

The Philosophy of Consciousness Without an Object

A Discussion of the Nature of Transcendental Consciousness

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Part 20 of 25

PART III

Introceptualism

CHAPTER 5

Pragmatism

(continued)

There can be no doubt but that the fundamental maxim of Pragmatism is of authentic utility in many applications. This is particularly true in the case of natural science, but “science” in this sense means a particular way or form of knowledge, and not knowledge in every possible sense. Natural science is a body of knowledge delimited by its own methodology. This science is governed by three heuristic principles, as follows:

1. The data or material of scientific knowledge is grounded in sensual observation, and restricted to the generally possessed sensory equipment.
2. The organizational concepts or theories introduced to form the mass of selected observation into a conceptually thinkable system are invented or intuited postulations.
3. The interpretative postulates must be of such a character that consequences may be inferred of such a nature that they are verifiable or disprovable by an indicated observation either with or without a devised experiment. But such a methodology uses concepts in a way that satisfies the Pragmatic prescription. Clearly, science in this sense is *for* a program or purpose and not a detached presentment of the real as an object for pure contemplation. Theory is an instrument toward a practical end, in the philosophical sense of the term, although, of course, this practicality is not necessarily to be limited to the sense of a narrow utilitarianism.*

Yet, although natural science is unavoidably a source of truth only in the pragmatic sense, owing to the limitations imposed by the methodology, nonetheless, an analysis of the attitudes revealed by at least some scientists suggests a feeling for knowledge in a more ultimate sense, such as that of the Gnosis. Why else the predominant preference for “pure science,” as contrasted to applied science, on the part

* [I introduce as a footnote at this point the observation that the sensual observation referred to in item (1) above does not mean only observation without the help of instruments or the indirect observing and interpretation by our present complicated devices.]

of the greater scientific thinkers? Here we have revealed an orientation to truth, not as a means to some practical accomplishment, but rather as an end or value in itself. Of course, a conceptual formulation of truth is less than Gnostic Truth, and the Gnosis is not grounded in a sensuous basis, as natural science is, yet the feeling for truth as a value in itself, however inadequately it may be conceived, is the sign of an interest which is more than pragmatic. In fact, it is a well-recognized principle among the pure research thinkers that a motivation guided by a consideration of possible practical utility acts as a barrier to successful research. The pure search for truth, whatever it may be, is the royal road to fruitful results, not alone in the development of detached theory, but even in the laying of the bases for future utilitarian applications. We may even say that the pure scientist, however much he may be restricted to the employment of a pragmatic methodology is, nonetheless, motivated by a love of truth as a terminal value. Thus the Pragmatist's theory of cognition is not sufficient to explain the whole of the scientific process, just as the logistic interpretation of mathematics is inadequate to achieve an understanding of mathematical creativeness.

The degree to which our scientific disciplines confirm the Pragmatist's theory of knowledge varies with the sciences. The sciences most closely related to empiric life, namely, the biological sciences and psychology, most largely confirm the Pragmatist's theory, as might well be anticipated, since this school is most closely oriented to this division of science. But this theory is progressively less adequate in the other sciences as they become more and more mathematical, and it fails most notably in the interpretation of pure mathematics—the field in which the New Realism has its greatest strength. Whether or not pure mathematics consists only of conceptual elements, it certainly is freed from admixture with the perceptual and thus is not subject to the methodology of the empiric sciences. So the Pragmatist's theory has only a restricted validity even in the field of science itself.

The general thesis of Pragmatism, that there is a non-intellectual form of knowledge or awareness, is one which can hardly be questioned, but the further thesis that this non-intellectual form is more fundamental and comprehensive does not necessarily follow, or it may be true in some respects and not in others. Further, the Pragmatists class this other form as perceptive in the sense of being experiential, with experience defined as “the entire process of phenomena, of present data considered in their raw immediacy.” If then we take a concept from out of a part of the perceptual flow, it is clear that the total flux is more than the concept, but the latter in its universality has an extension reaching far beyond any particular concrete experience. Thus, in one sense the perceptual is more comprehensive than the conceptual, but in another sense the reverse is the case. Which kind of comprehension is the vaster is a question on which we may never find agreement, since the relativity of individual psychology and insight is determinant here. Again, with respect to the question as to which is the more fundamental, much depends upon the theory of the origin of the concept and percept which the thinker entertains. If the conceptual is viewed as wholly derived from the perceptual matrix, then clearly the latter is more fundamental, but if both are viewed as derived from a common source, but not the one derived from the other, then there does not appear any simple way in which we could determine that either is more fundamental in the ontological sense.

