

Chapter XIII : THE NOTION OF OBJECTIVITY

Human knowing is cyclic and cumulative. It is cyclic inasmuch as cognitional process advances from experience through inquiry and reflection to judgment, only to revert to experience and recommence its ascent to another judgment. It is cumulative, not only in memory's store of experiences and understandings' clustering of insights, but also in the coalescence of judgments into the context named knowledge or mentality.

This complexity of our knowing involves a parallel complexity in our notion of objectivity. Principally the notion of objectivity is contained within a patterned context of judgments which serve as implicit definitions of the terms, object, subject. But besides this principal and complete notion, there also are partial aspects or components emergent within cognitional process. Thus, there is an experiential aspect of objectivity proper to sense and empirical consciousness. There is a normative aspect that is contained in the contrast between the detached and unrestricted desire to know and, on the other hand, merely subjective desires and fears. Finally, there is an absolute aspect that is contained in single judgments considered by themselves inasmuch as each rests on a grasp of the unconditioned and is posited without reservation.

### 1. The Principal Notion.

Principally, the notion of objectivity is contained in a patterned context of judgments. For one may define as object any A, B, C, D,..... where, in turn, A, B, C, D,..... are defined by the correctness of the set of judgments:

A is; B is; C is; D is; .....

A is <sup>neither</sup> ~~not~~ B nor C nor D nor .....

B is <sup>neither</sup> ~~not~~ C nor D nor .....

C is <sup>neither</sup> ~~not~~ D nor .....

Again, one may define a subject as any object, say A, where it is true that A affirms himself as a knower in the sense explained in the <sup>chapter</sup> ~~section~~ on self-affirmation.

The bare essentials of this notion of objectivity are reached if we add to the judgments already discussed, viz., I as a knower, This is a typewriter, the further judgment that I am not this typewriter. An indefinite number of further objects may be added by making the additional appropriate positive and negative judgments. Finally, in so far as one can intelligently grasp and reasonably affirm the existence of other knowers besides oneself, one can add to the list of <sup>the</sup> objects that are also subjects.

The properties of the principal notion of objectivity have now to be noted. First, as has already been remarked, the notion resides in a context of judgments; without a plurality of judgments that satisfy a definite pattern, the notion does not emerge. Secondly, there follows an immediate corollary; the principal notion of objectivity, as defined, is not contained in any single judgment and, still less, in any experiential or normative factor

that occurs in cognitional process prior to judgment. Thirdly, the validity of the principal notion of objectivity is the same as the validity of the set of judgments that contain it: if the judgments are correct, then it is correct that there are objects and subjects in the sense defined, for the sense defined is simply the correctness of the appropriate pattern of judgments.

Fourthly, to turn to certain broader aspects of the principal notion, judgments in the appropriate pattern commonly are made and commonly are regarded as correct. It follows that commonly, people will know objects and subjects and that commonly, they will be surprised that any doubt should be entertained about the matter. On the other hand, it does not follow that people will commonly be able to give a lucid account of their knowledge of objects and subjects. For the lucid account employs the somewhat recondite art of implicit definition and, at the same time, people are apt to jump to the conclusion that so evident a matter as the existence of objects and subjects must rest on something as obvious and conspicuous as the experiential aspect of objectivity. Hence, on the one hand, they will say that the typewriter is an object because they see it or feel it; on the other hand, however, they will admit that would not consider the typewriter an object if they knew it to be true either that there was no typewriter at all or that what they named a typewriter was identical with everything else.

Fifthly, the principal notion of objectivity is closely related to the notion of being. Being is that is to be known through the totality of correct judgments. Objectivity in its principal

sense is what is known through any set of judgments satisfying a determinate pattern. In brief, there is objectivity if there are distinct beings, some of which both know themselves and know others as others. Moreover, the notion of being explains why objectivity in its principal sense is to be reached only through a pattern of judgments. For the notion of being becomes determinate only in so far as judgments are made; prior to judgment, one can think of being but one cannot know it; and any single judgment is but a minute increment in the process towards knowing it. Again, being is divided from within; apart from being there is nothing; it follows that there cannot be a subject that stands outside being and looks at it: the subject has to be before he can look; and, once he is, then he is not outside being but either the whole of it or some part. If he is the whole of it, then he is the sole object. If he is only a part, then he has to begin by knowing a multiplicity of parts (A is; B is; A is not B) and add that one part knows others (I am A).

Sixthly, the principal notion of objectivity solves the problem of transcendence. How does the knower get beyond himself to a known? The question is, so suggest, misleading. It supposes the knower to know himself and asks how he can know anything else. Our answer involves two elements. On the one hand, we contend that, while the knower may experience himself or think about himself without judging, still he cannot know himself until he makes the correct affirmation, I am, and then, we contend that other judgments are equally possible and reasonable, so that through experience, inquiry, and reflection there arises knowledge of other

objects both as beings and as being other than the knower. Hence, we place transcendence, not in going beyond a known knower, but in heading for being within which there are positive differences and, among such differences, the difference between object and subject. Inasmuch as such judgments occur, there is in fact, objectivity and transcendence; and whether or not such judgments are correct, is a distinct question to be resolved along the lines reached in the analysis of judgment.

