THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

whether it can indefinitely pursue the task of trying to show that the results of science when they are properly interpreted do not mean what they seem to say, or of proving, by means of an examination of possibilities and limits of knowledge, that after all they rest upon a foundation congruous with traditional beliefs about values.

Since the root of the traditional conception of philosophy is the separation that has been made between knowledge and action, between theory and practice, it is to the problem of this separation that we are to give attention. Our main attempt will be to show how the actual procedures of knowledge, interpreted after the pattern formed by experimental inquiry, cancel the isolation of knowledge from overt action. Before engaging in this attempt, we shall in the next chapter show the extent to which modern philosophy has been dominated by effort to adjust to each other two systems of belief, one relating to the objects of knowledge and the other to objects of ideal value.

CHAPTER III

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

It is the theme of the present chapter that modern philosophy, understanding by this term that which has been influenced by the rise of the newer natural science, has contained within itself an inner division. It has tried to combine acceptance of the conclusions of scientific inquiry as to the natural world with acceptance of doctrines about the nature of mind and knowledge which originated before there was such a thing as systematic experimental inquiry. Between the two there is an inherent incompatibility. Hence the best efforts of philosophy have been constantly frustrated by artificiality and by controversial conflicts. Of all the many artificial problems which philosophy has thereby inflicted upon itself, we are here concerned with but one, the one with which the last chapter was concerned in a general way. This is the supposed need of reconciling, of somehow adjusting, the findings of scientific knowledge with the validity of ideas concerning value.

For obvious reasons, Greek thought, from which stems the philosophic conceptions about the nature of knowledge as the sole valid grasp or vision of reality, did not have this problem. Its physics were in complete harmony with its metaphysics, and the latter were teleological and qualitative. Natural objects themselves tend, throughout their changes, toward ideal ends that are the final objects of highest knowledge. A science of natural changes is possible only because of this fact. The natural world is knowable in as far as its changes are dominated by forms or essences that are immutable, complete or perfect.
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

In aspiring to actualize these prior and perfect forms, natural phenomena present characters in virtue of which they may be known, that is, defined and classified. Moreover, these ideal forms form reason in its full and perfect actuality of Being. To know them is to enjoy communion with perfect Being and thus to enjoy the highest happiness. For man as a rational and yet natural being strives also to realize his end, and this realization is identical with apprehension of true and immutable Being. In this apprehension, man rises above the mutabilities of the natural world and comes into possession of a perfection which is incapable of lack and deprivation. Pure rationality is in its purity above physical nature. But in his essential being, his rationality, man is himself above nature. The reality which satisfies the quest for cognitive certitude thus also affords the unqualified possession of perfect good.

The need of adjustment of the results of knowledge and the apprehension and enjoyment of the highest good came when, in the seventeenth century, new methods of inquiry gave an entirely new turn to the conceptions which could be entertained about the natural world.

Very early in its history, modern science asserted that the teleology of Greek science was a futile and mischievous encumbrance, wholly mistaken in its idea of the goal and method of scientific inquiry, and putting mind on the wrong track. It repudiated the doctrine of ideal forms, rejecting them as "occult." As the new scientific method progressed, it became increasingly clear that the material of knowledge, provided one took science as the model form of knowledge, gave no justification for attributing to the objects of cognitive certainty those perfections which in Greek science had been their essential properties. At the same time, there was no disposition to break away from the tradition according to which the valid status of values must be determined by knowledge. Hence the crucial problem which modern philosophy found forced upon it, in as far as it accepted the conclusions of the new science while it also retained three significant elements of ancient thought: the first, that certainty, security, can be found only in the fixed and unchanging; the second, that knowledge is the only road to that which is intrinsically stable and certain; the third, that practical activity is an inferior sort of thing, necessary simply because of man's animal nature and the necessity for winning subsistence from the environment.

In one significant respect, moreover, modern thought started with accentuation of the gulf between the values which are intrinsic to the real and hence are not dependent upon action, and those goods which, being merely instrumental, are the objects of practical activity. For Greek thought never made a sharp separation between the rational and perfect realm and the natural world. The latter was indeed inferior and infected with non-being or privation. But it did not stand in any sharp dualism to the higher and perfect reality. Greek thinking accepted the senses, the body and nature with natural piety and found in nature a hierarchy of forms leading degree by degree to the divine. The soul was the realized actuality of the body, as reason was the transcendent realization of the intimation of ideal forms contained in the soul. The senses included within themselves forms which needed only to be stripped of their material accretions to be true stepping stones to higher knowledge.

