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影响世界历史进程的书

Reconstruction

英文珍藏版

in Philosophy

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John Dewey
〔美〕 约翰·杜威

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the mathematics subtle; natural philosophy deep; moral grave;
logic and rhetoric able to contend.*

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Reconstruction in Philosophy

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INTRODUCTION

RECONSTRUCTION AS SEEN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER

I

The text of this volume was written some twenty-five years ago—that is, soon after the First World War; that text is printed without revision. This Introduction is written in the spirit of the text. It is also written in the firm belief that the events of the intervening years have created a situation in which the need for reconstruction is vastly more urgent than when the book was composed; and, more specifically, in the conviction that the present situation indicates with greatly increased clearness where the needed reconstruction must center, the locus from which detailed new development must proceed. Today Reconstruction of Philosophy is a more suitable title than Reconstruction in Philosophy. For the intervening events have sharply defined, have brought to a head, the basic postulate of the text: namely, that the distinctive office, problems and subjectmatter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and that, accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history.

The First World War was a decided shock to the earlier period of optimism, in which there prevailed widespread belief in continued progress toward mutual understanding among peoples and classes, and hence a sure movement to harmony and peace. Today the shock is almost incredibly greater. Insecurity and strife are so general that the prevailing attitude is one of anxious and pessimistic uncertainty. Uncertainty as to what the future has in store casts its heavy and black shadow over all aspects of the present.

In philosophy today there are not many who exhibit confidence about its ability to deal competently with the serious issues of the day. Lack of confidence is manifested in concern for the improvement of techniques, and in threshing over the systems of the past. Both of these interests are justifiable in a way. But with respect to the first, the way of reconstruction is not through giving attention to form at the expense of substantial content, as is the case with techniques that are used only to develop and refine still more purely formal skills. With respect to the second, the way is not through increase of erudite scholarship about the past that throws no light upon the issues now troubling mankind. It is not too much to say that, as far as interest in the two topics just mentioned predominates, the withdrawal from the present scene, increasingly evident in philosophy, is itself a sign of the extent of the disturbance and unsettlement that now marks the other aspects of man's life. Indeed, we may go farther and say that such withdrawal is one manifestation of just those defects of past systems that render them of little value for the troubled affairs of the present: namely, the desire to find something so fixed and certain as to provide a secure refuge. The problems with which a philosophy relevant to the present must deal are those growing out of changes going on with ever-geographical range, and with ever-deepening intensity of penetration; this fact is one striking indication of the need for a very different kind of reconstruction from that which is now most in evidence.

When a view similar to that here presented has been advanced on previous occasions, as, indeed, in the text which follows, it has been criticized as taking what one of the milder of my critics has called "a sour attitude" toward the great systems of the past. It is, accordingly, relevant to the theme of needed reconstruction to say that the adverse criticisms of philosophies of the past are not directed at these systems with respect to their connection with intellectual and moral issues of their own time and

place, but with respect to their relevancy in a much changed human situation. The very things that made the great systems objects of esteem and admiration in their own socio-cultural contexts are in large measure the very grounds that deprive them of "actuality" in a world whose main features are different to an extent indicated by our speaking of the "scientific revolution", the "industrial revolution" and the "political revolution" of the last few hundred years. A plea for reconstruction cannot, as far as I can see, be made without giving considerable critical attention to the background within which and in regard to which reconstruction is to take place. Far from being a sign of disesteem, this critical attention is an indispensable part of interest in the development of a philosophy that will do for our time and place what the great doctrines of the past did in and for the cultural media out of which they arose.

Another criticism akin to that just discussed is that the view here taken of the work and office of philosophy rests upon a romantic exaggeration of what can be accomplished by "intelligence". If the latter word were used as a synonym for what one important school of past ages called "reason" or "pure intellect," the criticism would be more than justified. But the word names something very different from what is regarded as the highest organ or "faculty" for laying hold of ultimate truths. It is a shorthand designation for great and ever-growing methods of observation, experiment and reflective reasoning which have in a very short time revolutionized the physical and, to a considerable degree, the physiological conditions of life, but which have not as yet been worked out for application to what is itself distinctively and basically human. It is a new comer even in the physical field of inquiry; as yet it hasn't developed in the various aspects of the human scene. The reconstruction to be undertaken is not that of applying "intelligence" as something ready made. It is to carry over into any inquiry into human and moral subjects the kind of method (the method of observation, theory as hypothesis, and experimental test) by which understanding of physical nature has been brought to its present pitch.