Pragmatism is not only anti-intellectualistic, it is also pro-sensationalistic, or pro-vitalistic, or pro-experientialistic, meaning by this that sensational experience and life are more fundamental and more bedded in the Real than the concepts of the intellect, or the intellectual order as such. One may agree with Pragmatism with respect to its anti-intellectualism in the sense that intellectualism means the identification of things with what we know of them in reflective thought—with nothing left over—and yet diverge with respect to the Pragmatist's view relative to Vitalism and Sensationalism. There is a Gnostic or Supramental Knowledge which is quite other than sensational cognition, or vital intuition or perceptual intuition, yet this Knowledge is truly more fundamental and comprehensive than the conceptual order. Pragmatism is not only anti-intellectualistic but it is also anti-transcendentalistic, and the primary focus of the present critique is aimed at the latter feature.

Transcendentalism may be no more than a postulate of the reason, in which case it is a speculative construct not grounded in experience or any other form of immediacy, but it may also be a conceptual construction based upon direct Realization, such as may be known as Gnostic or Mystical Enlightenment. For a consciousness that has no acquaintance with direct Realization, the notion of a transcendental Reality tends to appear fantastic, since it does not seem to be a content of common experience, and does not seem to be a necessity for the reasoning process, except, perhaps, in the restricted Kantian usage of the notion. From this latter point of view, the hypothesis of a transcendental Existent, however much it may facilitate a philosophic formulation, suffers by the defect that it can never be authenticated by common experience, and thus it appears more in the spirit of natural science to abandon the notion entirely and proceed to the construction of philosophic interpretation exclusively in terms of concepts which mean elements, complexes, relationships, or processes lying within the limits of experience. But for a consciousness which has had or possesses direct acquaintance with direct Gnostic Realization, such procedure inevitably appears to be arbitrary and inadequate. The latter may grant that, if we cut off that section of total consciousness which we may call the human empiric and conceptual consciousness, then the Pragmatist's epistemology and general philosophy forms a substantially accurate interpretation, but it would be only partial and could not satisfy more than a part of human need, since a portion of the total human need requires the Transcendental for its fulfillment. From this standpoint, Pragmatism is inadequate, and even in a measure malicious, since its orientation to the empiric is exclusive or privative.

It may be contended that mystical or Gnostic Realization is a form of experience and may therefore be embraced within the Pragmatic meaning of the term, and therefore be a possible referent in the forms of Pragmatic epistemology. The expression "mystical experience" does occur in literature, as in the cases of both William James and Sri Aurobindo, but to validate such usage the meaning of the term 'experience' must be widened substantially beyond that given in Baldwin's *Dictionary* and which appears as the sense directly affirmed or implied in Pragmatist's philosophy. No doubt, mystical states of consciousness do occur as *events* in the life of the individual, and to this extent we are dealing with a process in time, and the event itself is a phenomenon. To this degree we may validly speak of a mystical or Gnostic experience. But it is quite otherwise when we consider the meaningful content of the states. At least some of these states—and all that are authentically Gnostic—have a content which is timeless and

Noumenal, and thus fall outside the definition. I believe the definition of “experience” as given is perfectly sound and is in conformity with the general understanding of the term, but if we take “experience” in this restricted sense, then it becomes necessary to recognize other forms of immediacy, such as Gnostic immediacy.

A Gnostic immediacy may be the referent of a body of conceptual thought, in which case we may regard the conceptual or reflective thought as significant only in the instrumental sense, but it would not be instrumental to an empiric immediacy, and, therefore, not identical with the instrumentalism of Pragmatic epistemology. But while this is clear where the Gnostic Realization is sharply defined as neither thought nor experience, as is the case of preparatory meditation in which the intellective and sensuous process is silenced, there remains the case of Gnostic insight which is not pure but mixed with conceptual or empiric elements, or both, and in this case there can be confusion in interpretation. The actual state of consciousness of an individual may seem to be pure or simple, whereas, in point of fact, sufficiently profound criticism will reveal that it is a complex of functions or faculties. The Gnostic and the empiric may be so fused as to seem to be of one sameness with sense experience, but this fusing may occur between the Gnostic and intellective thought with the result that the whole complex appears to be simply the pure Reason. Here lies the source of the self-evident truths and innate ideas which formed so important a part of Rationalistic thought before the time of Kant. But while Kant made it clear what the pure reason *qua* reason is and took a pejorative attitude toward the Transcendent in the Gnostic sense, thus tying reason to experience in the narrow sense, the Reality for Gnostic Realization does not therefore cease to be, nor does the fusion of a partial Gnostic insight and reason cease to carry authority. What he did, in this respect, was the isolation of reason *qua* reason, and did not thereby invalidate the insight of the Rationalists and the Platonists.