Modern philosophy inherited the framework of Greek ideas about the nature of knowledge although rejecting its conclusions about natural objects. But it inherited them through the medium of Hebraic and Christian religion. The natural world in this tradition was fallen and corrupt. With the Greeks the element of rationality was supreme and the good came into human possession by the realized development of reason.
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

The intervening religious development made the ethical more fundamental than the rational. The most significant issues concerned the relation of will, rather than intellect, to supreme and perfect Being. Thus there was effected a reversal of perspective as to the relations in perfect Being of the properties in virtue of which it is respectively an object of true knowledge and of perfect good and bliss. Righteousness, in accordance with the Hebraic factors adopted into Christian theology, was primary, and strictly intellectual properties were subordinate. The participation of the mind in perfect being could not be attained by intellect until the intellect was itself morally redeemed and purified. The difference between the pure Greek tradition and the Christian is brought out in some words of Cardinal Newman. "The Church holds that it were better for sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fall, and for all the many millions who are upon it to die of starvation in extremest agony rather than that one soul should commit one venial sin."

In saying that modern philosophy inherited the Greek tradition as passed through this intervening medium of Christian thought, I do not mean to say that all features of the Christian view of nature in relation to God and the fall of man were taken over. On the contrary, distinctively modern thought is marked by a revival of the Greek interest and delight in nature and natural observation. Thinkers deeply influenced by modern science often ceased to believe in divine revelation as supreme authority and adhered to natural reason in its place. But the supreme place of good as a defining property of the ultimately real remained the common premise of Jew, Catholic and Protestant. If not vouched for by revelation, it was warranted by the "natural light" of intellect. This phase of the religious tradition was so deeply ingrained in European culture that no philosopher except the thoroughgoing sceptics escaped its influence. In this sense modern philosophy began its career with an accentuation of the gap which exists between ultimate and eternal values and natural objects and goods.

Thinkers who remained within the framework of the classic tradition held that the moral perfection which is the inherent property of ultimate Being prescribes the law of human action. It constitutes the norm of all significant and enduring values. Reason is necessary to furnish the foundation of truths without which observations—or experience in general—cannot be constituted a science. But it is even more necessary to provide for the apprehension of the ultimate and immutable end and law of moral action. When the hierarchical ascent of nature to mind and to ideal forms was disturbed by the conviction that the subject-matter of natural science is exclusively physical and mechanistic, there arose the dualistic opposition of matter and spirit, of nature and ultimate ends and goods.

Qualities, excellencies and ends that were extruded from nature by the new science found their exclusive abode and warrant in the realm of the spiritual, which was above nature and yet which was its source and foundation. The function of reason in determination and enjoyment of the good no longer formed the consummation of nature. It had a distinct and separate office. The tension created by the opposition and yet necessary connection of nature and spirit gave rise to all the characteristic problems of modern philosophy. It could neither be frankly naturalistic, nor yet fully spiritualistic to the disregard of the conclusions of physical science. Since man was on one hand a part of nature and on the other hand a member of the realm of spirit, all problems came to a focus in his double nature.

The philosophy of Spinoza is noteworthy for its frank statement of this problem and for the uniquely thoroughgoing way in which, given its terms, it was solved. An unqualified
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

naturalism in the sense in which he understood the new science was combined by a miracle of logic with an equally complete acceptance of the idea, derived from the religious tradition, that ultimate reality is the measure of perfection and the norm for human activity. The union thus effected is so complete as to afford a pattern of instruction regarding the problem of modern thought. In him, more than in any modern thinker, there are exhibited complete loyalty to the essential element in the Hebraic tradition—ultimate and self-sufficing Being as the standard of all human thought and action—with perpetuation of the Greek theory of knowledge and its exaltation of reason over experience, together with enthusiastic adherence to the new scientific view of nature. Thus he thought to obtain from the very heart of the new science a conclusive demonstration of the perfection of Being through which the human soul can alone obtain absolute security and peace. A scientific comprehension was to give, in full reality, by rational means, that assurance and regulation of life that non-rational religions had pretended to give.