Just as theories of knowing that developed prior to the existence of scientific inquiry provide no pattern or model for a theory of knowing based upon the present actual conduct of inquiry, so the earlier systems reflect both pre-scientific views of the natural world and also the pre-technological state of industry and the pre-democratic state of politics of the period when their doctrines took form. The actual conditions of life in Greece,

particularly in Athens, when classic European philosophy was formulated set up a sharp division between doing and knowing, which was generalized into a complete separation of theory and "practice". It reflected, at the time, the economic organization in which "useful" work was done for the most part by slaves, leaving free men relieved from labor and "free" on that account. That such a state of affairs is also predemocratic is clear. In political matters, nevertheless, philosophers retained the separation of theory and practice long after tools and processes derived from industrial operations had become indispensable resources in conducting the observations and experiments that are the heart of scientific knowing.

It should be reasonably obvious that an important aspect of the reconstruction that now needs to be carried out concerns the theory of knowledge. In it a radical change is demanded as to the subjectmatter upon which that theory must be based; the new theory will consider how knowing (that is, inquiry that is competent) is carried on, instead of supposing that it must be made to conform to views independently formed regarding faculties of organs. And, while substitution of "intelligence," in the sense just indicated, for "reason" is an important element in the change demanded, reconstruction is not confined to that matter. For the so-called "empirical" theories of knowledge, though they rejected the position of the rationalist school, operated in terms of what they took to be a necessary and sufficient faculty of knowledge, accommodating the theory knowing to their preformed beliefs about "sense-perception" instead of deriving their view of sense-perception from what goes on in the conduct of scientific inquiry^①.

It will be noted that the adverse criticisms dealt with in the foregoing paragraphs are dealt with not for the sake of replying to criticisms, but primarily as illustrations of why reconstruction is urgently required, and secondarily as illustrations of where it is needed. For there is no promise of the rise and growth of a philosophy relevant to the conditions that now

① The obvious insufficiency of psychological theories on this point has played a part in developing the formalisms already noted. Instead of using this insufficiency as ground for reconstruction of the psychological theory, the defective view was accepted qua psychology and hence was used as a ground for a "logical" theory of knowing that shut out entirely all reference to the factual ways in which knowledge advances.

supply the materials of philosophical issues and problems, save as the work of reconstruction takes serious account of how and where systems of the past indicate the need for reconstruction in the present.

II

It has been stated that philosophy grows out of, and in intention is connected with, human affairs. There is implicit in this view the further view that, while acknowledgment of this fact is a precondition of the reconstruction now required, yet it means more than that philosophy ought in the future to be connected with the crises and tensions in the conduct of human affairs. For it is held that in effect, if not in profession, the great systems of Western philosophy all have been thus motivated and occupied. A claim that they always have been sufficiently aware of what they were engaged in would, of course, be absurd. They have seen themselves, and have represented themselves to the public, as dealing with something which has variously been termed Being, Nature or the Universe, the Cosmos at large, Reality, the Truth. Whatever names were used, they had one thing in common: they were used to designate something taken to be fixed, immutable, and therefore out of time; that is, eternal. In being also something conceived to be universal or all-inclusive, this eternal being was taken to be above and beyond all variations in space. In this matter, philosophers reflected in generalized form the popular beliefs which were current when events were thought of as taking place in space and time as their all-comprehensive envelopes. It is a familiar fact that the men who initiated the revolution in natural science held that space and time were independent of each other and of the things that exist and the events that take place within them. Since the assumption of underlying fixities—of which the matter of space and time and of immutable atoms is an exemplification—dominated “natural” science, there is no ground for surprise that in a more generalized form it was the foundation upon which philosophy assumed, as a matter of course, that it must erect its structure. Philosophical doctrines which disagreed about virtually everything else were at one in the assumption that their distinctive concern as philosophy was to search for the immutable and ultimate—that which is—without respect to the temporal or spatial. Into this state of affairs in natural

science as well as in moral standards and principles, there recently entered the discovery that natural science is forced by its own development to abandon the assumption of fixity and to recognize that what for it is actually "universal" is process; but this fact of recent science still remains in philosophy, as in popular opinion up to the present time, a technical matter rather than what it is; namely, the most revolutionary discovery yet made.