But whether or not the Platonic ideas or self-evident truths or innate ideas are grounded in pure reason or a combination of the Gnosis and reason, the rationalistic method remains valid as a philosophical process, once the insight is given. Philosophy can be, in some range of its activity at least, a deductive development on the analogue of mathematics. And it would be no more necessary for this kind of philosophy to justify its conclusions by reference to a narrow empiricism than it is for pure mathematics. We are by no means justified in assuming that all Truth is correlated with the empiric in the narrow sense of the definition.

What I am here suggesting is that the alternative of Empiricism is not *necessarily* Intellectualism nor Rationalism in the sense of a pure reason, *in the Kantian meaning of the term*, as a source of knowledge independent of sense perception. The alternative may be a philosophy grounded upon a third form of cognition which is more fundamental, more primitive, and more authoritative than either sense perception—and likewise perceptive intuition and vitalistic intuition—or conceptual cognition. The present work is by no means unique in that it is a formulation of a philosophy of that sort, as can be verified by reference to the main streams of Indian philosophy and at least the philosophy of Plotinus among the Greeks. The standpoint is presented very clearly in the following quotation from Plotinus:

External objects present us only with appearances. Concerning them, therefore, we may be said to possess opinion rather than knowledge. The distinctions in the actual world of appearance are of import only to ordinary and practical men. Our question lies with the ideal reality that exists behind appearance. How does the mind perceive these ideas? Are they without us, and is the reason, like sensation, occupied with objects external to itself? What certainty could we then have, what assurance that our perception was infallible? The object perceived would be [a] something different from the mind perceiving it. We should have then an image instead of reality. It would be monstrous to believe for a moment that the mind was unable to perceive ideal truth exactly as it is, and that we had not certainty and real knowledge concerning the world of intelligence. It follows, therefore, that this region of truth is not to be investigated as a thing external to us, and so only imperfectly known. It is *within* us. Here the objects we contemplate and that which contemplates are identical,—both are thought. The subject cannot surely *know* an object different from itself. The world of ideas lies within our intelligence. Truth, therefore, is not the agreement of our apprehension of an external object with the object itself. It is the agreement of the mind with itself. Consciousness, therefore, is the sole basis of certainty. The mind is its own witness. *Reason sees in itself that which is above itself as its source; and again, that which is below itself as still itself once more.*

Knowledge has *three* degrees—Opinion, Science, Illumination. The means or instrument of the first is sense; of the second, dialectic; of the third, intuition. To the last I subordinate reason. It is absolute knowledge founded on the identity of the mind knowing with the object known.¹¹

Here we have recognized three forms of knowledge, namely, Opinion, or Perception in modern terms; Science, or Conceptual Cognition; and Illumination, or Transcendental Cognition, or Introception in the terminology of the present work. Reason, Science, or Conceptual Cognition occupies an intermediate position between the other two, but is seen as having its source in that what is above, or Illumination, and stands in a relationship of hierarchical superiority to the sense perception which lies below. Plotinus' philosophy is grounded upon Realization, and not upon mere inventive speculation, and, therefore, what we have is a relationship in the hierarchy of knowledge which is found by self-examination. Thus it is grounded in a self-searching similar to that on which William James grounded his theory of the relationship between the concept and the percept, though the found relationship was radically antithetical. What are we to conclude about such disagreement? Is one competent and correct and the other incompetent and in error? Or, shall we assume equal competency, but with difference of results growing out of difference of perspective? I think that an affirmative answer to the last question will afford the juster view. At any rate, assuming that it is the most just view, then it would follow that James' view that concepts are born exclusively out of

¹¹ Quoted from the letter to Flaccus as given in *Hours With the Mystics*, by R.A. Vaughan, (Italics mine except the italicized 'within' and 'know'.)

percepts is a part truth, valid only if the word “exclusively” is expunged. The authority of Illumination is too great to be disregarded.