In his unfinished essay on the The Improvement of the Human Understanding, he frankly states his impelling motive. He had experienced, he says, that everything in the ordinary course of experience is empty and futile. In desperation he set himself to inquiring whether there is not a good capable of communicating itself, a good so assured and complete that the mind can adhere to it to the exclusion of all else: a good which when found and taken possession of would give him eternally a constant and supreme bliss. For he had discovered that the cause of the perturbations and vanities of life was that affection and desire were fixed upon things which perish. But "love directed toward that which is eternal and infinite feeds the mind wholly with joy unmixed with any sadness. . . . The true good of man is that he should attain, together with

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

others if possible, to a knowledge of the union which the mind has with Nature as a whole." He concludes, "I wish to direct all the sciences to this one end and scope in order that we may attain to such perfection."

Certain, enduring and unalloyed Good through the union of mind with the whole of nature is the theme developed in detail in the Ethics. There results a philosophy which unites the Greek idea that man's highest good is demonstrative rational knowledge of immutable Being; the Hebrew and Christian conviction that the soul is capable of a way of life which secures constant and pure blessedness, and the premises and method of the new science, as he saw the latter. Nature was completely intelligible; it was at one with mind; to apprehend nature as a whole was to attain a cognitive certainty which also afforded a complete certainty of good for the purpose of control of appetite, desire and affection—this latter specification being one which Greek thought did not include and which it doubtless would have thought the height of presumption to lay claim to. Right ordering of human conduct, knowledge of the highest reality, the enjoyment of the most complete and unvarying value or good, were combined in one inclusive whole by means of adoption of the ideas of the complete interdependence of all things according to universal and necessary law—an idea which he found to be the basis of natural science.

There have been few attempts in modern philosophy as bold and as direct as is this one to effect a complete integration of scientific method with a good which is fixed and final, because based on the rock of absolute cognitive certainty. Few thinkers have been as willing to sacrifice details of the older tradition in order to save its substance as was Spinoza. The outcry from all quarters against him proved that, in the minds of his contemporaries and successors, he had made too many concessions to naturalistic science and necessary law. But this protest should
not conceal from us two essential considerations about his work. The first of these is that Nature, as the object of knowledge, is capable of being the source of constant good and a rule of life, and thus has all the properties and the functions which the Jewish-Christian tradition attributed to God. He was hence entitled to confer upon it the name *Natura sive Deus*. For Nature, as he conceived it, carried with it all the emotional associations and all the moral force and authority found in the older religious view of God. It provided an immutable End and Law for conduct, and it was the source, when rationally known, of perfect peace and unqualified security. Nature was naturally—that is rationally—known, and knowledge of it was such a perfect good that when it takes possession of the human mind the lesser and otherwise disturbing objects of affection and passion are so included within it as to fall into their proper place of subordination: that is, of complete control.

The second consideration is that Spinoza exemplifies with extraordinary completeness the nature of the problem of all modern philosophies which have not deserted the classic tradition, and yet have made the conclusions of modern science their own. What makes Spinoza so admirably the exponent of this problem is that he adopted with ardor and without the reservations displayed by most modern thinkers the essential elements in the Greek tradition of intellectualism and naturalism, the Hebrew-Christian idea of the priority and primacy of the properties of ultimate Being which concern the control of human affection and endeavor, and the method and conclusions of the new natural science—as he saw them.

The reluctance of other thinkers to follow the model of solution of their common problems which he offered was not, however, wholly due to their desire to save portions of the older moral and religious tradition that he was willing to surrender for what seemed to him a greater and more enduring good—the unification of science with an ethico-religious control of the springs of human conduct. There were difficulties from the side of science itself. Its experimental trend, as distinct from its mathematical strain, was adverse to Spinoza’s unquestioning faith that the logical order and connection of ideas is one with the order and connection of existence. For as the new science developed, the experimental necessity for sense data and verification by observation reduced the role of logical and mathematical conceptions from a primary to a secondary rank. Even his predecessor Descartes, also a devotee of rationalistic method, had seen that there had to be some warrant for the application of ideas to nature. Other philosophers felt that after all the perfections with which Spinoza had so richly dowered Nature as the object of knowledge, were, in spite of his professed denial of teleology, the fruit of emotion rather than of logic.

