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WHAT IS A POLITICAL THEORY?*

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For many centuries the philosophy of Western Europe has included as one of its accustomed parts a study of the nature and well-being of civic societies, a kind of companion-piece to its study, in psychology and ethics, of the nature and well-being of the human individual. Like so much else in European philosophy, this interest in the political community was, at the beginning, a creature of Greek civilization. It began with that humanistic reaction, fostered by the Sophists and crystallized in the overpowering personality of Socrates, which so completely changed the course of Greek philosophy at the end of the fifth century before Christ. Political philosophy began in Athens at the same time with the birth of social studies, such as linguistics, the history and criticism of literature, the descriptive analysis of political and economic institutions, and a critical as distinguished from a merely narrative history. This humanistic relationship, which dominated philosophy for many centuries, was not dissolved even when the rise of the modern natural sciences in the seventeenth century restored subjects like physics and mathematics to a place of foremost interest in the minds of philosophical scholars. Perhaps marginal, in the sense that it has existed on the edges of the more precise and more technical disciplines, political philosophy has still maintained its standing as a subject of perennial philosophical concern.

It is usually unprofitable to argue, speculatively and *a priori*, about the form or the purposes that a branch of science or philosophy ought to have. The discussion of scientific methods,

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like any other discussion, needs a subject matter, and in the case of political philosophy, this must be provided by the history of the subject. The question, What is a political theory, ought to be answered descriptively, since in fact political philosophy is whatever philosophers have thought about civil society and called by that name. Evidently, any practicable description will not be complete, for in the course of history political philosophy has assumed many forms, has served many purposes, and has answered to many conceptions of scientific and philosophical reliability. Still, the subject has to some extent been a unit throughout its history, and some description of its salient characteristics is possible. But though the description must depend on history, the object of seeking such a description at all is not historical. A person who wants to know what a political philosophy is, if he is not an antiquarian, means to ask about its truth, its certainty, or its reliability, and about the kind of criticism that should be applied in order to test these qualities. Obviously these are not historical questions, for the occurrence of a theory says nothing whatever about its truth.

This essay, therefore, has a twofold purpose. In the first place, it will enumerate some of the properties that political theories have actually had. Though this involves selection and concentration on a few properties that have recurred frequently and that seem important, it is intended to be quite factual, depending upon the analysis of what have figured as political theories in the literature of philosophy. In the second place, however, it is the intention to keep in view a variety of questions about the truth or validity of political theories. How far can they be described as simply true or false? In what sense can words like *sound*, *true*, *valid*, *reliable* be applied to them? And finally, the practical question, by what kind of criticism can elements of truth in them be discriminated from elements of falsehood?

When one runs his eye over the historical literature that belongs traditionally to political philosophy, he is struck at once by the fact that this literature is not typically the product of the study or the laboratory. Even when it is produced by scholars, its authors have one eye fixed on the forum; and when

political philosophy is produced in quantities, it is a sure symptom that society itself is going through a period of stress and strain. It is a remarkable fact that, in a history extending over nearly twenty-five hundred years, a considerable part of the most significant writing on political philosophy was done in two periods of only about fifty years each and in two places of quite restricted area. The first of these places was Athens, and the period was the two middle quarters of the fourth century before Christ, which saw the production of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics*. The second place was England, and the period was the half century between 1640 and 1690, which produced the works of Hobbes and Locke, together with the works of a host of lesser figures. Both these periods, it should be noted, witnessed changes of the most momentous importance in the course of European social and intellectual history. The first period saw the lapse of the Greek city from its place of cultural leadership—surely the major moral upheaval of the ancient world—and the preparation of that amalgam of Greek and Asiatic civilization which determined the whole future course of European culture. The second period saw the formation of the first constitutional state on national lines and the preparation of those intellectual and scientific changes that governed the Western World down at least until 1914.

These two cases are major examples of a quality in political philosophy which might be illustrated almost without end and which is indeed typical. Political theories are secreted, to paraphrase a famous comparison of substantive and procedural law, in the interstices of political and social crisis. They are produced, not indeed by the crisis as such, but by its reaction on minds that have the sensitivity and the intellectual penetration to be aware of crisis. Hence there is in every political theory a reference to a pretty specific situation, which needs to be grasped in order to understand what the philosopher is thinking about. Always he is thinking about something that has actually occurred and that has been the stimulus of his thought. To recover this situation and its power of intellectual stimulation may, if the theory belongs to a remote time and place, be a difficult task set to the historical imagination. But to reconstruct, as nearly

as one can, the time, the place, and the circumstance in which it was produced is always an important factor in understanding a political philosophy. For it is one of the characteristics of such a philosophy that it occurs as a part of or an incident in politics itself. It is an element of the same intellectual and social life within which politics is another element.