If reason, or the intelligible order, or the conceptual order, is derived from a source above it, and is in hierarchical transcendence with respect to the perceptual order standing below it, then it will most naturally have affinity to the Illuminative order of cognition, greater and more immediate than the affinity between the latter and perceptual cognition, though there is abundant ground for recognizing that a correlation of the latter sort, which proceeds around or short-circuits the reason, does exist. But the difference suggested as between these two types of correlation is analogous to the difference in military communications, known as communication through channels and around channels.

A certain important consequence follows from the interrelationship of the three types of cognition as given by Plotinus, and that is that the universal of the conceptual order is in closer affinity to the Illuminative Cognition than it is to the particular. In other words, that which appears from the standpoint of concrete sense perception as abstraction away from the immediately given, namely, the general concept, when viewed from the perspective of Illuminative Cognition, is closer to the immediately given, and is closest when the concept is most general and therefore most universal. Since it is from general or universal concepts that the largest deductive development is possible, it follows that a philosophy grounded on the Illuminative Cognition would elaborate itself mainly as a deductive system, which does not derive its authority, however much it may derive illustration, from sense perception, or from perceptual intuition or vitalistic intuition. Here we can see the possibility of a mathematic which is not mere logicism or formalism, but, rather, a revelation of truth as it is behind appearance or phenomena.

These considerations should throw light upon the philosophy of Spinoza, both with respect to its substance and form. This philosophy purports to be a necessary development, in mathematical form, of certain fundamental conceptions, so that the truth of the consequences depends upon the truth of the antecedents, with no need of any other kind of dependence. Truth in this sense may be viewed as a legislative authority with respect to experience. Of course, for a consciousness which is grounded solely in perceptual immediacy a development of this kind seems peculiarly irrelevant, but to a consciousness that commences with a mystical or Gnostic immediacy, of the type reported by Plotinus, the case is quite different. In the latter instance, the knowledge with which the system begins is known originally and immediately and with far stronger assurance and authority than anything given through perception. From this standpoint a critique of Spinoza would consist of the following three phases:

1. Is the initial insight based upon the reason alone, or is it grounded on some other power of consciousness?
2. Are the initial conceptions correct formulations of an adequate insight?
3. Is the logical development correct?

The question would not arise as to whether the conclusions were authenticated by experience. They might or might not conform to conclusions drawn from experience, or,

what is more likely, they might in part conform, in part contradict, and in part have no relation to, common experience. The only important practical or ethical question would be: Do they serve to orient consciousness in such a way that it tends to develop toward, or awaken to, the initial Realization? There is something in this that reminds us of the Pragmatist's maxim, in that the practical test of a truth is by a leading of consciousness to a somewhat that is other than a concept, but this would be an inverted Pragmatism.

Even though we assume that the Pragmatist has been successful, or at least may be successful, in showing that there is no knowledge which has its original source in the concept, or pure conceptual order, and that no ultimate terminal lies in this order, yet this achievement, by itself, is not enough to prove that the sole origin and the sole terminal lies in experience, in the sense defined. To justify completely the maxim, the Pragmatist must prove at the very least, that there is no such thing as Illuminative Cognition in the sense Plotinus has formulated. It is hard to see how this possibly could be done, any more than could a supposed non-sensuous being prove to our satisfaction that there is no such thing as sensation. The intellectual power is simply not competent to disprove the actuality of any immediacy, and the fact that a given individual or a large class of individuals has not known a certain type of immediacy is irrelevant so far as its factuality is concerned. This constitutes the essence of the present critique of Pragmatic epistemology.

Our discussion of Pragmatism would be incomplete if we failed to consider the Idealistic wing of Pragmatism as represented by F.C.S. Schiller. The view developed by this philosopher, while in fundamental methodological agreement with the conceptions of Dewey and James, differs from that of the latter philosophers in that it abandons their naturalistic Realism, a characteristic which is quite explicit in John Dewey's *Logic*. Schiller starts with a fact which has been of prime importance for all Idealism since Bishop Berkeley. This fact is expressed explicitly in the following words of Schiller: "The simple fact is that we know the Real *as it is when we know it*; we know nothing whatever about what it is apart from that process."¹² This fact of cognition is with Schiller, as with the Idealists generally, the foundation stone of ontology, or the theory of the nature of Being. Here we have a principle of philosophic procedure of primary importance with a large philosophic class, and we may profitably devote to it some consideration in its general form before proceeding to the discussion of the special form of Schiller's treatment.

