible falsification of experience, which is after all a merely empty possibility so far as our knowledge is concerned. The cases of falsification and fraud that may occur in actual human conduct will not at all serve to indict natural experience, for falsehood and unfounded pretense can be unmasked in the normal course of experience. Much better is the illustration of ontology, and of the province of pure or formal logic. The clarification of the experience of time, as distinguished from temporal properties of objective, natural events, is another pertinent theme for phenomenological analysis.

Some types of inquiry are suitable for the "inner" view of

phenomenology, but by no means all types. Most types of inquiry are “outer,” not “inner;” and, ideally, all observation might better be “outer,” if suitable techniques could be devised. But we are still a long way from that happy condition. For the indefinite future there is a limited place for the subjective type of inquiry—an important place, but nevertheless a limited one. There is always the danger that the thin, ethereal realm of “pure” reflection may make such a place for itself that it fails to stop when its contribution toward clarification has been made. It may (and on occasion does) threaten not only to clarify “being” but also to provide the whole of ontology.

The world presents a methodogenic problem for a subjective procedure; and so does existence. If one begins with his own experiences, the existence of other egos, or other people, becomes a crucial problem. These problems do not occur in the same way for naturalistic modes of inquiry. The world presents endless problems to an unlimited number of investigators. The discovery of truths about the world is a never-ending process. That is a real problem, a constant problem arising in natural experience. The basic fact of the independent existence of the real world is accounted for by real science and natural experience. The problem is quite different for phenomenological analysis, once the reduction has been instituted. The world then becomes the theme for an artificial problem. That is only disturbing if one forgets the actual nature of his method, which is ancillary as well as artificial, and is not suited to provide an ontology. It can no more do that than present naturalistic methods can provide an equivalent of subjective inquiry. But the case is far worse for the limitations of subjective inquiry, which are insuperable; whereas there are no essential obstacles in the way of an ideally complete type of objective method.

The so-called “eidetic reduction” of phenomenology involves the concept of essence, of essential structures and relations. This concept was never clarified satisfactorily in the now classical literature of phenomenology. Husserl spoke of the “method of variation” to determine essences in his *Erfahrung und Urteil*. The contingency of the natural world was emphasized repeatedly, in contradistinction to the necessity attached to essences. That was understood to mean the possible nonexistence of the world, as

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

discussed in his *Erste Philosophie*. In his *Ideen*, he gave some attention to the concept of essence. In his view, to say that a given thing could be essentially different would be to admit that it has an essence. Of course, if by essence is meant “that without which a thing would not be what it is,” there is nothing to insure the continued reality of an essence. For the essential features of a thing could cease to exist along with the concrete event illustrating them. Essences would then be affairs of knowledge, illustrated by events, but without ontological independence, and without any preferred ontological status. A disengaged essence is a fiction. Husserl did not shrink from recognizing fictions as examples of idealizations. Is it not true that all the data for phenomenological inquiry belong to the order of fictions, in contrast to real existence? Essences frozen out of real events, essential relations of forms of experience, the essential structure of perception, remembrance, and other modes of experience—if such themes constitute the subject matter of phenomenological inquiry, it can only function as a premetaphysical discipline, aiming to serve ontology in a way that will supplement the procedures of the special sciences. If there is any truth to the charge that the special sciences are naive or dogmatic (and that could be only granted in a carefully qualified sense, allowing for further “critical” development), it must also be pointed out that the phenomenological discipline is empty. The factory that provides the materials for subjective descriptions, for the idealizations of the thought processes, is located outside; and the credentials of its workers often bear union labels.

The *basic fact* (or the basic facts) underlying all philosophizing (including what has been referred to by the awkward term “phenomenologizing”) comprises not only nature but also the innumerable forms of cultural activity, all of which represent historical processes. That thought is active, that experience is the resultant of outer and inner functions, and that there are “constitutive” activities of thought—these truths have been recognized by philosophers with divergent points of view, among others by writers deriving from Kant and from Marx. It is to the credit of some idealists that they emphasized the contributive activities of human experience, in opposition to a passive or a mechanical theory of knowledge. Phenomenology, as a procedure that works out in the greatest possible detail the technique involved in account-



ing for all the activities or contributions of thought processes, occupies a necessary place in philosophic inquiry.

The conception of philosophy itself, of its problems and methods, underlies the entire question of a naturalistic formulation of subjectivism. This involves the question of judging subjectivism from the point of view of naturalism, and vice versa, either *in toto* or with respect to details—in a word, the question of instating intermethodological judgements. The “longitudinal” view of the naturalistic social-historical approach to philosophy can handle many questions. Even if all questions, including the “cross-sectional” questions of formal logic and eidetic analysis cannot be handled by “longitudinal” procedures, there is no need to draw ontological consequences, especially by means of a retreat to a subjective realm. Since a real reduction to “pure” consciousness is ruled out in principle, there remains only one alternative—to add phenomenological analysis to the special procedures included under the heading of general methodology.