It is true, of course, that this reference to a specific situation should not be overemphasized. Because a political theory refers to the historical occasion from which it originated, it need not be applicable to that alone. Political problems and situations are more or less alike from time to time and from place to place; what has been thought on one occasion is a factor in what is thought on another. For obvious reasons the political philosophy that remains alive is just that which can weave itself into the developing tradition of the subject. The greatest political theorizing is that which excels in both respects, in analysis of a present situation and in suggestiveness for other situations. Judged by this standard, Aristotle's *Politics* was probably the most important treatise on the subject that was ever written. Rarely has a form of government been subjected to a more penetrating examination than the Greek city received in the Fourth and Fifth Books of the *Politics*; probably never has a political treatise written in one age played so great a part in another as the *Politics* played in the fourteenth century, or again even in the nineteenth.

Since a political theory depends upon a special configuration of facts, it is to that extent turned toward the past. It is also, however, turned toward the future, for the kind of interest that produces political theory is in general quite different from that of an antiquarian. Characteristically political theories are bred of the interest that makes men want to do something about a situation which they believe to be bad. But even the most violently conservative theory—a theory directed to the merest preservation of the *status quo*—would still be directed, in the mind of its maker, toward the future, since a policy of doing nothing is still a policy. Quite regularly a political theory does contain or imply a policy. It commends some way of doing or criticizes some other; it defends or attacks what has been done

and argues for the continuance or the reversal of a line of conduct. Examples might be multiplied at any length. Locke, as everyone knows, wrote "to establish the throne of our great restorer, our present King William," and to show the validity of representative government founded in the consent of the people. Quite regularly his version of natural rights served to consolidate the gains of successful revolution or to defend the legitimacy of revolutionary programs. With equal regularity the great opponent of Locke's theory, the theory of dynastic legitimacy or royal divine right, was used to commend the values of political stability and national unity, or to neutralize revolutionary propaganda. Very often, perhaps usually, political theories have had some sort of partizan bias, revolutionary, liberal, conservative, or reactionary. Even the most detached philosophies have grown from some interested reading of the facts, some estimate of what the facts signify for the future, and some concern with the way events should shape themselves.

There is, then, no such thing as a disinterested political theory, if that word be used to mean literally something that is bred of indifference. For those who are genuinely indifferent about the future do not take the trouble to make political theories, and those who do take that trouble usually care intensely about something. This attitude of regard for the future itself needs to be analysed and divided. It always must include, either expressly or by implication, both a judgment about what is likely and a judgment about what is desirable. In short, a political theory includes an estimate of probabilities and an estimate of values. It can scarcely lack the former because any responsible attitude toward the future must take account of the possibilities, or, more accurately, the varying degrees of likelihood that belong to different projects for action, unless indeed a theorist is the complete doctrinaire. It certainly cannot lack the latter because any interested attitude toward the future involves preferences, choices, the sense of moral imperatives, the belief that one outcome is better than another. The word *policy* is quite meaningless without some assumptions about what is desirable or obligatory—however one chooses to name this act of evaluation.

A political theory, then, as thus far analyzed, covers three kinds of factors: it includes factual statements about the posture

of affairs that gave rise to it; it contains statements of what may be roughly called a causal nature, to the effect that one kind of thing is more likely to happen, or may be more easily brought about, than another; and it contains statements that something ought to happen or is the right and desirable thing to have happen. This analysis, it will be perceived, follows pretty closely the description of reflective thinking given by the pragmatists, particularly by Professor Dewey and George H. Mead. The pragmatists, indeed, would generalize the description, asserting that the joint reference to past and future, and the joint reference to causes and values, are characteristic of every complete act of thought, whether about politics or anything else. Any theory, for the pragmatist, is a plan of action designed to adjust a tension between actually conflicting but potentially harmonizable needs, and this definition is defended on the still more general principle that no concept could be meaningful at all except as a factor in behavior. Whether this general psychological theory of thinking is true or not, the description is reasonably accurate so far as theories of politics are concerned.