Besides the principal notion of objectivity, there also are the partial aspects of experiential, normative, and absolute objectivity. It will be convenient to begin from the last of the three.

The ground of absolute objectivity is the virtually unconditioned that is grasped by reflective understanding and posited in judgment. It is formally unconditioned, which has no conditions at all, stands outside the interlocked field of conditional<sup>ing</sup> and conditioned; it is intrinsically absolute. The virtually unconditioned stands within that field; it has conditions; it itself is among the conditions of other instances of the conditioned; still its conditions are fulfilled; it is a de facto absolute.

Because the content of the judgment is an absolute, it is withdrawn from relativity to the subject that utters it, the place in which he utters it, the time at which he utters it. Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon was a contingent event occurring <sup>at</sup> ~~in~~ a particular place and time. But a true affirmation of that event is an eternal, immutable, definitive validity. For if it is true that he did cross, then no one whatever at any place or time can

truly deny that he did.

Hence, it is in virtue of absolute objectivity that our knowing requires that has been named its publicity. For the same reason that the unconditioned is withdrawn from relativity to its source, it also is accessible not only to the knower that utters it but also to any other knower.

Again, it is the absolute objectivity of the unconditioned that is formulated in the logical principles of identity and contradiction. The principle of identity is the immutable and definitive validity of the true. The principle of contradiction is the exclusiveness of that validity. It is, and what is opposed to it, is not.

*contradiction*

Further, absolute objectivity pertains to single judgments as single. As has been argued, the principal notion of objectivity is constituted only by a suitable constellation of judgments. But each judgment in such a constellation is an absolute and, moreover, it is an absolute in virtue of its own affirmation of the unconditioned. The validity of the principal notion is a derived validity resting on the set of absolutes it involves. But the absolute aspect of objectivity has its ground in the single judgment to which it pertains. It is quite compatible with the affirmation that there is but one being, that there is no object except the affirming subject; accordingly, the absolute aspect of objectivity does not imply any subject-object relation; it constitutes the entry of our knowing into the realm of being but, by itself, it does not suffice to posit, distinguish, and relate beings. However, this insufficiency arises, not from some defect of absolute

objectivity, nor because the posited beings, their distinction, and their relations are not all unconditioned, but because several judgments are needed to posit, to distinguish, and to relate.

It is important not to confuse the absolute objectivity of any correct judgment with the invariance proper to the expression of universal judgments. Both universal and particular judgments, if correct, are absolutely objective. But the former are expressed invariantly because the expression is independent of variations in spatio-temporal reference frames, while the latter are expressed relatively because their expression does not enjoy such independence. However, the variation of the expression presupposes and reveals the absolute objectivity of that is expressed. Because "I am here now" has absolute objectivity, <sup>there is an identical</sup> ~~truth~~ truth <sup>to be repeated</sup> only by employing the different words, "We was there then".

Again, absolute objectivity has no implications of an absolute space or of an absolute time. If it is true that space is, then what is absolute is the truth and not the space. Whether the space is absolute or relative, is a further question. If it is true that space consists of an infinite set of immovable and empty places, then space is absolute. If it is true that space is not such a set, then space is relative. Which is correct? At least, the issue cannot be settled by appealing to the fact that a true judgment posits an unconditional.

Further, as Zeno argued, to affirm that something or other is, does not imply that it is within space. If it did, one could ask whether or not the space (within which it is) is. If not, that space is nothing and to affirm things within nothing is meaningless. If, however, it is, then since "to be" is "to be within space", the

question recurs; if "X is" means "X is within space", it would seem to follow that "space is" means that "space is within space"; the second space cannot be identical with the first, else it would not contain it; and if it is distinct, then it can be only by being within a further space, and so on indefinitely.

The same argument holds for being within time. If "to be" is "to be at some time", then either there is time or there is not. If there is not, then "to be at some time" is really a mere "to be". If there is time, then it has to be at some time, and that at some time, and so forth to infinity.

Interpretations of being or of absolute objectivity in terms of space and time are mere intrusions of imagination. Absolute objectivity is simply a property of the unconditioned; and the unconditioned, as such, says nothing about space or time. If one's imagination makes the use of the preposition "within" imperative, then one may say that every judgment is within a context of other judgments and that every unconditioned is within a universe of being. Then "space is" by being within the universe of being, and "time is" by being within the universe of being, where to "be within the universe of being" is to "be unconditioned along with other unconditioned <sup>instances of the</sup>".

