

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

THE ANALYSIS OF 'EXPERIENCE'

'It is the first distemper of learning
when men study words, and not matter.'

FRANCIS BACON.

THIS paper is devoted to a specific set of questions. What do people mean by saying that all our knowledge is derived from experience, or that philosophy must be based on experience? If philosophers have made experience the source from which they derive their ideas, notions and propositions, or the principle for the verification of empirical propositions, have they made any preliminary analysis of this 'experience' which is the beginning and the end of their deliberations? Is this 'experience' as unambiguous as they suppose it to be? Have they not held preconceived views about it, looking at it from a certain point of view, and, instead of analysing it, replacing it, *e.g.*, by observation, experiment or inner experience? Have they not been content with statements like this, contained in a textbook on logic: "All knowledge, it may safely be said, must ultimately be founded upon experience, which is but a general name for the various feelings impressed upon the mind at any period of its existence"?¹ This paper will deal in its first part very shortly with the historical aspect of these problems, it will proceed in its second part to the analysis of that 'experience' which is presupposed by all kinds of analysis of experience which have been hitherto given. It will distinguish different meanings of the word experience and in doing so will not deal with the use of words only, but with different aspects of the nature of experience.

Unfortunately a history of the term experience, both in antiquity and in the modern era, does not exist. Therefore I must restrict my-

¹ W. S. Jevons, *Elementary Lessons in Logic*. Lesson 27, p. 228.