We do not need to trace these complications. They are important for our purpose because they induced so many variations in the treatment of a single underlying problem: the adjustment to each other of two unquestioned convictions: One, that knowledge in the form of science reveals the antecedent properties of reality; the other, that the ends and laws which should regulate human affection, desire and intent can be derived only from the properties possessed by ultimate Being. If the rest of the chapter is given to a brief survey of the diverse methods of adjustment which have been propounded, it is not for the sake of conveying information upon matters familiar to all students of philosophy. I am concerned only to set forth illustrations of the way in which unyielding adherence to traditional premises regarding the object of true knowledge and the source of moral authority have set the problem of modern thought, and to provide illustration of the diverse and incompatible ways in which “solutions” have been sought.
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

Before the rise of the new science of nature there was developed a method for adjusting the claims of natural reason and moral authority by means of a division of the field: the doctrine of "the two-fold nature of truth." The realm of the ends and values authoritative for conduct was that of the revealed will of God. The organ for its apprehension was faith. Nature is the object of knowledge and with respect to it the claims of reason are supreme. The two realms are so separate that no conflict can occur. The work of Kant may be regarded as a perpetuation of the method of adjustment by means of partition of territories. He did not of course demarcate the realm of moral authority on the ground of faith in revelation. He substituted the idea of faith grounded in practical reason. But he continued the older distinction of one realm where the intellect has sway and one in which the requirements of will are supreme. He retained also the notion of an isolation of the two fields so complete that there is no possible overlapping and hence no possibility of interference. If the kingdoms of science and of righteousness nowhere touch, there can be no strife between them. Indeed, Kant sought to arrange their relations or lack of relations in such a way that there should be not merely non-interference but a pact of at least benevolent neutrality.

Kant's system bristles with points of internal difficulty; many of these are objects of controversy. Ignoring these as irrelevant to our problem, it can fairly be asserted that the main characteristic of his system is precisely a division of territory between the objects of cognitive certitude and those of equally complete practical moral assurance. The titles of his two chief works, the Critiques of Pure Reason and of Practical Reason are memorial to this interpretation. The first aims to make secure, on rational a priori grounds, the foundations of natural knowledge; the second performs a like office for the foundations of moral and religious conceptions. Science is limited to phenomena in space and time in order that the world of higher and noumenal realities may be appropriated by ideals and spiritual values. Each has complete jurisdiction and undisputed sovereignty in its own realm.

Heine's view that the subject-matter of the practical critique was an afterthought, a concession to the needs and fears of the multitude represented by his manservant, is wittily expressed, but will not stand critical examination. Kant's argument for the justification of the certitude of the foundations of knowledge is couched at every point so as to indicate the necessity of a higher although intellectually unapproachable realm. There was nothing factitious, in Kant's own conception, in the way in which the two kingdoms excluded each other and yet made each other necessary. On the contrary, the neat way in which the elements of each dovetailed into those of the other was to him a convincing proof of the necessity of the system as a whole. If the dovetailing was the product of his own intellectual carpentry, he had no suspicion of the fact.

On the contrary, he thought he had disposed, once for all, of many of the most perplexing problems of prior philosophy. Upon the scientific side he was concerned to provide a final philosophical justification, beyond the reach of scepticism, for the Newtonian science. His conception of space and time as necessary forms of the possibility of perception was the justification of the application of mathematics to natural phenomena. Categories of thought necessary to understand perceived objects—an understanding necessary to science—supplied the foundation of permanent substances and uniform relations of sequence—or causation—demanded by the Newtonian theories of atoms and uniform laws. The tendency of the mind to pass beyond the limits of experience to the thought of unconditioned and self-sufficient totalities, "Ideas" of the
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

universe, soul and God, was explained; and while cognitive validity was denied these Ideals, they were admitted as regulative ideals which directed inquiry and interpretation. Above all, the thought of these trans-phenomenal and super-empirical realities left room that practical reason with its imperative of duty and postulate of free choice could fill. Thus the supremacy of righteousness according to the Hebraic-Christian tradition was justified independently of revelation by purely rational means. Moral demand for the final and unquestionable authority of duty authorized and necessitated practical certainty as to the reality of objects beyond experience and incapable of cognitive verification. The quest for certainty was fulfilled; cognitive certainty in the region of phenomena, practical certainty in the realm of moral authority.

This outline of obvious points in Kant's system passes over points which have received much attention—such as the "subjectivity" of his view of space and time and the categories; the contrast of the a priori and the empirical, as well as, in the Critique of Practical Reason, the seemingly arbitrary way in which faith in God and immortality are introduced. But with reference to his ultimate aim of establishing a perfect and unshakeable adjustment of the certainty of intellectual beliefs and of moral beliefs, these matters are secondary. The point on the practical side that had to be protected at all hazards was that no concrete and empirical material be permitted to influence ultimate moral realities—since this would give natural science jurisdiction over them and bring them under the sway of mechanical causality. On the cognitive side, the corresponding point to be certified was restriction of natural science to a strictly phenomenal world. For then there could be no encroachment of specific scientific conclusions upon ultimate, that is ethico-religious, belief.