But is there a sense in which one can say of subjectivism the analogue of what has been said of historicism, that one never gets beyond history? Can it also be said that one never gets beyond experience, in the sense of lived experience? It is unavoidably true, but trivial, that experience indicates and presupposes the presence of experience. There are no ontological consequences of that statement. On the other hand, it can be said that as a matter of fact one never gets beyond nature. But one can think “beyond” nature, in the sense that ideal entities and possibilities can be entertained or utilized. That does not mean transcending nature. Even the capacity to entertain ideal entities in thought, and the occasion for devising them, may be traced out to real social-historical conditions.

The “garment of ideas” that is alleged to attach to the objects of experience by subjectivism becomes a “pattern of interpretation” for naturalism; but also, when truth is completely assured, it is regarded as the correct determination of the objects of experience. It is not suggested that ideas never shut us off from realities. The contrary is only too frequently the case. That is most strikingly seen in ideas concerning the actual social system. Thus ideas of military and political activities may be far removed from the facts. When the Nazi soldiers moved into Czechoslovakia with

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

the belief that they were “liberating” its people, they were surprised at the cool reception by the inhabitants. Evidently at least one “garment of ideas” did not fit the facts. The moral protestations of numerous countries involved in the First World War may also be recalled. Both sides (if not all sides) were well supplied with a convenient coverage of ideas. The citation of economic causes was unpopular. That both sides in a war may be misled, or that they may conceal their actual motives and operations by a smoke screen of avowed aims and empty generalities, can be readily illustrated historically.

What must be recognized is that ideas and judgements are to be tested for their truth. If true they are simply a statement of the facts; and if they are false or misleading, that must be pointed out, and they should not be allowed to masquerade as the truth. One can undertake reflectively to examine all of them for their evidence, and with respect to the methods by which they were instated. Ideas, beliefs, and systems of judgements in the form of theories do not necessarily shut us off from the truth. True judgements name the actual state of affairs. What turns out to be a false hypothesis may nevertheless prove to be valuable in the discovery of truth. The “questioning” of all ideas and judgements is therefore a programmatic aim which, while indispensable for the discovery of truth and the appraisal of the evidence, is not therewith an indictment of the work of the human mind. Deficient or inadequate ideas are corrected by more adequate ideas. There need be no search for a dimension of a more ultimate, “original” truth “prior” to natural experience. Such a “preobjective” realm would merely be a result of analysis, and would have the function of an explanatory abstraction, never real in itself. The search for a primitive realm of original experience turns out to be one more effort in the cause of antinaturalism. The answer is provided by a philosophy of experience within nature, that undertakes to do full justice to all the aspects of experience by means of a growing plurality of methods.

### VIII. ON THE PROMISE OF A CRITICAL MATERIALISM

To say that there is always an explanation for an event and a solution of a problem is either to express confidence in the rational

nature of the world, or to adjust the notion of explanation to whatever happens. Such a statement has then the force of a tautology. An apt description may serve as an "explanation." Whatever devices may be used, in the absence of the possibility of a definitive solution of a problem, the important condition to be observed is that the field of inquiry is objective, so that there is no escape from nature. The tradition of materialism and naturalism has maintained this principle.

When Engels discussed the nature of materialism in his essay on Feuerbach, he drew the lines most generously: the restriction of reality to nature marked one as a materialist, whereas the admission of the primacy of spirit and a supernatural realm signified idealism. For Engels as well as Marx there were historically outmoded types of materialism, there were crude and popular versions, and there was a narrow type of mechanism. Their interest in social philosophy led them to a historical materialism. In their view, there were no difficulties in principle in the way of an analysis of organic structures in terms of physical science. But that was not their problem. It was clear to them that one could be an "analytical" materialist while ignoring social problems. Materialism was conceived as a weapon, as an instrument for the transformation of society. For the evidence that reality can be known truly, Engels appealed to practice. Practical results were to determine the reaches of knowledge.

It is easy to state issue of idealism as opposed to materialism in a hopeless form. If the mind is taken to be irreducible and to be ontologically different from matter, with properties assigned to it which are not to be found in matter, it must follow that one cannot account for the mind in terms of matter. W.E. Hocking gives a clear example of that kind of argumentation in his *Types of Philosophy*, in which he assumes that the mind cannot be located in space. That he was magnanimous toward materialism was shown by his admission that it does not necessarily turn mankind back to the pig sty.