Granting that political theories have characteristically contained factors of the three kinds mentioned—the factual, the causal, and the valuational—it still remains a question what logical relation holds between these three types of proposition. The pragmatist infers that because the three sometimes (or, as he thinks, always) occur in the same psychological situation, they must therefore be united in some logical form of synthesis. In other words, what he calls a complete act of thought claims to be complete in a logical as well as a psychological sense. The validity of this conclusion is the philosophical problem (or one current form of it) that this essay is meant to pose, because it appears to be a major issue in contemporary thought. The conclusion herein defended is that logically the three kinds of propositions are quite distinct; in short, that the likelihood of an event's happening and the desirability of its happening are quite without any logical correlation. And this conclusion implies a destructive criticism of pragmatism, in so far as pragmatism has claimed to be more than a chapter in social psychology. This general conclusion will be made a little clearer, and perhaps a

little more convincing, in the latter part of the essay, but at present it will be better to finish describing a political theory.

The description so far given applies to what might be called the logical structure of a political theory, the elements in it that make propositions and that might, in consequence, be affirmed or denied. Very often, however—perhaps usually—political theories have, and are intended to have, psychological as well as logical effects. Because they deal with practical social issues and are created as incidents of conflict, they are intended to persuade as well as to convince. Even the most abstract political theory probably never altogether lays aside some such purpose, and even the coolest scholar can hardly be indifferent to the adoption of courses that he believes to be wise and good. In popular political theorizing the element of persuasion is usually very much in the foreground. When Thomas Jefferson wrote the famous second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, he set down the main axioms of the philosophy of natural rights as a justification, to America and to the world, of the action that the Congress had already taken in voting a resolution that “these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states.” Years afterward, when John Adams testily declared that there was not an idea in the document which was not a generally accepted commonplace, Jefferson very reasonably replied that he had not been deputed by the Congress to “invent new ideas.” He was to state the case for Congress and the Colonies in a form that would carry conviction to all men of intelligence and good will. The doctrine that men have inalienable rights and are justified in protecting them by armed resistance was persuasive just because it had a familiarity and an emotional warmth bred by centuries of belief.

The project of persuading, however, opens up larger possibilities than are immediately evident. In form at least, the Declaration of Independence, though certainly biased, was still essentially argumentative, possibly because it was addressed to an age in which the love of rationality was itself a major passion. But passion of any sort is inherently persuasive. It generates its own belief in the fulfillment of its own wishes and projects its own loves and hates into the perception of facts both past and future. If the object of a political theory were merely

to generate belief, it would probably be a waste of time to spend much effort on either facts or arguments. The obvious—and, it must be acknowledged, the effective—short-cut is to generate the passions and supply them with the psychological apparatus of uncritical belief that perpetuates them and gives them effect. The part that political philosophy has been made to play in the modern dictatorships might be described as an elaborate experiment in applied psychiatry, and they show that this art is not only feasible but comparatively easy. One thinks at once of the part that the conception of race has played in recent German political writing. On scientific grounds no competent anthropologist for a moment takes seriously the idea that any European race is pure. Neither is it possible to believe that the persecution of the Jews resulted from any of the actual characteristics of that group in Germany, such as their greater prosperity or their alleged inability to think, feel, or act like other Germans. They were merely suitable—for emotional, not for actual reasons—to be cast in the rôle of national scapegoat. The ideal of racial purity has a strictly mystical significance. It serves as a symbol, and object of veneration, to solidify a party, to release its energies, and to foster that “more savage will to power” which Hitler has described as the key to national greatness. Race is a “myth,” in the sense that Georges Sorel attached to that word.

In truth, however, it is not the dictatorships alone that have discovered what might be called the folklore of political philosophy. The Freudian psychologists, and indeed psychologists of many other schools, have explored the influence that interests, wishes, and desires exert upon belief and their tendency to produce “rationalizations” that can masquerade as valid theories. As a mode of attacking an opponent’s position this sort of criticism has become a standard part of the modern controversialists’ equipment, witness the prevalence of a word like “ideology” in our modern vocabulary of political criticism. There is no denying that partizan interests do generate partizan beliefs, and that partizan beliefs do claim the certainty of fact or the necessity of logic. Probably it is true that no man, whatever his honesty of purpose or his desire to be fair, can always weigh his own interests on an equal scale with interests that he dislikes or distrusts. But it is one thing to say that political theories have

sometimes served the same purposes as folklore, and another to imply, as enthusiastic psychologists and sociologists sometimes seem to do, that they never serve any other purpose, or that a theory is nothing but a tactical manoeuvre in the class-struggle or in the national struggle for power. This game of ideological criticism permits of any number of players, and when the game is all played out and every view has been shown to be equally nonsensical, then the serious business of politics as thus conceived can begin, namely, breaking heads instead of answering arguments.