In its essential framework, the Kantian scheme thus agreed

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

marvelously well with the needs of the historic crisis. It gave freedom—and a blessing—to both science and morals, with a guarantee that they could never interfere with each other. Granted the acceptance of the traditional belief that security of moral authority depends upon some source in Being apart from the experiences by which values are incarnated in concrete objects and institutions, the Kantian scheme has such merits that it is safe to predict that as long as that tradition continues to have vitality, the main elements of the Kantian system will have devoted disciples.

The Kantian method is of course but one of a number of the philosophic attempts at harmonization. There is one phase of it which may be said to continue the Cartesian attempt to find the locus of absolute certainty within the knowing mind itself, surrendering both the endeavor of the ancients to discover it in the world without, and of the medieval world to find it in an external revelation. In his search for forms and categories inherent in the very structure of knowing activity, Kant penetrated far below the superficial level of innate ideas in which his predecessors had tried to find the locus of certainty. Some of them were conditions of the possibility of there being such a thing as cognitive experience. Others were conditions of there being such a thing as moral experience. His idealistic successors pushed their way further on the road which Kant had broken—even though he insisted that the doors were locked to traveling on it any further than he had gone.

Solution by the method of partition is always unsatisfactory to minds with an ambition for comprehensiveness, just as it commends itself to those of a more modest turn. Moreover, the very neatness with which the essential traits of Kant's two realms fitted each other suggested a single underlying and unifying principle. And Kant himself in various writings had suggested, particularly in his Critique of Judgment, considera-
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

tions which softened the sharpness of their separation from each other. Fichte and Hegel saw in these things a challenge to complete a work which Kant had only confusedly undertaken and had not had the intellectual courage and clarity to execute.

The controlling purpose of the Post-Kantian idealistic systems was to accomplish by way of integration the task which Kant attempted by way of division. The contrast between the methods of Fichte and Hegel is worth a passing notice. Fichte was wholly in the Hebraic tradition of the supremacy of the moral. He accordingly attempted unification of the cognitive and the practical from the side of moral self, the self from which issues the imperative of duty. The “is” of knowledge is to be derived from the “ought to be” of morals. The effort does not seem promising; it appears to speak more for the ethical ardor of his personality than for the sobriety of his understanding. Yet given the premises as to the certainty and supremacy in Being of ideal values prior to all action, Fichte’s method has a logic not to be impeached. If the moral ideal is the ultimate reality, it is proper to derive the structure and characteristics of the actual world from the necessities the ideal imposes and the demands it makes. Argument from the actual to the ideal is a precarious undertaking, since the actual is in so many respects so thoroughly un-ideal.

Hegel, on the other hand, is never weary of pouring contempt upon an Ideal that merely ought to be. “The actual is the rational and the rational is the actual.” There is a definite relaxation of the stern Puritanism of Fichte. The moral task of man is not to create a world in accord with the ideal but to appropriate intellectually and in the substance of personality the meanings and values already incarnate in an actual world. Viewed historically, Hegel’s system may be looked on as a triumph in material content of the modern secular and positivistic spirit. It is a glorification of the here and now, an indica-

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

tion of the solid meanings and values contained in actual institutions and arts. It is an invitation to the human subject to devote himself to the mastery of what is already contained in the here and now of life and the world, instead of hunting for some remote ideal and repining because it cannot be found in existence. In form, however, the old tradition remains intact. The validity of these meanings and values, their “absolute” character, is proved by their being shown to be manifestations of the absolute spirit according to a necessary and demonstrative logical development—even though Hegel had to create a new logic to establish the identity of meaning and being.

The Hegelian system is somewhat too grandiose for present taste. Even his followers find it necessary to temper the claims made for his logical method. And yet if there be a synthesis in ultimate Being of the realities which can be cognitively substantiated and of the meanings which should command our highest admiration and approval, then concrete phenomena, barring a complete corruption due to some lapse, ought to be capable of being exhibited as definite manifestations of the eternal union of the real-ideal. Perhaps there is no system more repugnant to the admirers of Spinoza than the Hegelian; and yet Hegel himself felt, and with considerable reason, that he was simply doing in a specific and concrete way what Spinoza had undertaken in a formal and mathematical way. However, the point important for our purpose is that in both Fichte and Hegel there is expressed the animating spirit of modern idealism in dealing with the basic problem of all modern philosophies. They have sought by examination of the structure of the knowing function (psychological structure in the subjective idealisms and logical structure in the objective idealisms and usually with a union of both strains) to show that no matter what the detailed conclusions of the special sciences, the ideal authority of truth, goodness, and beauty are secure possessions.
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

of ultimate Being independently of experience and human action.