The recent revival of interest in materialism as a philosophy goes far beyond the Marxist conception. In some cases it is practically nonsignificant, if not merely whimsical. Santayana provided an example earlier in the twentieth century. His "materialism" was so conceived that he could think of himself as the only mate-

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

rialist alive. In a period in which materialism was still far from welcome academically, such a conception was reasonably sage, for it led nowhere in particular. "Naturalism" was a more convenient designation, meaning philosophy as a generalization of the sciences. That allowed considerable room for rigorous and mixed types of formulation.

The more recent philosophical interest in materialism has been associated with the growing tendency toward logical analysis. With the great increase of scientific knowledge and the controversies in psychology and philosophy in the twentieth century, it is no longer necessary to regard the argument for an alternative to materialism as difficult to meet. The understanding of the human mind depends upon physical, physiological, and psychological facts; but also upon social and cultural facts. It is added to by the structural findings of "pure" phenomenological inquiry.

The term "materialism" in its critical sense is the name for a universal philosophy, all-inclusive in its scope. The status of the mind, of the person, of social institutions, of cultural objects, of sonatas and symphonies, of mathematical truths, of aesthetic and moral values—all of these must have their place in the existential domain of materialism.

It will be asked whether all philosophical questions can be answered by materialism. That depends upon what "philosophical questions" comprise. If that is taken to include all the questions asked by contributors to the literature of philosophy, it could well be that materialism has no possible answer for some types of questions, except to provide clarification from a social-historical perspective. What goes by the name of philosophy may involve special premises, which may not be meaningful in terms of empirical or physical reality. There are limited "standpoint" questions; there are questions resulting from the type of procedure in use. A critical materialism that takes due account of the diverse types of questions, standpoints, and methods is not embarrassed by the charge that it cannot answer all questions raised by philosophical writers.

Quite different is the thesis that it is possible to translate all questions or statements about experience and reality from the language of subjectivism into the language of naturalism or materialism. The question of the possibility of the reverse should also

be considered. This is not only a problem of the use of language. It is a problem of the demonstration of facts. If an abstract language is used, it is always possible, with the aid of nominal definitions, to express any statement in other terms. Such nominal definitions, suited to a Procrustean conception of method, may be called "key definitions." To some extent this type of definition may be used in concrete languages, insofar as no falsification in fact is incurred thereby. But this has to be carefully qualified and controlled in view of the inexhaustible nature of real events or things. On the other hand, formal "nothings" (empty objects) may be substituted (for other formal "nothings" at will), within the limits of the formal properties involved. Thus, the thesis of translation from language  $L_1$  to language  $L_2$  (or from system  $S_1$  to system  $S_2$ ) may say very little. But it may say a great deal in crucial cases if more than formal operations are under discussion.

The traditional questions at issue between materialism, naturalism, and temporalism on the one hand, and spiritualism, supernaturalism, and eternalism on the other hand, retain interest for the present generation. The line of cleavage between the opposing philosophies continues to be a firm one, despite the fact that the questions at issue have been clarified and settled in principle. The claim that spiritualism provides the only satisfactory "interpretation" of reality as a whole can only be supported by advantages arbitrarily introduced into its definitions and assumptions. The outcome of that claim depends upon the explanatory merit of entities with no standing in the world of experience, so far as the available evidence goes. The epistemological arguments supporting spiritualism have been demolished by philosophical criticism, based upon our scientific knowledge and general experience. The thesis of supernaturalism has long been regarded as simply unproved, or as an unclear conception rooted in human desires. Eternalism has not been established as applicable to anything in existence, so that it could not be defended as a theory of reality. This leaves the field to materialism, naturalism, and temporalism, which may be united in one philosophical position, in accord with the present level of our knowledge. It does not necessarily involve mechanism, and certainly not the commonly understood narrow conception of mechanism; although it rules out vitalism as unnecessary at best, even if it were not defended fallaciously. It is both

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

monistic, in the sense that there is one basic type of existence, and pluralistic, in the sense that our knowledge is organized in a multiplicity of systems. The numerous systems result from the complex nature of our knowledge, including the unlimited number of formal systems; and also from the selective character of the sciences.

The extension of the term "materialism" to apply to history and human society had its reasons. The scientific autonomy so necessary for the development of physical science had been a hard-won achievement in the modern period. The autonomy of social science, the scientific and independent philosophical treatment of man and human history, required a much longer period because of the opposition to be overcome. It is understandable that supernaturalism was defended against the spread of scientific inquiry, with its various degrees and types of philosophical expression, for it served firmly established interests. Spiritualism, supernaturalism, and eternalism offered ways of justifying dominant religious and social interests.