The supposed fact that morals demand immutable, extra-temporal principles, standards, norms, ends, as the only assured protection against moral chaos can, however, no longer appeal to natural science for its support, nor expect to justify by science its exemption of morals (in practice and in theory) from considerations of time and place—that is, from processes of change. Emotional—or sentimental—reaction will doubtless continue to resist acknowledgment of this fact and refuse to use in morals the standpoint and outlook which have now made their way into natural science. But in any case, science and traditional morals have been at complete odds with one another as to the kinds of things which, according to one and the other, are immutable. Hence a deep and impassable gulf is set up between the natural subjectmatter of science and the extra—if not supra-natural subjectmatter of morals. There must be many thoughtful persons who are so dismayed by the inevitable consequences of this split that they will welcome that change in point of view which will render the methods and conclusions of natural science serviceable for moral theory and practice. All that is needed is acceptance of the view that moral subjectmatter is also spatially and temporally qualified. Considering the controverted present state of morals and its loss of popular esteem, the sacrifice demanded should not seem threatening to those who are not moved by vested institutional interest. As for philosophy, its profession of operating on the basis of the eternal and the immutable is what commits it to a function and a subjectmatter which, more than anything else, are the source of the growing popular disesteem and distrust of its pretensions; for it operates under cover of what is now repudiated in science, and with effective support only from old institutions whose prestige, influence and emoluments of power depend upon the preservation of the old order; and this at the very time when human conditions are so disturbed and unsettled as to call more urgently than at any previous time for the kind of comprehensive and "objective" survey in which historic philosophies have engaged. To the

vested interests, maintenance of belief in the transcendence of space and time, and hence the derogation of what is “merely” human, is an indispensable prerequisite of their retention of an authority which in practice is translated into power to regulate human affairs throughout—from top to bottom.

There is, however, such a thing as relative—that is relational—universality. The actual conditions and occasions of human life differ widely with respect to their comprehensiveness in range and in depth of penetration. To see why such is the case, one does not have to depend upon a scientifically explored theory of control from outside and above by self-moved and selfmoving forces. On the contrary, theory began to count in the sciences of astronomy, physics, physiology, in their multiple and varied aspects, when this attitude of dogmatism was replaced by the use of hypotheses in conducting experimental observations to bind concrete facts together in systems of increasing temporal – spatial extent. The universality that belongs to scientific theories is not that of inherent content fixed by God or Nature, but of range of applicability—of capacity to take events out of their apparent isolation so as to order them into systems which (as is the case with all living things) prove they are alive by the kind of change which is growth. From the standpoint of scientific inquiry nothing is more fatal to its right to obtain acceptance than a claim that its conclusions are final and hence incapable of a development that is other than mere quantitative extension.

While I was engaged in writing this Introduction, I received a copy of an address recently delivered by a distinguished English man of science. Speaking specifically of science, he remarked, “Scientific discovery is often carelessly looked upon as the creation of some new knowledge which can be added to the great body of old knowledge. This is true of the strictly trivial discoveries. It is not true of the fundamental discoveries, such as those of the laws of mechanics, of chemical combination, of evolution, on which scientific advance ultimately depends. These always entail the destruction of or disintegration of old knowledge before the new can be created.”^① He continued by pointing out specific instances of the importance

① C. D. Darlington, Conway Memorial Lecture on *The Conflict of Society and Science* (London: Watts & Co., 1948); italics not in text.

of getting outside of the grooves into which the heavy arm of custom tends to push every form of human activity, not excluding intellectual and scientific inquiry: "It is no accident that bacteria were first understood by a canal engineer, that oxygen was isolated by a Unitarian minister, that the theory of infection was established by a chemist, the theory of heredity by a monastic school teacher, and the theory of evolution by a man who was unfitted to be a university instructor in either botany or zoology." He closed by saying, "We need a Ministry of Disturbance, a regulated source of annoyance; a destroyer of routine; an underminer of complacency." The routine of custom tends to deaden even scientific inquiry; it stands in the way of discovery and of the active scientific worker. For discovery and inquiry are synonymous as an occupation. Science is a pursuit, not a coming into possession of the immutable; new theories as points of view are more prized than discoveries that quantitatively increase the store on hand. It is relevant to the theme of domination by custom that the lecturer said the great innovators in science "are the first to fear and doubt their discoveries."