### 3. Normative Objectivity.

The second of the partial aspects of objectivity is the normative. It is objectivity as opposed to the subjectivity of wishful thinking, of rash or excessively cautious judgments, of allowing joy or sadness, hope or fear, love or detestation, to interfere with the proper march of cognitional process.

The ground of normative objectivity lies in the unfolding of the unrestricted, detached, disinterested desire to know.



Because it is unrestricted, it opposes the obscurantism that hides truth or blocks access to it, in whole or in part. Because it is detached, it is opposed to the inhibitions of cognitional process that arise from other human desires and drives. Because it is disinterested, it is opposed to the well-meaning but disastrous reinforcement that other desires lead cognitional process only to twist its orientation into the narrow confines of their limited range.

Normative objectivity is constituted by the immanent exigence of the pure desire in the pursuit of its unrestricted objective. A dynamic orientation defines its objective. No less, it defines the means towards attaining its objective. Not only does the pure desire head for the universe of being, but also it does so by desiring to understand and by desiring to grasp the understood as unconditioned. Hence, to be objective, in the normative sense of the term, is to give free rein to the pure desire, to its questions for intelligence, and to its questions for reflection. Further, it is to distinguish between questions for intelligence that admit proximate solutions and other questions of the same type that, at present, cannot be solved. Similarly, it is to distinguish between sound questions and, on the other hand, meaningless questions, or incoherent or illegitimate questions. For the pure desire not only desires: it desires intelligently and reasonably; it desires to understand because it is intelligent and it desires to grasp the unconditional because it desires to be reasonable.

Upon the normative exigences of the pure desire rests the validity of all logics and all methods. A logic or method is not

an ultimate that can be established only by a hullabaloo of starry-eyed praise for Medieval Philosophy or for Modern Science, along with an insecure resentment of everything else. Logic and method are intelligent and rational; their grounds are not belief nor propaganda nor the pragmatic utility of atom-bombs and nylon stockings; their grounds are the inner exigence of the pure desire to know. They are to be accepted in so far as they succeed in formulating that dynamic exigence; and they are to be revised in so far as they fail.

In various manners this dependence has already been noted. Thus, the logical principles of identity and contradiction result from the unconditional and the compulsion it exercises upon our reasonableness. The principle of excluded middle possesses ultimate but not immediate validity: it possesses ultimate validity because, if a judgment occurs, it must be either an affirmation or a denial; it does not possess immediate validity, for with respect to each proposition, rational consciousness is presented with the three alternatives of affirmation, of negation, and of seeking a better understanding and so a more adequate formulation of the issue. Again, the procedures of empirical method in its classical and statistical phases have been accounted for by the pure desire's movement towards understanding, towards an understanding that regards not only things as related to us by our senses but also, things as related functionally among themselves, towards an understanding that presupposes data to admit systematization in the classical phase and, in other respects, to be non-systematic and so necessitate a statistical phase. Finally, precepts regarding judgment can

be derived from the general requirement of the unconditioned and from the special circumstances of different kinds of judgments which may be primitive or derived, theoretical or concrete, descriptive or explanatory, certain or probable.

4. *Experiential Objectivity.*

The basic, partial aspect of objectivity is the experiential.

It is the given as given. It is the field of materials about which one inquires, in which one finds the fulfillment of conditions for the unconditioned, to which conditional process repeatedly returns to generate the series of inquiries and reflections that yield the contextual manifold of judgments.

Further, the given is unquestionable and indubitable. That is constituted by answering questions, can be upset by other questions. But the given is constituted apart from questioning; it remains the same no matter what the result of questioning may be; it is unquestionable in the sense that it lies outside the cognitive levels constituted by questioning and answering. In the same fashion the given is indubitable. That can be doubted is the answer to a question for reflection; it is a "Yes" or a "No". But the given is not the answer to any question; it is prior to questioning and independent of any answers.

Again, the given is residual and, of itself, diffuse. It is possible to select elements in the given and to indicate them clearly and precisely. But the selection and indication are the work of insight and formulation, and the given is the residue that remains when one subtracts from the indicated 1) the instrumental act of meaning by which one indicates, 2) the concepts expressed

by that instrumental act, 3) the insights on which the concepts rest. Hence, since the given is just the residue, since it can be selected and indicated only through intellectual activities, of itself it is diffuse: the field of the given contains differences, but in so far as they simply lie in the field, the differences are unassigned.

Again, the field of the given is equally valid in all its parts but differently significant in different parts.

It is equally valid in all its parts in the sense that there is no screening prior to inquiry. Screening is the fruit of inquiry. It takes place once inquiry has begun.

It is differently significant in different parts in the sense that some parts are significant for some departments of knowledge and other parts for other departments. The physicist has to disregard what he merely imagines, merely dreams, merely derives from his personal equation. The psychologist has to explain imagination, dreaming, and personal equations. Hence, once inquiry begins, the first step is the screening that selects the relevant field of the given.