There have been attempts at adjustment of the results of knowledge and the demands of ethico-religious authority which have not been mindful of the classic tradition. Instead of bringing nature within the fold of value, the order has been reversed. The physical system has been treated as the supporter and carrier of all objects having the properties which confer authority over conduct. A word about the system of Herbert Spencer among the moderns is appropriate in this connection, as one about Lucretius would be if antiquity were the theme. The doctrine that universal evolution is the highest principle of the physical world, one in which all natural laws are brought to unity, is accompanied with the idea that the goal of evolution marks the ideal of moral and religious beliefs and endeavors. This conclusion is as surely an attempt to adjust the two elements of the problem as anything found in any idealistic system. Were there any doubt about this point, Spencer's insistence on the evanescence of evil in the ongoing evolutionary process would remove it. All evils are the fruits of transitional maladjustments in the movement of evolution. The perfect adjustment of man, personal and collective, to the environment is the evolutionary term, and is one which signifies the elimination of all evil, physical and moral. The ultimate triumph of justice and the union of the good of self with the good of others are identical with the working out of physical law. In objection to this or that phase of the Spencerian system it is easily forgotten that fundamentally he is occupied with the usual quest for a certainty in which a warrant of necessary knowledge is employed to establish the certainty of Good in reality.

Comprehensive systems are for the moment out of fashion; and yet if cognitive certainty is possible and if it is admitted

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

that the justification of value lies in its being a property of the realities which are the objects of knowledge, comprehensiveness, whether of the Hegelian or the Spencerian type, would seem to be the proper ideal of philosophy. And if one believes that the conclusions of science exhaust the scope of the universe, then certainly all moral, social and political goods must fall within them; in that case such a task as that of Spencer's is not only legitimate but one which philosophy cannot evade without being subject to the charge of bad faith.

One more illustration awaits us. Contemporary philosophy in its realistic forms shows a tendency to revert to adjustment of the cognitive realm and the realm of values by means of the method of isolation. In detail, however, the method pursued is unlike that of Kant in that it does not start from the knowing mind but rather from the objects of knowing. These, it is argued, show a radical division into the existential and the non-existential. Physical science deals with the former; mathematics and logic with the latter. In the former, some things, namely sense-data, are objects of infallible apprehension; while certain essences or subsistences, immaterial in nature because non-existential and non-physical, are the subjects of an equally assured cognition by reason. Uncertainty appertains only to combinations of ultimate and simple objects, combinations formed in reflective thought. As long as we stick to the self-guaranteed objects, whether of sense or of pure intellect, there is no opening for any uncertainty or any risk.

In some of these realisms, intrinsic values are included among the immaterial essences of which we have infallible and immediate knowledge. Thus the scheme of cognitive certainty applies all the way through. Science, in its naturalistic sense, is true of existences; ultimate morals and logic are true of essences. Philosophy has to do with the just partitioning of the
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

field, and with the problems that arise from the union of existences and essences.

Still another conception of philosophy of a more austere character has, however, been advanced. According to this view, values are hopelessly entangled with human affections and impulses, and are too variable to be the objects of any kind of sure knowledge—of anything but variable opinion and guesswork. The great mistake of historic philosophy has been to admit values in any shape within the sacred enclosure of perfect science. Philosophy is concerned only with propositions which are true in any possible world, existentially actual or not. Propositions about good and evil are too dependent upon a special form of existence, namely human beings with their peculiar traits, to find a place in the scheme of science. The only propositions which answer to the specification of pure universality are logical and mathematical. These by their nature transcend existence and apply in every conceivable realm. Owing to the recent developments of mathematics, a philosophy emancipated from the contingencies of existence is now for the first time possible.

This view of philosophy has been objected to on the ground that it rests on an arbitrary limitation of its subject-matter. But it may be questioned whether this restriction is not a logical development of that strain in historic philosophy which identifies its subject-matter with whatever is capable of taking on the form of cognitive certainty. Without committing one's self to the subjective view of values that seems to be implied, values are so intimately connected with human affections, choices and endeavors, that there is ground for holding that the insincere apologetic features of historic philosophies are connected with the attempt to combine a theory of the values having moral authority with a theory of ultimate Being. And a moderate amount of acquaintance with these philosophies discloses that

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

they have been interested in justifying values drawn from current religious faiths and moral codes, not just eternal values as such—that they have often used the concept of universal and intrinsic values to cover those which, if not parochial, were at least exponents of temporal social conditions.

