CHAPTER III

EXPERIENCE AND THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Logic is sometimes conceived as 'the science of necessary laws of thought', sometimes as the theory of ordered relations - relations which are independent of thought. Sometimes it is also said that "logic is the theory of transformation of linguistic expression" - the criterion of transformation being identity of syntactical forms. These diverse opinions about the ultimate subject-matter is due to the fact that logic is a branch of philosophy.

John Dewey in his book 'Logic: The theory of Inquiry' states: logical forms accrue the subject-matter when the latter is subjected to controlled inquiry. The second and third chapter discuss the independent grounds, biological, cultural, for holding that logic is a theory of experiential, naturalistic subject matter. In the first of the next two chapters, the theme is developed with reference to the relation of the logic of common sense and science. It is held throughout these chapters that inspite of different subject-matter inquiry has a common structure or pattern.

The existence of inquiry is not a matter of doubt.

Contd......P/51.
It is required in every area of life and every aspect of every area. As a mode of conduct, inquiry is as accessible to objective study as are these other modes of behaviour. Inquiry and conclusions can not be justified unless methods and instruments of inquiry are correctly obtained. The materials which provide the theory of logical forms with a subject matter should be carefully noted. To have correct materials for logical forms the following points are to be noted. Dewey says :-

1. In virtue of its concern with objectively observable subject-matter by reference to which reflective conclusions can be tested, dependence upon subjective and 'mentalistic' states and processes is eliminated.

2. The distinctive existence and nature of forms is acknowledged. Logic is not compelled, as historic "empirical logic felt compelled to do", to reduce logical forms to mere transcripts of the empirical material that anteced the existence of the former.

3. Logical theory is liberated from the unobservable transcendental and the intuitional.

Method and results of inquiry are studied as objective data. The distinction has been drawn between Contd... P/52.
reporting the ways in which men do think and prescribing the ways in which they ought to think. The usual interpretation is in terms of difference between the psychological and the logical, the latter consisting of 'norms' provided from some source outside of and independent of experience.

The dualism between logic and methodology of inquiry is not altogether denied by Dewey. Logical requirements are imposed upon method of inquiry from without. It is logic which justifies the inquiry and methods applied to a particular inquiry. When the pragmatists define logic as methodology they mean to say that logic grew out of inquiry into nature and has its primary use in guiding material inference. Dewey is interested in logic for use as he is interested in terms, propositions and formal relation as the constituent parts of judgement.

Dewey's philosophical investigation is intimately connected with the method of inquiry which he calls instrumentalism or experimental logic. James regarded concepts and theories not as solutions or answer to the philosophical enigmas but as instruments which are 'mental modes of adaptation to reality', which makes a relation between
parts of experience, link things satisfactorily, and enable us "to move forwarded" and "make nature even again by their aid".

James never formulated a complete theory based on this functional or instrumental view of concepts and ideas, which was done by Dewey's instrumentalism. The instrumentalism advocated by Dewey was initiated as an attempt to provide a complete description and systematic analysis of the instrumentalism, interpretation of reasoning.

Of Dewey's instrumentalism it has been said that Instrumentalism is an attempt to constitute a precise logical theory of concept, of judgement and inferences in their various forms by considering primarily how thought functions in the experimental determinations of future consequences it attempts to establish universally recognised distinctions and rules of logic by deriving them from the reconstruction or mediative function ascribed to reason. It aims to constitute a theory of the general forms of conception and reasoning, and not of this or that particular

Contd...P/54.
judgement or concept related to its own context, or to its particular implication. 1.

The theory was development over many years and in many writings. It was Dewey who gave a final shape to the theory of instrumentalism. The theoretical core of Dewey's instrumentalism is found in his theory of inquiry.

In his theory of inquiry we find two objectives. But Dewey treats them as interrelated and it is due to our confusion we make a boundary between them.

The first objective is that of presenting a 'natural history of thinking' as the empirical facts will permit. In short, it is a description of how thought occurs and how intelligence works in a situation. So in order to have a general theory of logic we shall have to explain biological, psychological and social aspects.

The second objective has to do with the distinctive traits of situation within which the function of thought begins and eventually ends. This objective of the instrumental theory of logic is both a generalization from and reflection upon the first, with aim to uncovering and accounting for the assumptions and implications


Contd.....P/55.
that appear to be involved in and suggested from achieving the first objective. The latter objective differs from the former in being of a more 'theoretical' and explanatory character. Apart from this instrumental view of concepts which was taken from James, Dewey was further influenced by the biological account of mind which was laid down by James in his book "Principles of Psychology". He never agreed with James' view that mind is a stream of consciousness. But he accepted James' emphasis upon the fundamentally biological nature of mind and the criterion which is required for discovering the existence of mind.

Dewey urges against the Intellectualists from his biological standpoint, that thinking or reflection is never, as thinking in every day life or science shows, purely contemplative and carried on for its own sake, but always "comes from something, and out of something or for the sake of something". It is always some final objective for the sake of which thought intervenes.

Thinking is required for the adjustment between the organism and the environment. When smooth flow of life interrupted, and opposed responses are provoked which can not be simultaneously taken into action, giving rise to achieve discordance, dissentioncy and conflict.

Contd.....P/56.
In a word, in which there is no trouble, no doubt and no problem of evil, thinking would not exist and hence no knowledge.

"Thinking is adoption to and through the adjustment of particular objective contents", which forms its data. At every stage of his procedure the thinker is stimulated or checked by the particular situation that confronts him. Dewey holds that thinking or knowledge-getting is not a speculative affair and all knowledge issuing from reflection is experimental in literal physical sense of experimental.

So Dewey says,

knowledge is a name for the product of competent inquiries. 2.

Thinking in otherwords,

is the criterion for relevancy and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures. 3.

He regards the thinking activity as an integrated unity of mental and overt bodily and physical activity.

3. Logic : Theory of Inquiry, P. 108

Contd.... P/57.
Thinking according to him, involves the exploration by which the relevant data are procured and the physical analysis by which they are refined and made precise. Instrumental theory of thinking and knowing is in essence a mode of behaviourism. Thinking is not a "transcendent act" suddenly introduced into a previously natural scene, but the operations of knowing are natural responses of the organism.

Thinking or activity of inquiry, is a process having certain phases occurring within certain limits; it starts with a perplexed, troubled or confused situation at the beginning and a cleared up, unified, resolved situation at the close. 4.

The troubled situation in which inquiry begins has biological antecedent conditions in a state of imbalance in organic environmental interactions; 5.

It is a state of disturbed disequilibrium. 6.

4. How We Think, P. 106
5. Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, P. 107
6. Ibid, PP. 26-27

Contd...P/53.
This situation of disequilibrium or imbalance is indeterminate with respect to its issue; but is confused in meaning, its outcome can not be anticipated; it is obscure because its final consequences can not be clearly foreseen, it is conflicting when it tends to evoke discordant responses. 7.