That is not to imply that materialism was necessarily a revolutionary doctrine. It has a radical sweep which makes itself felt in the conception of man and human values. It could however be advanced as an upper-class philosophy, as was the case in ancient Greece. In the modern period it was associated with the interests of the commercial class and was a means of combatting the ideology of the feudal-ecclesiastical tradition. Because it is dependent upon the scientific level of the time, it is always "dated." The importance of scientific achievement for the development of the large-scale industrial economy could be granted, however, while denying or modifying the philosophy based upon the sciences. Thus supernaturalism may readily fit into the world view of persons primarily interested in secular activities.

The attempts to treat man and human society scientifically in the nineteenth century by such writers as Comte, Spencer, Marx, and Morgan were forerunners of a vast scientific growth, added to by scientific psychology and the social sciences in the twentieth century. Materialism becomes a name for a universal, unrestricted scientific philosophy. Comte and Spencer were in part conservative, recognizing vested economic interests. Marx and Morgan envisaged the complete transformation of economic relations, with

far-reaching social consequences. Historical materialism became a new chapter in the attempt to study man and his works, including ideas and cultural activities in an objective, scientific manner. It was ordered under dialectical materialism as the implied general philosophy, which was left in an unfinished state by its founders.

A significant philosophy always has its primary motivation. In the case of historical materialism, the revolutionary motivation focussed attention especially on economic factors (the economic "structure"), as conditioning the "superstructure" comprising social relations and cultural products. Religious, political, social, moral, and philosophical ideas were viewed as affected by economic changes, in the last analysis. The fact that religious and moral ideas, for example, were regarded as having economic consequences in turn must be borne in mind in appraising the theory. It was left in a general form, with only partial clarification, but with some striking illustrations of the structure-superstructure relationship highly suggestive for further research. But the detailed elaboration of the theory, assigning appropriate "weight" to the various factors as an explanation of historical events, was left to others. As an objective scholarly theme interesting scientists and philosophers, it amounts to a never-ending inquiry, for questions relating to the past are endless, and new questions are always emerging. The materialistic conception of history then eventuates in what may be called "the logically weighted interpretation of history." In that interpretation due weight is given to the various factors, once the scope and significance of the question to be answered have been determined. The economic factor receives full recognition thereby, and for many questions it is of deciding importance. It is not over-emphasized at the cost of other contributing factors. In some cases the economic factor may be neglected practically, if it plays no effective part in the historical events under consideration. This view is naturalistic or materialistic, and it is temporalistic. It belongs to a later stage of scholarship, for which the now classical work on historical materialism has given the basic impetus.

It is unavoidable in a discussion of materialism that mention be made of writers who did not call themselves materialists, or who would even reject that position. There are declared and unde-

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

clared varieties of materialism and naturalism. There are also near-materialists and partial materialists among those designated as naturalists. In the class of naturalists comprises all science-oriented philosophers, the views of writers such as Comte, Spencer, Huxley, and Haeckel must be considered, regardless of the restrictions of their methods and theories of knowledge, or special metaphysical interpretations that are introduced.

A thoroughgoing materialism occurs rarely. It must satisfy scientific and logical requirements in all regions of experience. There must be methodological, ontological, epistemological, valuational, and social-philosophical theses to meet those requirements. Since materialists have not organized formally, in the fashion say of personal idealists, it is not possible to enumerate a number of formally approved principles. It is evident that not all the marks of a thoroughgoing materialism are present in a mechanistic version of materialism. Justice must be done to all the facts, including human and social facts, and facts of experience and knowledge.

The invariant features of past "materialisms" amount to a group of general and abstract principles. The general designation "materialism" as applied to historical types is unavoidably thin. It is a "this-wordly" point of view, so that there must be a principle restricting all talk of ontology or existence to nature. That will be *P (1): All existence is within nature*. A supernature is ruled out as a mode of existence; it has no ontological status. Accordingly, *P (2) is There is no supernature as a mode of existence or reality*. Moreover, existence occurs in the form of events which are individual and unique. That is, *P (3): Existence consists of individual, unique events*. The knowledge of the behavior of events is obviously dependent upon scientific inquiry and general experience. Thus, *P (4): Laws, generalizations, and explanations of events are subject to the standards of the scientific determination of evidence*. The process of inquiry is a complex event, with a locus in the physical realm, and with conditioning factors derived from the social system and the cultural tradition, as well as from organic factors. That means, *P (5): All inquiry is within nature, with multiple conditioning factors, all of them within nature*.