It is true, of course, that every political theory is a fact, a quite substantial fact that occurs in the gamut of facts that makes up a particular political situation. As such, it had its causes and may, no doubt, have its effects. Moreover, it has its effects whether it be true or false, because in either case it exists in a quite objective sense, as a thing that may affect men's conduct. It is always possible that men behave differently in any given situation, merely because they entertain some theory about their own existence and the situation in which they find themselves. This is a curious involution that occurs in all social theories and that has no precise analogue in the theories of natural science, unless it be in those cases, recently brought to light by the principle of indeterminism, where the mere fact of observation operates to change the very state of affairs which is under observation. Where this occurs, the natural scientist admits with all modesty that he has reached a limit beyond which he cannot conceive a refinement of his theory. And the social scientist must surely, in all intellectual honesty, do the same. In so far as theories figure as facts, standing in causal relations with other facts, and in so far as they appear as the data of human behavior which a theorist must himself count among the data of the situation that he is studying, they must of course be accepted as all data are, simply as elements of the reality studied. Their effects are in no way correlated with their truth, for even false theories may influence men's conduct. Their causal influence as existing facts is simply irrelevant to their truth or falsity. But in any given time and place one must make up his mind which language he elects to speak. If he accepts a theory as itself a *bona fide* effort to speak the truth, he must accord it that respect

which belongs to such an effort. He must meet it on the plane of logic, must confirm or refute it on that level, by showing its consistency or inconsistency and its ability or inability to explain the facts. When he begins to discuss its influence, he puts it among existing things in the world of events and objects, and events are not themselves true or false; they simply occur.

An example will make the meaning clearer. A critic may deal in two quite different ways with the doctrine that Jefferson wrote into the Declaration of Independence. It is possible to discuss the validity of those propositions about inalienable and infeasible natural rights, to apply a rational criticism to the assertion that all men are created equal, to analyse their meaning, to show how they agreed with a prevalent conception of scientific method, and to point out wherein they fall short of the self-evidence that Jefferson attributed to them. But such criticism is possible only so far as the critic is willing to discuss the factual truth or logical consistency of the theory examined. Quite apart from all such questions, however, it is still a fact that Jefferson and his fellow-members of the Continental Congress did believe in the theory of natural rights. It is quite possible that they would not have acted as they did had their beliefs been otherwise. It is credible that in so believing they may have been unconsciously the agents of a militant middle-class, intent upon rising to the political power that their economic importance warranted. If such causal influences swayed their action, it is of no consequence whatever whether what they believed was true or false. As Bishop Butler said, "Everything is what it is, and not another thing," and beliefs may have their effects however false they are. But surely no critic can apply both criteria at once. He may be concerned to assess the correctness of a doctrine, and if so its consequences are irrelevant; or he may be concerned with its actual effects and influences, and then its truth is irrelevant.

Political theories, therefore, live on two planes or play a double rôle. They are theories, or logical entities belonging to the abstract world of thought, but they are also beliefs, events in people's minds and factors in their conduct. In this latter rôle they are influential (if they are) not because they are true but because they are believed. On this plane they operate as events,

or as actual factors in historical situations, and as such are part of the data which the historian of politics has to deal with. But this historical reality is obviously not what interests those persons who sincerely believe a theory to be true; such persons are not interested in a theory because it exists but because they believe it to be a valid explanation of something else. What the framers of the Declaration of Independence meant to do was "to declare the causes" that impelled them to dissolve the political bands which had connected the Colonies with England, an explanation required by "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind." In this they set down as a major premise the claim of indefeasible natural rights and as a minor premise a long list of aggressions, which they attributed to the King of England and interpreted as evidence of a settled determination to tyrannize. For them these claims were not merely beliefs; they were parts of what purported to be a correct statement of facts and a valid inference from them. A rational criticism, as distinguished from a study of historical causes, would have to take these claims as *bona fide*, even though it might end with the conclusion that they were utterly fallacious.