I am here specially concerned with the bearing of what was said about men of science upon the work of philosophy. (The borderline between what is called hypothesis in science and what is called speculation (usually in a tone of disparagement) in philosophy is thin and shadowy at the time of initiation of new movements—those placed in contrast with "technical applications and developments" such as take place as a matter of course after a new and revolutionary outlook has managed to win acceptance.) Viewed in their own cultural contexts, the "hypotheses" advanced by those who now bear the name of great philosophers differ from the "speculations" of the men who have made great (and "destructive") innovations in science by having a wider range of reference and possible application; by the fact that they claim not to be "technical" but deeply and broadly human. At the time there is no sure way of telling whether the new way of seeing and of treating things is to turn out to be a case of science or of philosophy. Later, the classification is usually made with comparative ease. It is a case of "science" if and when its field of application is so specific, so limited, that passage into it is comparatively direct—in spite of the emotional uproar attending its appearance—as, for example, in the case of Darwin's theory. It is designated "philosophy" when its area of application is so comprehensive that it is not possible for it

to pass directly into formulations of such form and content as to be serviceable in immediate conduct of specific inquiry. This fact does not signify its futility; on the contrary, the contemporary state of cultural conditions was such as to stand effectually in the way of the development of hypotheses that would give immediate direction to specific observations and experiments so definitely factual as to constitute "science." As the history of scientific inquiry clearly shows, it was during the "modern" period that inquiry took the form of discussion, which, however, was not useless or idle, scientifically speaking. For, as the word etymologically implies, this discussion was a shaken up, a stirring, which loosened the firm hold of earlier cosmology upon science. This period of discussion, with the loosening that attended it, marks the time of the shading off of what now ranks as "philosophy" into what has now attained the rank of "science,"^① What is called the "climate of opinion" is more than a matter of opinions; it is a matter of cultural habits that determine intellectual as well as emotional and volitional attitudes. The work done by the men whose names now appear in histories of philosophy rather than of science played a large role in producing a climate that was favorable to initiation of the scientific movement whose outcome is the astronomy and physics that have displaced the old ontological cosmology.

It does not need deep scholarship to be aware that, at the time, this new science was regarded as a deliberate assault upon religion and upon the morals then intimately tied up with the religion of Western Europe. Similar attacks followed the revolution that began in the nineteenth century in biology. Historically prove that discussions that have not been carried, because of their very comprehensive and penetrating scope, to the point of detail characteristic of science, have done a work without which science would not be what it now is.

① It is well worth while recalling that for quite a while Newton ranked as "philosopher" of the division of that subject still classified as "natural" in distinction from metaphysical and moral. Even by his followers his deviations from Descartes were treated as matter not of physical science but of "natural philosophy".

III

The point of the foregoing discussion does not lie, however, in its bearing upon the value of past philosophic doctrines. Its relevancy for this Introduction consists of its bearing upon the reconstruction of work and subjectmatter that is needed to give philosophy today the vitality once possessed by its predecessors. What took place in the earlier history of science was serious enough to be named the "warfare of science and religion." Nevertheless, the scope of the events that bear that name is limited, almost technical, when it is placed in comparison with what is going on now because of the entry of science more generally into life. The present reach and thrust of what originates as science affects disturbingly every aspect of contemporary life, from the state of the family and the position of women and children, through the conduct and problems of education, through the fine as well as the industrial arts, into political and economic relations of association that are national and international in scope. They are so varied, so multiple, as well as developing with such rapidity, that they do not lend themselves to generalized statement. Moreover, their occurrence presents so many and such serious practical issues demanding immediate attention that man has been kept too busy meeting them piecemeal to make a generalized or intellectual observation of them. They came upon us like a thief in the night, taking us unawares.