Whether our experience reports the features of existence truly, just as they are (the contention of a "direct realism") or "represent-



tatively," complicated by forms of interpretation, is a secondary problem for materialism. It is a primary problem for an idealistic philosophy that is instated by means of epistemological arguments and analyses. For materialism, the "interpretations of the mind" are modes of behavior of the socially conditioned organism. Idealization and ideal identification are features of experience with an instrumental function. They name practical devices of experience, and they do not signify any additions to the content of ontology. To speak with Berkeley's language, although not at all in his spirit, they do not add to the furniture of the earth; and they would indeed find a place in the choir of angels if heaven could find a place in ontology.

#### IX. CONCLUSION: ON DIALECTIC AND EXPERIENCE

Whitehead once declared that there is nothing behind the veil of experience pictured by science, but that there is very much on that veil. This declaration has its region of merit. But it may also be close to idealism, if the term "veil" is taken to suggest a restriction to the process of human experience. Although it is appropriate to endorse the scientific enterprise and its successes, there is a further truth to be acknowledged. There is very much—an infinite amount—behind or beyond experience. It is important first of all to determine what it is that is registered on the veil of experience; the physical universe is surely not to be equated or correlated with any amount of actual experience. Furthermore, it is important that experience be understood literally, in terms of the interrelationship of sentient beings with their environment. A metaphysics should not be locked up in the conception of experience. Neither should experience become in effect a straitjacket foisted upon the realm of existence; it should not be a means for imposing conditions of existence.

Since experience is coextensive with the process of interaction between man and his environment, it has a definite place in nature. That there is no process of interaction apart from space, time, and physical reality is a primary truth that predetermines the course of philosophic thought. The motive to escape from the confines of physical existence has led to strange operations with the concept of experience. Since the natural process of experience could not pos-

## *Toward a Naturalistic Philosophy of Experience*

sibly transcend nature, all such operations must proceed assumptively with a specially conceived type of experience, along with restrictions imposed upon reality.

It has been said, in the spirit of "dialectic," that to know a limit is to know beyond the limit. Apart from possible experience and its objects, however, there would be only a vacuous otherness. But it can be said with evidence that there is always more in existence than could be experienced actually. The correlation between experience and reality need not be a restriction to an actual knower, or to any group of actual knowers. It can be understood in an indifferent sense, with no consequences for the nature of reality or for the scope of experience and reality. If experience is given a special ontological nature and is thereby lifted out of nature, it is likely to become a means for the ingestion of nature. Epistemological arguments combine with extra philosophical motives of faith to assimilate nature to experience, and to assign experience to an alleged higher type of being. The well-known "Absolute" of the philosophical tradition has been succeeded in recent philosophy by a vague and mysterious "transcendence." The scientific use of experience, with its emphasis upon clarity and evidence, yields therewith to obscurity and pretense. It is the "negation" of experience, which means here, the misuse of experience.

The term "dialectic" has been traditionally on the governing side of experience, along with "reason" and the whole apparatus of transcendentalism. In its larger sense it has named the function of conferring order and form on a fluid process of events, from the physical level to ethical standards. If the knowledge of the events of nature was not to be regarded as lacking in certainty, a suitable net was to be thrown over them, or built-in principles of change and order provided. The commandment imposed upon the world of experience had the force of a general "Thou shalt," even if that was expressed by means of another vocabulary. The *logos* of Heraclitus adumbrated the eternalism of Hegel; and traces of it live on in the usage of many of the later dialectical philosophers.

The conception of "dialectic" expresses transition, transitoriness, and negation; it is a response to the awareness of opposites. That life engenders death is testified to by all experience. On the other hand, it is not equally clear that death engenders life. Considerable looseness of language would be required to fit both directions into

one formula, without doing violence to the facts. It was an ancient insight that the life of nature follows from the death of nature. But experience gives no basis for the necessity of such a transition. The talk of necessity belongs to a conception operating "from above down," which determines reality. This culminates in a theory of "dialectic" as a system of ontological necessities operating with successive negations, and these are interpreted in various ways. Quantity plays an important part, but it cannot be left as a merely tenuous abstraction. What is needed is empirical inquiry in every case.

The logically controlled use of "dialectic" as an explanatory principle, or as a generalization from the evidence of experience, will not be questioned. What is admittedly a valuable synthetic generalization based upon experience is not however to be transformed into an essence-theory somehow independent of experience and yet conditioning it. The independent order of nature is investigated part by part in an endless process of inquiry. General determinations are subject to the findings of experience, and must be justified by the evidence. The general requirement must be met, that a philosophy of experience conform to the knowledge of existence, including experience as a type of existence.