It is a fact, recognized by the more thoughtful Realists, as well as insisted upon by all Idealists, that all that we ever cognize is an existent in consciousness. Whether this existent is viewed as primarily a conception, a perception, or a volition—differences of view that have led to the classification of Idealists into sub-schools—in every case we meet this existent as a fact in consciousness. Now, while the Realist who acknowledges all this would say that this fact is merely an incident characteristic of the cognitive process, which leaves the real Existent, as it is, unaffected, the Idealist insists that the characteristic of Existence, as it is in consciousness, is the characteristic of Existence as it is in itself, or *per se*. Certain Idealists have attempted to prove logically this thesis, but with respect to this effort at proof the Realistic criticism under the

¹² Quoted from the quotation in Perry's *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, p. 217.

headings of the so-called fallacies of the “fallacy of definition by initial predication” and the “fallacy of the egocentric predicament” does seem to be well taken. It will profit us to consider these critiques.

“Definition by initial predication” means the defining of any idea, fact, or thing by the circumstances of its first manifestation to our cognition. Thus my first cognition of gravity might be the experience of seeing an organic object, such as an apple, fall from a tree. If then I defined gravitation in such terms that being an organic object was essential to the notion, I would have defined by initial predication. There is an obvious error in such a definition, since other than organic objects are clearly subject to gravitation, and the valid statement of the law must be such as will account for all instances and exclude all that is not essential to the conception. In the case of Idealism this criticism is applied in the sense that the appearance of the existent in consciousness is only the accident of the first appearance, and may not validly be made a determinant of the Existent as such. Therefore, it is not proved that the Existent is an Existent for consciousness and only for consciousness. The force of this argument may well be granted, but all that it has achieved is disproof of proof in the logical sense; it has not disproved the fact that the Idealist maintains it. Further, there is a fundamental weakness in the argument in that there is no second or other subsequent appearance or experience of the Existent which contrasts with the initial experience in this respect. In the illustration of the falling organic object the case is different, since we do have subsequent experiences of falling inorganic objects. This fact makes a very important difference. The error made by the Idealist in this case was the attempting logical proof where his real ground lies in immediacy, just as the greenness of a green object subsists in immediacy and cannot be proved.

The so-called “fallacy of the egocentric predicament” is akin to that of initial predication. It is a fact that it is impossible to conceive of anything apart from consciousness, and, in particular, in terms of relative consciousness, it is impossible to cognize anything that does not stand in a conscious relationship to a knower, witness, or subject. As ordinarily conceived, this knower or witness is viewed as the ego, and so we have the primary fact of relative consciousness that all cognition stands in relation to a conscious ego. By ordinary, non-mystical means we cannot escape this. Thus, if we try to compare the object of consciousness with what it may be supposed to be outside all relation with an apperceiving ego, we are stymied at the very beginning of our effort. We may compare an object as it is for pure perception with what it becomes for conception, but in neither case do we get something outside consciousness in every sense, nor do we find anything that is not in relationship to a cognizing subject. The critical Realist acknowledges the factuality of the predicament but denies that this fact is sufficient to justify that only ideas exist or that only objects for consciousness exist. Again, we may grant the validity of the criticism so far as the question of logical deduction or induction is concerned. We may quite well grant that in formal logical terms the Idealist does beg the question, but this criticism carries force only if the Realist can produce a conceptual system which does not involve an analogous error of equal or greater importance.

But the Realist does beg the question much more egregiously than does the Idealist. For if we do predicate that there is an Existent outside consciousness in every sense, then we are making a statement concerning that of which we can never know anything whatsoever. As a matter of knowledge, we cannot validly affirm even bare

existence of such an Existent. If we believe in it, then that is an act of violent will to believe that can hardly be surpassed by the most superstitious religious belief. Further, what possible meaning attaches to the notion of a forever unknowable unknown for every possible form of cognition there may be? How can we possibly distinguish between such a supposed existence and absolute nothingness?