To return now to the beginning of this essay, it will be apparent that the questions there raised referred to the rational criticism of political theories, the question whether, or in what sense, they can claim the logical attributes of truth or validity. It will be remembered also that in the description there given of political theories it was said that they regularly unite two kinds of factors. In the first place, there are elements of a factual and causal nature: the apprehension of a state of affairs actually existing, an estimate of the relative importance of different factors in this situation, and a weighing of future possibilities. In the second place, there are elements of valuation: an estimation of importance, not in the sense of what is likely to happen, but of what ought to happen, the discrimination of a better from a worse way, the conviction that some courses of action are morally obligatory, an expression of choice or preference growing from an attitude of desire, or fear, or confidence toward what the present holds and what the future may bring forth. The question, then, is whether a theory uniting these two kinds of factors can be rationally adjudged to be true or false; in short,

whether there is any common measure that can extend over and validate the theory as a whole.

Now the only absolutely general standard of rational criticism is the rule that a theory must not contain propositions that are mutually contradictory. A person who thinks about politics is under the same obligation to think consistently as one who thinks about any other subject, and to be convicted of an inconsistency is as damaging to a political theorist as to any other kind of theorist. Moreover, the standard of straight, coherent thinking is applicable both to thought which has facts for its subject-matter and to thought which has values for its subject-matter. A thinker can argue for mutually contradictory obligations as easily as he can attribute mutually incompatible properties to objects, and when he does the first he is as certainly wrong as when he does the second, for the avoidance of contradiction is a general principle that applies to all valid intellectual operations whatsoever. Nevertheless, the mere absence of contradiction cannot be regarded as equivalent to truth, except perhaps in pure logic and mathematics. For even if a theory were altogether self-consistent, there would still be the question whether what actually happens is the same as what the theory contemplates, and even if a theory of values were entirely coherent, there would still be the question whether the values which it contemplates are really acceptable as ends to be striven for and, if possible, attained. After making every admission possible to the binding-force of logical consistency, one must still agree that it goes only a little way toward validating a theory of any kind, whether in politics or any other subject.

If non-contradiction, though indispensable, is still not a sufficient principle of criticism, is there any other principle that can bridge the two kinds of propositions—allegations of fact and ascriptions of value—that occur together in every political theory? Apparently the answer must be, No. In combining these two kinds of factor a political theory puts together propositions for which there is no common logical measure and which all the dictates of clear thinking require to be distinguished. In so far as a political theory depends on the assertion, expressed or implied, that some state of the facts is so and so, the only test applicable to it consists in inquiring whether the facts really were as alleged

or different. In so far as it presumes that one course of events is more likely to occur than another, it can be tested only in the light of the actual probabilities and perhaps in part by seeing whether the event seems to justify the expectation. In either case the assertion that an event has happened and the assertion that it ought to have happened are simply different and therefore ought not to be confused. And similarly, to say that a future event is probable is quite different from saying that it is desirable, or good, or the reverse. The two kinds of propositions are logically disparate in the sense that any statement containing such a copulative verb as "ought to be" requires the assumption of a standard of value which is never present as such in any purely actual situation or any purely causal sequence of events. When the two kinds of statement occur in conjunction, as they continually do in political theories, the beginning of critical judgment is analysis, the discrimination of the two kinds and the application to each of the tests appropriate to it.

Analysis and discrimination in this matter do not imply the superficial idea that political theories can be made "scientific" by the omission of references to moral and other forms of valuation. This idea usually depends not at all on discrimination of values as one element in a theory, but only on a simple-minded unconsciousness of valuations that have become habitual. It depends upon the kind of intellectual simplicity that Schopenhauer once attributed to an opponent: he imagined, Schopenhauer said, that whatever he had learned before he was fifteen years old was an innate principle of human reason. In truth it is humanly impossible even to describe a political or social situation without at least implicit assumptions about the importance of the elements that are to go into the description; the choice is between implicit assumptions and the explicit avowal of what is assumed. Moreover, there is no objection, at least on the score of logic, to making explicit assumptions about what is desirable; a policy or an end can be discussed as reasonably as anything else. It is probably not true even that men disagree more about values than they do about other matters. In any case there is no logical reason why a social philosopher should not postulate any value he chooses, provided only that he avows what he is doing and does not pretend to prove what he is merely taking for granted.

What he cannot do logically (or even honestly, if he knows what he is doing) is to pass off his valuations as if they were inescapable facts.

