

ΤΕΣΣΑΡΑΚΟΝΤΑΕΤΗΡΙΣ

ΘΕΟΦΙΛΟΥ ΒΟΡΕΑ

ΤΟΜΟΣ ΠΡΩΤΟΣ

ΕΝ ΑΘΗΝΑΙΣ

ΤΥΠΟΙΣ: "ΠΥΡΣΟΥ,, Α. Ε.

1940

Ε.Υ.Δ της Κ.τ.Π
ΙΩΑΝΝΙΝΑ 2006

THE PRESENT SITUATION IN AXIOLOGY

by

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In an article entitled «Metaphysics and Value» published in *Contemporary American Philosophy* (1930), I gave an account of the development of my own thinking of the subject of value. As I then wrote, it was only because I believed «that the way my own thought had gone in the last quarter century might throw light on the problems of this interesting epoch that I felt at all justified in displaying it». Developments since that time have tended to confirm even more definitely my conception of the problems as then envisaged. In responding to the invitation to write for the special volume in celebration of the distinguished career of the philosopher, *Theophilos Boreas*, I can perform no better service than to attempt a summary of the situation in axiology as it appears today. Nor is it inappropriate, since it is from the Greek genius that the thought as well as the word ultimately sprang.

Of the limited value of such an attempt I am well aware. It can be little more than an impression of one student of the subject and, as such, subject to all the prejudices and ignorances of the writer. On the other hand, with all their limitations such summary views are valuable at various stages of the development of a subject. They serve at least to afford a perspective from which the facts may be viewed, and a wrong perspective may often be almost as instructive as the true.

The present situation is excellently indicated by the fifty papers on the subject presented to the Ninth International Congress of Philosophy. The distribution of subjects suggests at once the extent of the field and the incidence of interest at the present time. Of these three were given to general questions; twelve to the problem of the relation of value to know-

ledge and action; three to problems of cosmology and value and fourteen to the problem of value and reality⁽¹⁾. This emphasis upon the epistemological and metaphysical aspects of the value problem is symptomatic of present preoccupations in this field. In contrast with the two preceding Congresses — I have the Proceedings of the Seventh before me as I write — the increase in the amount of space devoted to the subject, no less than the increasing emphasis upon these aspects of its problems, are noteworthy. In developing the theme of this present paper it will, therefore, be helpful to follow the main topics of the Congress as our guide. There is, to be sure, no intention of attempting a review of these contributions themselves, but merely to use them as topics for discussion⁽²⁾.

I.

General Questions.

A noteworthy character of the present Congress is the use of the term Axiology. The delimitation of this special field in philosophy and its final acceptance is in itself of significance in any attempt to evaluate the present situation in value theory. The almost simultaneous appearance in so many varied quarters of this new «name» indicated the emergence of new problems which could neither be satisfactorily expressed nor adequately solved under the old categories. The rapidity with which the new term was adopted also made it clear that in it had been found a means not only of clarifying many issues that had been confused, but also of unifying a field of investigation which had gradually become one of the central interests of modern philosophy.

It is, however, precisely at the moment that Axiology has thus established itself that a movement has appeared which, if it were to maintain itself and if its conclusions were generally accepted, would cut the ground of axiology from under its feet. I refer of course to the New Positivism, or logical positivism as it is called. So far as the general situation in value

(¹) Travaux du IX^e Congrès International de Philosophie, Fascicules X, XI, XII, Hermann & Cie, Paris 1937.

(²) There is an excellent review of this part of the Proceedings, by D. S. Robinson in *Ethics*, Vol. XLVIII, No 3, April 1938.

theory is concerned this is in many ways the most significant phenomenon to be noted. In using the term significant here I do not mean ultimately important (this I do not believe) but significant in the sense of determining—for the moment at least—the form in which certain basal and general questions must be put.

The thesis of positivism is that such a field as axiology is, in the very nature of the case, impossible and that what are called value or normative sciences are really not knowledge at all. A logical analysis of language shows that what are called value judgments are really not judgments but merely expressions of feeling, and that a value judgment cannot in the nature of the case be constructed. Now I have no intention of going into a critical discussion of this value nominalism here—to me it seems as untenable as it is presumptuous—but merely to indicate the problems which it sets for axiology. Surely one of the most important of its present tasks is this problem of language and values involving further analysis of value assertions or propositions. A brief paper on *Value from the Point of View of the Philosophy of language*, presented to the Congress by G. D. Scraba, indicates a recognition of this problem⁽¹⁾. Even more pressing, however, is the problem of truth and verification in this sphere. Granted that our assertions of value are not mere expressions of feeling but genuine propositions, then our assertions must have referents and some form of verification must be possible. Of the question of the knowledge of values I shall have more to say presently. Here I wish merely to indicate the problems set to axiology by modern positivism.