The Idealist is on quite unassailable ground if he affirms only that which he knows, and which therefore is an existent for consciousness, and makes no affirmation or denial with respect to the supposed unknowable unknown so far as its existence is concerned, but points out that the notions of existence and non-existence are quite meaningless with respect to such an eternally unknowable unknown. The predication of this eternally unknowable unknown may have, as Schiller quite rightly notes, a pragmatic value as a convenient fiction, but it is the *predication*, not the supposed unknown, that has the pragmatic value, and predication is an act within and of consciousness. Still, if we can dispense with this predication and replace it with another conception of such a sort that it is in principle verifiable, and which has an equal or greater pragmatic value, then we shall have established our philosophy upon a sounder base than that known to any form of Realism. Such a conception will be offered later in this work.

So far, I believe the position taken by Schiller is the soundest of all the Pragmatists, but as we follow further his thought serious difficulties arise. In basic conformity with the other Pragmatists, Schiller restricts, or seems to restrict, consciousness to the notion of experience. Now in addition to the general criticism of this aspect of Pragmatism, given above, in the case of idealistic Pragmatism there are further difficulties. The "experience" of Schiller, as of other Pragmatists, is the experience of empiric human beings, and not a total experience of an Absolute. How does this kind of experience become organized into a unity, social or otherwise? With the realistic Pragmatist, there is a possible unity provided by the commonality of the supposed real order outside experience, but this order does not exist for the idealist Pragmatist. Absolute Idealism provides the organizing modulus of either a Transcendental or of an Absolute Consciousness, but such a modulus does not exist for Schiller. As a result we are faced with a relativism of specific experiencings, not unified by any rational or Transcendental Principle. Schiller derives an ethical metaphysic, but hardly provides any way of choosing between the empiric ethical orientations for the social body, save that of successful social imposition. If the ethics of a Hitler were successfully imposed by the sword, then Hitler would have won the empiric argument, and there would be no higher ground for an adverse moral judgment. The strength of Schiller is his Idealism; his weakness lies in restricting consciousness to the experience of empiric man.

It is not part of the present purpose of the writer to develop either a comprehensive exposition or critique of Pragmatism, nor, for that matter, to achieve completeness in this respect relative to any of the current schools of philosophy. The purpose is rather to clear the ground for his own formulation which involves certain incompatibilities with many current views. Beyond this restricted purpose there is no intention of trying to prove that any extant system or philosophic orientation is completely false or unsound. It seems to the writer that all philosophies, or at least most, constitute a valid formulation, in at least some measure, of genuine insight into Being or

knowledge, or of acquaintance with fact or experience. For the most part, error arises through giving a too sweeping, or even exclusive, extension to views that are only partial. Full recognition of the partial validities is freely offered, along with the critique of important defects.

The writer feels that Pragmatism has made a durable contribution to philosophic thought, a contribution which may not be disregarded in any future philosophy, if the latter is to establish itself upon a sound basis. Thus the Pragmatist's analysis of the percept and the concept, with their interrelations, is a valuable continuation and advance upon the criticism of Immanuel Kant, and, like the production of the latter, must be taken into account in any future metaphysic. But by an exclusive orientation to experience, so conceived as to close the door to the Transcendental and the type of cognition which renders the Transcendental available to human consciousness, Pragmatism so far restricts the field of human consciousness as to close the gate to those values which form the most essential part of the higher religion and religious philosophy. As a philosophy which is oriented exclusively to mundane interests, Pragmatism has a great deal to offer as a modulus in the field of action, but action is not the whole of man. There are rich values to be known only in a state of contemplation, and there comes sometime, at least to some men, a felt need for these values that transcends the desire for action. Here the orientation is to the substantive rather than to the activist or functional. It may well be, as C.S. Peirce indicated in the quotation given earlier, that Pragmatism is a philosophy more adapted to the needs of youth than to the spirit of age and maturity. Sooner or later we must all face the mystery of death and the dissolution of at least a phase of organized consciousness. The philosophy which provides the greater preparation for this transition, so that it may be faced with confidence, trust, and even assurance, would seem to have met the greater need since after all the cycle of material activity plays but a small part in the vast reaches of Eternity.