The primary requisite of reconstruction is accordingly to arrive at an hypothesis as to how this great change came about so widely, so deeply, and so rapidly. The hypothesis here offered is that the upsets which, taken together, constitute the crisis in which man is now involved all over the world, in all aspects of his life, are due to the entrance into the conduct of the everyday affairs of life of processes, materials and interests whose origin lies in the work done by physical inquirers in the relatively aloof and remote technical workshops known as laboratories. It is no longer a matter of disturbance of religious beliefs and practices, but of every institution established before the rise of modern science a few short centuries ago. The earlier "warfare" was ended not by an out-and-out victory of either of the contestants but by a compromise taking the form of a division of fields and jurisdictions. In moral and ideal matters supremacy was accor-

ded to the old. They remained virtually immutable in their older form. As the uses of the new science proved beneficial in many practical affairs, the new physical and physiological science was tolerated with the understanding that it dealt only with lower material concerns and refrained from entering the higher spiritual "realm" of Being. This "settlement" by the device of division gave rise to the dualisms which have been the chief concern of "modern" philosophy. In the developments which have actually occurred and which have culminated especially within the last generation, the settlement by division of territories and jurisdictions has completely broken down in practice. This fact is exhibited in the present vigorous and aggressive campaign of those who accept the division hold that the representatives of natural science have not stayed where they belong but have usurped in actual practice—and of ten times in theory—the right to determine the attitudes and procedures proper to the "higher" authority. Hence, according to them, the present scene of disorder, insecurity and uncertainty, with the strife and anxiety that inevitably results.

I am not here concerned to argue directly against this view. Indeed, it may even be welcomed provided it is taken as an indication of where the issue centers with respect to reconstruction in philosophy. For it indicates by contrast the only direction which, under existing conditions, is intellectually and morally open. The net conclusion of those who hold natural science to be the fons et origo of the undeniably serious ills of the present is the necessity of bringing science under subjection to some special institutional "authority." The alternative is a generalized reconstruction so fundamental that it has to be developed by recognition that while the evils resulting at present from the entrance of "science" into our common ways of living are undeniable they are due to the fact that no systematic efforts have as yet been made to subject the "morals" underlying old institutional customs to scientific inquiry and criticism. Here, then, lies the reconstructive work to be done by philosophy. It must undertake to do for the development of inquiry into human affairs and hence into morals what the philosophers of the last few centuries did for promotion of scientific inquiry in physical and physiological conditions and aspects of human life.

This view of what philosophy needs in order to be relevant to present human affairs and to regain the vitality it is losing is not concerned to deny that the entry of science into human activities and interests has its destructive phase. Indeed, the point of departure for the view here presented re-

garding the reconstruction demanded in philosophy is that this entry, amounting to a hostile invasion of the old, is the main factor operating to produce the present estate of man. And, while the attack upon science as the responsible and guilty party is terribly one-sided in its emphasis upon the destruction involved and in neglect of the many and great human benefits that have accrued, it is held that the issue cannot be disposed of by drawing a balance sheet of human loss and gain with a view to showing that the latter predominates.

The case in fact is much simpler. The premise on which the present assault upon science depends is that old institutional customs, including institutional belief, provide an adequate, and indeed a final, criterion by which to judge the worth of consequences produced by the disturbing entry of science. Those who maintain this premise systematically refuse to note that "science" has a copartner in producing our critical situation. It only takes an eye single to the facts to observe that science, instead of operating alone and in a void, works within an institutional state of affairs developed in prescientific days, one which is not modified by scientific inquiry into the moral principles that were then formed and were, presumably, appropriate to it.