What is known in Axiology.

I have spoken of the general agreement as to a field of Axiology in philosophy. No less significant, to my mind, is a growing consensus of opinion as to what is actually known in this sphere.

In a paper presented to the Congress by Ladislav Tatar-

⁽¹⁾ G. D. Scraba, *La valeur au point de vue de la philosophie du langage*.

kiewicz the attempt was made to distinguish between what we know and what we do not know about values⁽¹⁾. He said that we know that there are objective values, but we do not know how many there are. Among objective values we know that some are intrinsic and some instrumental, but we do not yet know where to draw the line between them, nor do we know all the intrinsic values. Among intrinsic values we know that some are simple and that all others can be reduced to these simple ones, but we are not yet in accord as to what are the simple intrinsic values. Yet he thinks that nearly every one would include in this list moral, intellectual, aesthetic and hedonic values. We know that some values are superior and others inferior, but we know only a fragment of the complete hierarchy of values. We know some criteria to use in recognizing values and in ordering them in a series, but we are still greatly handicapped by our ignorance. In sum, the main outlines of axiology are fairly well established, although the details leave much to be desired.

Now I do not contend that the preceding summary is in all respects a wholly unchallengable statement of what we certainly know in the field of values. I should myself want to modify it at certain points. I hold, however, that it does express a body of propositions upon which there is a noteworthy unanimity of agreement—an agreement, moreover, which seems to be relatively independent of the special schools in value theory. Nor do I contend that when we say we know these things knowledge here means precisely what is meant when a corresponding summary of «fact and theory» in any given positive science is offered. And yet to those who have followed closely the stages of the development of the value problem—the arguments by means of which these several points have been established and the criticism of opposing situations—this summary represents fairly accurately the points on which there is a large measure of general assent. In this sense then — of rational assent—we may say that this is what is known in axiology.

(¹) *Ladislas Tatarkiewicz*, *Ce que nous savons et ce que nous ignorons des valeurs*.

II.

The Objectivity of Values. Value Realism.

We know now, says the writer to whom I referred, that there are objective values and I think that the statement, properly understood, is true.

I do not mean, of course, that there are none that do not still maintain the subjectivity of values. In American philosophy at least—although not so markedly in European—there is still a strong body of opinion which makes values mind-dependent in the sense that they are determined or created by feeling, desire or «interest», but surely this is not the main tendency. Value realism, in the sense of the independent subsistence of values, is a view widely held—even among epistemological realists themselves—and seems to be quite independent of the realist-idealist controversy.

In Anglo-American philosophy the subjectivity of value has been attacked by idealist, realist and pragmatist alike. There have been attempts, it is true, as among the Pragmatists, to sidestep the issue by introducing notions of quasi-objectivity, but there seems to be no question as to what the dominant tendency is. There are, to be sure, significant differences as to what this objectivity means, of the ontological status of values—and of this we shall have more to say presently—but on the basal question there seems to be little doubt as to the side upon which the weight of critical opinion falls.

The Phenomenological Movement.

It is the phenomenological movement—using the term for the moment in the broadest sense—that has chiefly been responsible for this development. In British and American philosophy the work of G. E. Moore and others had convinced a significant number of philosophers of the objectivity or mind independent character of values. The phenomenological movement in the narrower sense has undoubtedly contributed largely to this movement and its influence can be seen in many papers of the Congress⁽¹⁾. The revolt against psychologism in

(1) *F. Heinemann*, *Les Problèmes et la valeur d'une phénoménologie comme théorie de la réalité*.

the field of logic was followed inevitably by a similar revolt in the sphere of morals and values generally. From this has followed a value realism which — in contrast to the subjectivist view, with its inevitable nominalism — has for the moment at least apparently dominated the field of axiology.

It may be said that this phenomenology of values has raised more problems than it has solved, and in a sense this is true. It has, as we shall see, created certain problems of knowledge of values which have not yet been satisfactorily solved. It has also raised the question of the status of these value essences, and of their relation to existence or reality, to which likewise there is as yet no wholly satisfactory answer. But despite these unsolved problems the phenomenological, as opposed to the psychological point of view in value theory, has, I think, come to stay.