The limitation of philosophy to propositions about what is logically possible eliminates all special physical propositions as well as all matters of morals, art and religion. In its chaste austerity it seems to fulfill the demand for cognitive certainty as no other conception of philosophy can do. Whether one accepts or rejects it, there is provided by it an explicit way in which to raise a question. Because of the sharpness of its delimitation of the office of philosophy, it elicits clearly the problem of the idea to be entertained of that office. For with the restriction that is made there remains over and untouched a problem of the greatest possible human significance. What is the bearing of our existential knowledge at any time, the most dependable knowledge afforded by inquiry, upon our judgments and beliefs about the ends and means which are to direct our conduct? What does knowledge indicate about the authoritative guidance of our affections, desires and affections, our plans and policies? Unless knowledge gives some regulation, the only alternative is to fall back on custom, external pressure and the free play of impulse. There is then need of some theory on this matter. If we are forbidden to call this theory philosophy by the self-denying ordinance which restricts it to formal logic, need for the theory under some other name remains.

There is a fatal ambiguity in the conception of philosophy as a purely theoretical or intellectual subject. The ambiguity lies in the fact that the conception is used to cover both the attitude of the inquirer, the thinker, and the character of the subject-matter dealt with. The engineer, the physician, the moralist deal with a subject-matter which is practical; one, that
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

is, which concerns things to be done and the way of doing them. But as far as personal disposition and purpose is concerned, their inquiries are intellectual and cognitive. These men set out to find out certain things; in order to find them out, there has to be a purgation of personal desire and preference, and a willingness to subordinate them to the lead of the subject-matter inquired into. The mind must be purified as far as is humanly possible of bias and of that favoritism for one kind of conclusion rather than another which distorts observation and introduces an extraneous factor into reflection.

Except, then, on the premise that the subject-matter of philosophy is fixed properties of antecedent Being, the fact that it is an intellectual pursuit signifies nothing beyond the fact that those who engage in it should respect the canons of fairness, impartiality, of internal consistency and external evidence. It carries no implication with it—except on the basis of a prior assumption—save that of intellectual honesty. Only upon the obverse of the adage that whose drives fat oxen must himself be fat, can it be urged that logical austeriy of personal attitude and procedure demands that the subject-matter dealt with must be made lean by stripping it of all that is human concern. To say that the object of philosophy is truth is to make a moral statement which applies to every inquiry. It implies nothing as to the kind of truth which is to be ascertained, whether it be of a purely theoretical nature, of a practical character, or whether it concerns the bearing of one upon the other. To assert that contemplation of truth for its own sake is the highest ideal is to make a judgment concerning authoritative value. To employ this judgment as a means of determining the office of philosophy is to violate the canon that inquiry should follow the lead of subject-matter.

It is fair, then, to conclude that the question of the relations of theory and practice to each other, and of philosophy

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

to both of them, has often been compromised by failure to maintain the distinction between the theoretical interest which is another name for intellectual candor and the theoretical interest which defines the nature of subject-matter. Over and above this fact, there is reason to suppose that much of the impatience with the suggestion of the practical in connection with philosophy is due to the habit of associating "practical" with affairs of narrow personal concern. The significance of the idea cannot be thus sheared down without an elimination of intellectual regard for the values which are to have authority over our desires and purposes and thus over our entire conduct. It would seem as if only the cynical skeptic would willingly take such a stand.

The discussion has indulged in an excursion from the theme of the problem of modern philosophies. But it is relevant to our main topic if it serves to make clear the fundamental ground for the disparaging view held of practical activity. Depreciation is warranted on the basis of two premises: first, namely, that the object of knowledge is some form of ultimate Being which is antecedent to reflective inquiry and independent of it; secondly, that this antecedent Being has among its defining characteristics those properties which alone have authority over the formation of our judgments of value—that is, of the ends and purposes which should control conduct in all fields—intellectual, social, moral, religious, esthetic. Given these premises—and only if they are accepted—it follows that philosophy has for its sole office the cognition of this Being and its essential properties.