The practical question, of course, remains, whether it is really possible to perform this act of analysis, at least so long as a political theory is still an element in a living situation. Looking back to the past one easily perceives how often men's judgment of facts is swayed by their interests or misled by the intensity of their moral convictions, but in one's own thinking it must be admitted that one does not, and probably cannot, always avoid the same kind of error. The common usages of language conspire to make such confusions. The most ordinary words, like *is* and *must be*, have regularly a twofold use, to signify indifferently logical or moral necessity, existence or predication, and the precise meaning must be gathered, if at all, from the context. Thus, to refer again to the Declaration of Independence, when Jefferson declared it to be "self-evident that all men are created equal," he may have thought that the proposition was analogous to the alleged self-evident propositions that stand on the opening pages of Euclid. In the light of an exact analysis of those propositions, however, no one can imagine that he was merely giving a rule for handling symbols. It is hardly likely that Jefferson thought that all men are as a matter of fact equal; certainly the moral effect of the sentence is spoiled if one takes it to be parallel with some literally true statement about the way men are created, such as, All men are created babies. As everyone knows, Jefferson was really expressing a moral conviction to the effect that, in some matters of vital human importance, it is wrong to deprive men of their freedom of choice. One may accept or reject this assertion, but he cannot intelligently do either unless he sees what is really intended. In a sense the inevitability of confusion or error is irrelevant, even if it is a fact. No one wholly avoids inconsistency, but inconsistency is an error just the same. If there is a confusion inherent in the conflation of facts and values, it is still a confusion even if the whole world conspires to do it. Of course, no one doubts that, in this as in other respects, men do think more clearly when they try resolutely to avoid confusion.

It would be altogether unfair, however, to imply that the coalescence of judgments of value with judgments of fact or of logical implication has only the standing of a frequent, but admitted, popular confusion. On the contrary this coalescence is undertaken systematically in certain philosophies which, together, cover a considerable part of current philosophical opinion. A representative of one of these views would enter an exception against the statement made above, that propositions stating facts and propositions ascribing values are logically disparate and would hold that it is possible to include both within a single logical synthesis. Historically this contention goes back to Hegel, who believed that the idea of a self-developing totality in logic could sublimate the duality of rationalism and empiricism and refute at once the revolutionary doctrine of natural rights and the conventionalism or positivism implied by Hume's critique of natural rights. This was the purpose which Hegel thought that dialectic could fulfill. By means of dialectic he supposed it possible to show that certain values must emerge in the course of history and, conversely, that the causal processes of history are regulated by an inherent tendency to realize and conserve values. The dialectic was at once, therefore, a causal exploration and an immanent ethical criticism. However it may be formulated, the belief that some such dovetailing of value and fact is a soluble problem remains the best index of Hegel's influence over later philosophy. It continued to characterize the English Neo-Hegelians, and with all their differences it remains the fundamental claim of the Marxists, whose dialectical materialism is still in essence a claim that causal and moral necessity can be synthesized. In a milder form the purposes, if not the apparatus, of Hegel's dialectic perpetuated themselves in the pragmatism of Professor Dewey and Professor Mead, already referred to. For from the allegation that meanings can occur only in the fulfillment of purposes and that reflective thought is only a directive agency in behavior, it appears to follow that logical adequacy must include both factual efficiency and the fulfillment of purpose.

It would be silly to embark upon a thumb-nail refutation of Hegelianism, with all its ramifications, at the end of an essay already too long. The purpose has been to outline a problem and

to suggest a type of solution but not to offer a refutation of other types of solution that have been attempted. Its intention has been to suggest that here is one of the systematic differences between philosophical points of view, rooted as such differences are likely to be in diverse theories of knowledge. Descriptively one finds in human thinking about a concrete problem—say the problem attacked by a political theory—what seems to be a variety of factors answering to a variety of critical standards. There are allegations of fact and cause; there are imputations of value or obligation; there are the consequences, for human behavior, of believing or disbelieving the theory. Now must it be the case that there is some criterion of truth large enough to stretch over all these factors in the problem? If some such criterion is proposed—say “coherence”—does it cover the ground because it affords a really applicable standard for all types of problem, or does it seem to do so merely because it is so vague and ambiguous that no one knows with certainty what it means? Or, on the other hand, is it possible that the drawing of distinctions is both the beginning and the end of wisdom? In short, is it possible that truth is a word with several different meanings and that no one can say what it means unless he is allowed to discriminate at least what Leibniz called truths of reason and truths of fact, and perhaps several other kinds beside? With this reference to Leibniz it will be well to stop. For it suggests the obvious line of criticism, namely, that this paper illustrates a kind of philosophic atavism, the nostalgia for clear and distinct ideas that was more typical of the seventeenth than of the nineteenth century.