The value realism which I have just described and which in one form or another is implied or expressed in so many of the papers of the Congress, is a significant phenomenon in the general philosophical situation. In his Introduction to Vol. II of *Contemporary British Philosophy* the editor, J. H. Muirhead, writes: «there has been, among British philosophers at least, a broadening of view, a widening of outlook shared by realist and idealist alike. It has come to be recognized that as there are transindividual values, so there may be and are trans-social values... They thus acquire a status and value of their own by which our conceptions of being are extended and enriched».

III.

The Relation of Value to Knowledge.

The second problem which called out so many papers in the Congress is closely related to the first. If value is conceived as objective in the sense of «existing» or subsisting independently of the mind that feels or apprehends it (which of these terms shall be used being left undecided for the moment), then the question of how we know these values becomes all-important.

It is an essential part of the subjective theory that there is no knowledge of values for there are no values to have knowledge of. Values are felt. We may, to be sure, know many things about desire, feeling, «interest», but that is no knowledge

of values, but only knowledge about the conditions of valuation. On the other hand, it is an equally necessary part of value realism that it should include the idea of a unique type of knowledge. Value realism, as opposed to value nominalism, implies a doctrine of intuition of values.

This New Intuitionism is no mere revival of the Intuitionism of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries with which it was sought to meet the empiricism and subjectivism of those times. As has been said, the doctrine of «emotional intuition» is an application in principle of the same argument against subjectivism in the sphere of sensation; the distinction between sensation and sense *datum* is paralleled by a similar distinction between emotional *Erlebniss* and the *wert-datum erlebt*. It would be idle to contend that the doctrine as thus developed has proved wholly satisfactory. We may be convinced by the arguments of a Moore or a Hartmann that values are objective. We may see how such objectivity implies intuition of an emotional rather than of a perceptual or rational type, but it is still extremely difficult for most philosophers to say the word emotional without saying the word subjective in the same breath. It must be frankly admitted that much more work must be done on this problem before any theory of emotional intuition can be formulated which will be generally convincing. Even more difficult is the problem of truth and error in this field. Any form of intuitionism finds difficulty in handling the problem of error and this is *a fortiori* true in the case of a doctrine of emotional intuition. If there is valuational truth there is also valuational error. It is true, we may with Scheler and Hartmann, speak of valuational blindness—and doubtless there is such a thing—but the notion solves no problems. What is needed is a theory of verification in this field and as yet no satisfactory theory exists⁽¹⁾.

(¹) In an article entitled Value Propositions and Verifiability, The Journal of Philosophy, vol. XXXIV No 22, I have stated these problems and made an attempt at a solution. It is only a beginning, but it suggests, I think, the direction in which the solution must be found. Starting with recognized facts of valuational error, and indicating how they are shown to be erroneous, I attempt to construct a theory of «authentication» or validation of values which is public—that is, admits of communication and confirmation.

Axiology and the Social Sciences.

Closely connected with this problem of the knowledge of values is one which may be described as the problem of value in the social sciences, a problem which in one way or another received attention in sixteen of the papers of the Congress.

As is apparent to every one, there is something of a crisis in the social sciences or what are often known as the *Geisteswissenschaften*. This crisis has been developing for some time—ever since, in fact, the appearance of Rickert's *Die Grenzen der Naturwissenschaften*—but for reasons into which we cannot go here it has come to a head in American thought only recently. The situation may be described briefly in the following way. That these sciences are not sciences in the ordinary sense has become increasingly apparent. Any body of propositions such as make up so-called social or political science, contain propositions or judgments of two kinds—those of fact and those of value. The former can, of course, in principle at least, be verified in the same way that factual judgments are verifiable in any field of science. But these are really not the propositions which give the peculiar significance to these fields. It is rather the normative judgments, the value propositions which constitute the life blood of these sciences.

For a long time many were under the illusion that the valuational judgments could in some way be derived from the factual. That illusion has, however, been pretty well dispelled. Many practitioners of these sciences may not have heard of the «naturalistic fallacy», but they have come to sense it none the less. An interesting situation is thus created. Either these sciences are merely factual—and all judgments as to the value of any social or political form are expressions of personal feeling—of our own likes and dislikes—or else there are objective values and these can be known and verified in some way. There are some who frankly accept the first horn of the dilemma, but there is an increasing number who feel that such scepticism and nihilism cannot be the last word. For these the problem of the normative in the social sciences has become the burning question. In any case, the methodological problems of these sciences—no less than of axiology itself emphasize the impor-

tance of the issues which the present situation in value theory has brought into the foreground.