I can understand that the tenor of my discussion may have aroused a certain impatience among those familiar with current treatment of politics, morals and art. It will be asked: Where is there any evidence that this treatment is controlled by regard for antecedently fixed qualifications of what is taken to be ulti-
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

mately real? It cannot be denied, and I have no interest in denying, that the vast bulk of critical discussion of such matters is conducted on quite different grounds, with hardly even a side glance at any standards which flow from any philosophy of ultimate grounds. This admission causes two important considerations to stand out the clearer. Traditional religion does refer all ultimate authoritative norms to the highest reality, the nature of God; and failure on the part of those professedly accepting this religion to carry this reference over to concrete criticism and judgment in special fields of morals, politics and art, is only an evidence of the confusion in which modern thought is entangled. It is this fact which gives the strict adherents to old beliefs, such as those trained in the Catholic faith, an intellectual advantage over “liberals.” For the latter have no philosophy adequate for their undertakings and commitments.

This consideration brings us to the second point. The failure to employ standards derived from true Being in the formation of beliefs and judgments in concrete fields is proof of an isolation from contemporary life that is forced upon philosophy by its adherence to the two principles which are basic in the classic tradition. In the middle ages there was no such isolation. Philosophy and the conduct of life were associated intimately with one another; there was genuine correspondence. The outcome is not fortunate for philosophy; it signifies that its subject-matter is more and more derived from the problems and conclusions of its own past history; that it is aloof from the problems of the culture in which philosophers live.

But the situation has a still more unfortunate phase. For it signifies intellectual confusion, practically chaos, in respect to the criteria and principles which are employed in framing judgments and reaching conclusions upon things of most vital importance. It signifies the absence of intellectual authority.

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

Old beliefs have dissolved as far as definite operative hold upon the regulation of criticism and the formation of plans and policies, working ideals and ends, is concerned. And there is nothing else to take their place.

When I say “authority” I do not mean a fixed set of doctrines by which to settle mechanically problems as they arise. Such authority is dogmatic, not intellectual. I mean methods congruous with those used in scientific inquiry and adopting their conclusions; methods to be used in directing criticism and in forming the ends and purposes that are acted upon. We have obtained in constantly accelerated measure in the last few centuries a large amount of sound beliefs regarding the world in which we live; we have ascertained much that is new and striking about life and man. On the other hand, men have desires and affections, hopes and fears, purposes and intentions which influence the most important actions performed. These need intellectual direction. Why has modern philosophy contributed so little to bring about an integration between what we know about the world and the intelligent direction of what we do? The purport of this chapter is to show that the cause resides in unwillingness to surrender two ideas formulated in conditions which both intellectually and practically were very different from those in which we now live. These two ideas, to repeat, are that knowledge is concerned with disclosure of the characteristics of antecedent existences and essences, and that the properties of value found therein provide the authoritative standards for the conduct of life.

Both of these traits are due to quest for certainty by cognitive means which exclude practical activity—namely, one which effects actual and concrete modifications in existence. Practical activity suffers from a double discrediting because of the perpetuation of these two features of tradition. It is a mere external follower upon knowledge, having no part in its de-
THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY

termination. Instead of evolving its own standards and ends in its own developing processes, it is supposed to conform to what is fixed in the antecedent structure of things. Herein we locate the source of that internal division which was said to characterize modern philosophic thought. It accepts the conclusions of scientific inquiry without remaking the conceptions of mind, knowledge and the character of the object of knowledge that are involved in the methods by which these conclusions are reached.

The chapters of which this is the concluding portion are introductory. They have tried to make clear a problem and the reasons why it is a problem. If, as has been intimated, the problem arises from continued adherence to certain conceptions framed centuries ago and then embodied in the entire western tradition, the problem is artificial in as far as it would not arise from reflection upon actual conditions of science and life. The next task is accordingly to elucidate the reconstructions of tradition which are involved in the actual procedure and results of knowing, as this is exemplified in physical inquiry. The latter is taken as the type and pattern of knowing since it is the most perfected of all branches of intellectual inquiry. We shall see that for a long time it also was influenced by the survival of the traditional conceptions of knowledge and its supposed relationship to properties of antecedent existence, while in our own time it has finally emancipated itself and arrived at a consciousness of the principles contained in its own method. Having discovered what knowledge means in its own terms, that is, in those of the conduct of knowing as a going concern, we shall be ready to appreciate the great transformation that is demanded in the older notions of mind and knowledge. Particularly we shall see how completely the separation of knowing and doing from one another has broken down. The conclusion of this part of the discussion will be that stan-

CONFLICT OF AUTHORITIES

dards and tests of validity are found in the consequences of overt activity, not in what is fixed prior to it and independently of it. This conclusion will lead us to the final point, the transformation that is required in the conception of the values which have authority over conduct.