~~Now~~ We are employing the name, "given", in an extremely broad sense. It includes not only the veridical deliverances of outer sense but also images, dreams, illusions, hallucinations, personal equations, subjective bias, and so forth. No doubt, a more restricted use of the term would be desirable, if we were speaking from the limited viewpoint of natural science. But we are working at a general theory of objectivity and so we have to acknowledge as given not only the materials into which natural

science inquires but also the materials into which the psychologist or methodologist or cultural historian inquires.

There is a profounder reason. Our account of the given is extrinsic. It involves no inscription of the stream of sensitive consciousness. It involves no theory of that stream. It discusses neither the contribution of the empirically conscious subject nor the contribution of other "outside" agents. It simply notes that reflection and judgment presuppose understanding, that inquiry and understanding presuppose materials for inquiry and something to be understood. Such presupposed material will be unquestionable and indubitable, for they are not constituted by answering questions. They will be residual and diffuse, for they are what is left over once the fruits of inquiry and reflection are subtracted from cognitive contents.

For such unquestionable and indubitable, residual and diffuse materials for inquiry and reflection must be regarded as equally valid in all their parts. Were they all invalid, there could be neither inquiry nor reflection, and so no reasonable pronouncement that they are invalid. Were some valid and others invalid, there would have to be a reasonably affirmed principle of selection; but such a principle can be grasped and reasonably affirmed only after inquiry has begun. Prior to inquiry there can be no intelligent discrimination and no reasonable rejection.

There is still a deeper reason. Why is the given to be defined extrinsically? Because all objectivity rests upon the unrestricted, detached, disinterested desire to know. It is that desire that sets up the canons of normative objectivity. It is

~~and?~~ (~~that desire that gives rise to the absolute objectivity. It is~~)  
 that desire that gives rise to the absolute objectivity implicit  
 in judgment. It is that desire that yields the constellation of  
 judgments that implicitly define the principal notion of dis-  
 tinct objects in the universe of being, some of which know others.  
 Experiential objectivity has to rest on the same basis, and so the  
 given is defined, not by appealing to sensitive process, but by  
 the pure desire regarding the flow of empirical consciousness as  
 the materials for its operation.

5. *Characteristics of the Notion.*

An account has been given of a principal notion of object-  
 ivity and of its three partial aspects, the experiential, the  
 normative, and the absolute. However, there also exists subject-  
 ivity, and the reader may be inclined to find in the present section  
 a full confirmation of a suspicion that he has for some time en-  
 tertained, namely, that we have failed to place our finger on  
 what is objective, that we are confusing with the objective either  
 in part or in whole what really is subjective. To deal with this  
 problem will call for <sup>a</sup> further and rather complex investigation  
 but, before we go on to it, let us note the more general character-  
 istics of the notion of objectivity that has just been outlined.

First of all, despite its complexity, it can be the notion  
 of objectivity that common sense presupposes and utilizes. The  
 principal notion is implicit within a suitable pattern of judg-  
 ments; it arises automatically when the judgments that happen to  
 be made fall within such a pattern. The absolute aspect is im-  
 plicit in judgment for, as we have argued at length, judgment af-  
 firms the unconditional that reflective understanding grasps. The

normative aspect is not any set of rules that has to be invented; it results from the intelligent inquiry and the reflective reasonableness that are the unfolding of the pure desire to know. Finally, the experiential aspect, while it may appear to do violence to common sense expectations, is fully in accord with scientific practice which claims to be an extension and refinement of common sense.

Secondly, the notion of objectivity that has been outlined is a minimal notion. There arises the question, What is objectivity? If the answer is to be intelligent and reasonable, then the pure desire and its normative exigencies must be respected. Moreover, there must be materials into which intelligence inquires and reasonableness reflects. Further, if there is a definitive answer, the unconditional and so the absolute will be attained. Finally, if the question and answer have a point, there will be other judgments which, if they occur in an appropriate pattern, will yield the principal notion.

*on which*  
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Thirdly, our notion of objectivity begs no questions. Just as our notion of being does not decide between empiricism and rationalism, positivism and idealism, existentialism and realism, but leaves that decision to the content of correct judgments that are made, so also our notion of objectivity is equally open. If judgments occur in the appropriate pattern, then it involves a plurality of knowing subjects and known objects. If, in effect, there is only one true judgment, say, the affirmation of the Hegelian Absolute Idea, our notion of objectivity undergoes no formal modification. If true judgments are never reached, there arises



the relativist position that acknowledges only experiential and normative objectivity. Only on the supposition that inquiry and reflection, intelligence and reasonableness, have nothing to do with objectivity, is our notion invalidated. But, in that case, there does not arise the question: What is objectivity?.