One simple example shows the defection and distortion that results from viewing science in isolation. The destructive use made of the fission of the nucleus of an atom has become the stock-in-trade of the assault upon science. What is so ignored as to be denied is that this destructive consequence occurred not only in a war but because of the existence of war, and that war as an institution antedates by unknown millennia the appearance on the human scene of anything remotely resembling scientific inquiry. That in this case destructive consequences are directly due to pre-existent institutional conditions is too obvious to call for argument. It does not prove that such is the case everywhere and at all times; but it certainly cautions us against the irresponsible and indiscriminate dogmatism now current. It gives us the definite advice to recall the unscientific conditions under which morals, in both the practical and the theoretical senses of that word, took on form and content. The end-in-view in calling attention to a fact that cannot be denied, but that is systematically ignored, is not the futile, because totally irrelevant, purpose of justifying the work of scientific inquirers in general or in special cases. It is to direct attention to a fact of

outstanding intellectual import. The development of scientific inquiry is immature; it has not as yet got beyond the physical and physiological aspects of human concerns, interests and subjectmatters. In consequence, it has partial and exaggerated effects. The institutional conditions into which it enters and which determine its human consequences have not as yet been subjected to any serious, systematic inquiry worthy of being designated scientific.

The bearing of this state of affairs upon the present state of philosophy and the reconstruction which should be undertaken is the theme and thesis of this Introduction. Before directly resuming that theme, I shall say something about the present state of morals; a word, be it remembered, that stands both for a morality as a practical socio-cultural fact in respect to matters of right and wrong, good and evil, and for theories about the ends, standards, principles according to which the actual state of affairs is to be surveyed and judged. Now the simple fact of the case is that any inquiry into what is deeply and inclusively human enters perforce into the specific area of morals. It does so whether it intends to and whether it is even aware of it or not. When "sociological " theory withdraws from consideration of the basic interests, concerns, the actively moving aims, of a human culture on the ground that " values " are involved and that inquiry as "scientific" has nothing to do with values, the inevitable consequence is that inquiry in the human area is confined to what is superficial and comparatively trivial, no matter what its parade of technical skills. But, on the other hand, if and when inquiry attempts to enter in critical fashion into that which is human in its full sense, it comes up against the body of prejudices, traditions and institutional customs that consolidated and hardened in a pre-scientific age. For it is tautology, not the announcement of a discovery or of an inference, to state that morals, in both senses of the word, are pre-scientific when formed in an age preceding the rise of science as now understood and practiced. And to be unscientific, when human affairs in the concrete are immensely altered, is in effect to resist the formulation of methods of inquiry into morals in a way that renders existing morals—again in both senses—anti-scientific.

The case would be comparatively simple if there were already in hand the intellectual standpoint, outlook, or what philosophy has called "categories," to serve as instrumentalities of inquiry. But to assume that they are at hand is to assume that intellectual growths which reflect a pre-scientific

tific state of human affairs, concerns, interests and ends are adequate to deal with a human situation which is increasingly and for a very large part the outgrowth of new science. In a word, it is to decide to continue the present state of drift, instability and uncertainty. If the foregoing statements are understood in the sense in which they are intended, the view that is here proposed in regard to reconstruction in philosophy will stand out forcibly. From the position here taken, reconstruction can be nothing less than the work of developing, of forming, of producing (in the literal sense of that word) the intellectual instrumentalities which will progressively direct inquiry into the deeply and inclusively human—that is to say, moral—facts of the present scene and situation.

The first step, a prerequisite of further steps in the same general direction, will be to recognize that, factually speaking, the present human scene, for good and evil, for harm and benefit alike, is what it is because, as has been said, of the entry into everyday and common (in the sense of ordinary and of shared) -ways of living of what has its origin in physical inquiry. The methods and conclusions of "science" do not remain penned in within "science." Even those who conceive of science as if it were a self - enclosed, self - actuated independent and isolated entity cannot deny that it does not remain such in practical fact. It is a piece of theoretical animistic mythology to view it as an entity, as do those who hold that it is *fons et origo* of present human woes. The science that has so far found its way deeply and widely into the actual affairs of human life is partial and incomplete science: competent in respect to physical, and now increasingly to physiological, conditions (as is seen in the recent developments in medicine and public sanitation), but nonexistent with respect to matters of supreme significance to man—those which are distinctively of, for, and by, man. No intelligent way of seeing and understanding the present estate of man will fail to note the extraordinary split in life occasioned by the radical incompatibility between operations that manifest and perpetuate the morals of a pre-scientific age and the operations of a scene which has suddenly, with immense acceleration and with thorough pervasiveness, been factually determined by a science which is still partial, incomplete, and of necessity onesided in operation.