Knowledge as Involving Valuation.

There is another aspect of this problem of knowledge and value which received attention in the Congress and neglect of which in this summary would involve a serious oversight. Cornelius Krusé argued against the sharp dualism between cognition and value which characterizes the value theory of many realists⁽¹⁾, and Guido della Valle discussed the topic of «Knowledge as a Form of Valuation»⁽²⁾.

Now I think we «know» — to use the form of expression already introduced — that this sharp dualism is untenable. We know that truth is itself a value and we also know that all ultimate notions are related to ends and values—in other words, that the problem of knowledge cannot ultimately be divorced from the problem of value. But while in a sense we know all this our knowledge has not in the last decade gone much further. In fact it seems to have come to something of an impasse. Values are determinative of our judgments of existence and truth, but what is the status of these values? The answer is that they are neither existent nor subsistent, but are merely valid meanings. This notion of values as «unreal» meaning structures beyond all being, while perhaps logically necessary, is an even more difficult conception than the phenomenological notion of values as merely essences or self-subsistent entities. Now I do not deny that this conception is without its element of truth. As over against the subjective and merely pragmatic theories of value, this tendency, like the phenomenological, was an important means of clarification and rescue and that to lose the insights which it has brought would be a reversion to wholly uncritical forms of thinking. What I do say is that it has never received a form of statement that is either generally convincing or without fundamental difficulties. It is necessary to be able to ascend to this rarefied atmosphere of essences or meaning structures, but it is not possible to live in it long.

⁽¹⁾ *Cornelius Krusé*, *Cognition and Value Reexamined*.

⁽²⁾ *Guido della Valle*, *La conoscenza come forma di valutazione*.

It is this which, from one aspect at least, the so-called existential philosophy has felt.

IV.

Value and Reality.

The problems involved under this caption are those which appeared to interest the contributors mostly — fourteen of the total number of papers being devoted to this special problem. I think it represents the distribution of interest at the present time.

The general movement to value realism above described, especially as represented in the British realists and the German phenomenologists, was bound not only to emphasize this problem but to present it in a new form. So likewise the Neo-Kantian movement of which we have just spoken. Both tendencies distinguish value and real being sharply from one another, the chief *desideratum* of the axiologists of the moment being to seek an intelligible relation between the two realms.

This *desideratum* is recognized by all writers on value theory at the present and the feeling of its necessity was echoed in the papers of the Congress. It is generally recognized, I think, that both of these movements were necessary stages in the movement from subjectivism and psychologism to objectivity, but are only half way stages and that in both cases thought is in a stage of unstable equilibrium. It is this unstable equilibrium which sets the fundamental problem of Axiology today, namely, the metaphysical problem. We «know» — to use the form of statement we have allowed ourselves — we know that values are objective. We know also that, as values, they are not existent as things are existent—in space and time, and we must therefore speak of them either as essences or as meanings beyond all being. And yet we know also that this cannot be right — that they are in some way related to the world of existences in some way other than through the minds that cognize and acknowledge them. What that relation is it has not yet been possible to say in an idiom that is either understandable or acceptable to all the schools.

Cosmology and Values.

The problems treated under this title in the Proceedings of the Congress are, of course, closely related to the more general

problem of the preceding section. Nevertheless, they may be distinguished as special problems in the sense that the issues raised are closely related to science and the present state of physics especially.

As is well known, the tendency towards idealism of many of the leading physicists of the present has seemed to many to open up a place for values in the scheme of the cosmos apparently not possible in the conceptual structure of the older physics. The two main factors responsible for this tendency are first the change in the conception of matter, and secondly the change in the status assigned by many physicists to natural laws. One of the papers of the Congress discusses the relation of the normative to indeterminism. It does not take up specifically the problem of indeterminism in the sense of which the principle is formulated in physics, but argues that the social norm is not possible without a hierarchy of connections and this has for its premise a pluralism of ontological spheres and this in turn involves indeterminism⁽¹⁾.

The second change in modern physics—namely, the change in the concept of matter—has had, indirectly at least, a notable effect upon the problem of cosmology and values. The apparent displacement in physics of the notion of stable entities by the concept of events has to many minds, whether rightly or wrongly, seemed to open up the way for new conceptions of the place of values in the cosmos.

