

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

PRAGMATISM AND METAPHYSICS¹

I

WE wish to be as realistic as it is possible to be and still talk sense, but we do not know the limits of meaningful discourse,—such I take it is a fair expression of the temper of many philosophers today. This plight is a result of the meeting of two of the deepest needs and impulses which man has shown: the desire to avoid being bamboozled, expressed by attempting to put all speculation to the test of confrontation with what is talked about; and the demand for an object of devotion and of knowledge in some sense independent of and more stable than oneself as knower and actor.² The man on the street has no doubt as to the existence of objects unperceived. The individual scientist demands the right to call every theory before the bar of his experience, and yet he insists that knowledge be of objects which others can confront as well as he. Morality demands novel and creative action, but also a cause which transcends the individual. The most empirical philosopher does not hesitate to take out a life-insurance policy or to refer to the never-again-to-be-given event of his birth. Life reveals a rhythm of the demands for adventure and for security which thought itself mirrors. The whole history of ideas illustrates the clash between the intellectual asceticism of empiricism and the intel-

¹ Read, with omissions, before the meeting of the American Philosophical Association, Chicago, September 1933.

² In my volume, *Six Theories of Mind*, there was, for instance, no genuine reconciliation of the positivistic and realistic strains which run throughout the argument. The present paper, in suggesting such a reconciliation, helps to complete the argument of the book. The clash between positivistic and realistic motives is evident throughout the entire history of Greek, medieval, and modern empiricism. The empiricist is usually a realist with a bad conscience—and scepticism is the clinical symptom through which the malady takes visible form.