No doubt the supreme criterion of Pragmatist philosophy is the principle of *test by consequences*, which stands in contrast to *test by source*. Equally, there can be no doubt that in many situations the test by consequences is the only available method by which empiric man can evaluate offered conceptions. This is an application of the old maxim, "by their fruits you shall know them," but raised to a status of a universal and exclusively valid principle. However, with all its unquestionable utility, this criterion has serious limitations. A given empiric consciousness, and indeed the whole of empiric consciousness as a type, may fail to apprehend the full range and bearing of the consequences, with the result that a judgment of soundness, desirability, or "warranted assertibility," or the opposite, may be made, while a full knowledge would reverse the judgment. We may illustrate the difficulty by a reference to Plato's figure of the cave. The man who escaped from the cave and found the light-world and then returned to the dwellers in the cave with conceptions having their base in the light-world would most likely find that his conceptions were not acceptable to those whose cognitions were confined to the shadow-world. Conceivably, some of these conceptions might be verified by the test of consequences within the terms of the shadow-world in some degree, but to the largest extent they would fail of such verification. Undoubtedly, for the greater part they would seem like rank heresy, with all the implications that follow from that. Tested by consequences exclusively, such conceptions would have little or no positive value for those who chose to remain bound in the cave consciousness. Suppose, though, that among the cave dwellers there was one or more who

accepted the man who returned as an *avatar*, or a divine descent from a transcendent order, and then accepted in faith the conceptions offered because of their source, and then proceeded to think and act in conformity with the implications of the new and strange conceptions. The probable outcome would be ultimate escape from the cave, with the subsequent verification of the conceptions.

The great limitation of verification by consequence lies in the fact that it assumes the understanding and insight of the present, existing empiric man as the power or standard for the evaluation of the consequence. It is not hard to see how the greatest ultimate good and truth could appear to the perspective of the present empiric consciousness as something unattractive, unsound, and even malign. There may well be conjunctures in the history of empiric man when disaster can be avoided only by the hieratic imposition of certain truths with their implications. Changes wrought in the human consciousness by this means can have the effect of rendering the given consequences attractive, sound, and benign. In the two situations the test by consequences leads to quite divergent evaluations.

To be sure, the Pragmatic thinkers do quite generally accept the notion of evolution as an active operating principle resulting in the development of human consciousness. Indeed, with John Dewey, the development is a fundamental conception. This implies that the valuation based upon consequences is subject to progressive modification, but this development is, quite naturally, viewed as a continuum in the evolving empiric consciousness. Yet, while one may recognize a degree of validity in this conception, the difficulty remains that it can be finally valid only on the assumption that the sole process in the transformation of human consciousness is in the form of a continuous evolutionary development in the empiric field. If it is true that the total process in the transformation of human consciousness is in the nature of multiple continua in discrete relationships of transcendence with respect to each other—as may be illustrated by the notion of multiple dimensions—then the conception of development exclusively within the terms of one evolutionary continuum fails of being adequate. It is reduced to a part truth, which, by being insisted upon too exclusively, can retard the realization of the higher possibilities of man.

A study of the history of Gnostic transformations renders quite clear the fact that here we are dealing with alterations of states of consciousness and of self-identification that involve relationships of discrete transcendence, often, if not generally, manifesting incommensurability as between state and state. Here, then, we have at least one field in which the test by consequences fails.

The test by consequences, when viewed as the sole criterion of truth and soundness, tends to the enthronement of the *consensus gentium* as supreme authority, and, in the absence of universal consent, to the general exaltation of majority opinion and evaluation. This tends to drag culture down to the dead level of mediocrity, since the valuation of the majority tends to be that of the medial intelligence, character, and taste. Superiority of truth-insight, moral standard, level of taste, and so forth, are not initially or naturally part of the medial level of human consciousness, but are the contribution of the few who stand or march in the van of human progression. The valuations of the latter tend to fare ill before the *consensus gentium* at the time of their presentation, however much they may slowly percolate into the common consciousness in the passage of time.

The result is that the test by consequences, when too greatly exalted as a truth and value criterion, tends to retard the development of the higher possibilities in human consciousness. If the goal of man is to exceed himself, if this goal is such that he must leave behind what he now is in order that he may become a something more, which, as yet, he cannot understand and properly value, then the test by consequences is not enough when applied by the *consensus gentium* of the majority. It is here that Pragmatism fails.

[The end of the fifth chapter of the third part of *Consciousness Without an Object*.]