This situation has, in Anglo-American philosophy at least, led to the construction of metaphysical systems in which the notion of value plays a fundamental part. The philosophies of S. Alexander, John Laird and A. N. Whitehead are all outstanding examples of this tendency to make value in some form coextensive with reality. In a paper presented at the Congress entitled: *The Objectivity of Value*, Alexander maintained that «value in its elementary, non-human form is the universal feature of the interconnection of things»—a restatement of course of his position in *Space, Time and Deity*, and Whitehead maintains in principle the same position in *Process and Reality*.

(1) *Leopold Silverstein*, Indéterminisme au point de vue normatif.

Whitehead's philosophy is, from the standpoint of the problem of Cosmology and Values, the most interesting and challenging book of recent times. He conceives it as his main task to overcome the isolation between natural science and value experiences, and in order to bridge this gulf he, like both Alexander and Laird, reads value down into the most elementary constituents of the universe, and in so doing develops a panpsychism which, while sharing the general character of the classical forms such as those of Leibnitz and Schopenhauer, seems at least to overcome some of the difficulties of those positions. This is not the place either to consider his method or the validity of his conclusions. There are, indeed, those who would challenge both and would criticize his use of the notion of value. The point of importance here is that an attempt is made, on a grand scale, to solve the problem of Cosmology and Values. Not only is the problem recognized as the basal problem of philosophy, but the conditions of its solution are, in principle at least, apprehended and expressed (¹).

V.

Conclusion: Values as Realities.

At the beginning of this paper I suggested briefly the significance of the emergence of this new field of inquiry. There are also reasons in the present situation for the continued stress upon the importance of this field.

In one of the papers of the Congress, H. Heyse blamed the present European crisis on the metaphysical separation of value and reality which characterizes recent European philosophy and held that Germany is leading Europe to a saving philosophy because of the insistence of German philosophers on the union of value and reality in the historical process (²).

(¹) I myself find difficulties both in the method and in the conclusions and have expressed them at length in an article, *Elements of Unintelligibility in Whitehead's Metaphysics*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. XXV. No. 23.

(²) *H. Heyse, Idee und Existenz: Die Krisis der Philosophie und die Werte des Lebens.*

One need not go all the way with this philosopher—either in his exclusive account of the European crisis or on the question of the saving power of the German leadership — to recognize the truth of his main contention. The metaphysical separation of value and reality has been, until quite recently, the note of all typical modern thinking and it was this doubtless that has motivated the profound change in German thought — namely, the rise of the life philosophies and of the «existential standpoint» in philosophical thinking. Both are attempts to heal the breach, whether satisfactory or not it is not for me to say.

The metaphysical separation of value and reality is, I repeat, the keynote of all typically modern thinking. The consignment by Galileo of the secondary qualities to the mind was followed inevitably by the tertiary. A subjective theory of values was even more inevitable than a subjective and sceptical theory of knowledge. Kant was fully aware of this fact and he made valiant efforts to stem the tide by the quasi-objectivity of the *Critique of the Practical Reason*. The attempt was, historically at least, unsuccessful, and this fundamental dualism in modern life and thought widened with accelerating speed until the intellectualism, against which so much of recent thought has been a protest, was inevitable. The reunion of value and reality has thus become the great *desideratum*.

I have emphasized this aspect of the question especially for the reason that we are coming to see, largely through these considerations, that the entire European movement in philosophy up to modern empiricism included this value realism and also the cosmic significance of values, and that modern subjectivism is a wholly modern movement. Seeing this movement in a larger perspective, we are able also to evaluate the present movements towards objectivity more adequately. It is not an accident, therefore, that there is a revival of interest in many quarters of the idea of a *philosophia perennis* and of the relation of value to reality as the central note of this philosophy. In so far as the European crisis is concerned, one thing may be said with certainty. If you take values out of the cosmos, you must take them out of the historical process also. If the cosmos is without meaning and value, history also easily

becomes «sound and fury, signifying nothing». The modern European crisis has, of course, many causes, but certainly one of the most deep-seated is this disjunction of value and reality with all the scepticism and nihilism to which it has led.

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΙΩΑΝΝΙΝΩΝ
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ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΤΗΣ: ΕΠ. ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΗΣ ΚΩΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΣ Θ. ΠΕΤΣΙΟΣ

Ε.Υ.Δ της Κ.τ.Π
ΙΩΑΝΝΙΝΑ 2006