

CORRESPONDENCE

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*
DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION

MY DEAR EDITOR,

I suggest that the distinction between description and explanation is that between values concerning which men agree and values concerning which they differ.

Everyone recognizes the difference between a true and complete statement of facts and a false or incomplete statement; everyone prefers the former. The purely descriptive part of science consists of a series of statements about scientific facts; everyone judges in the same way the value of these statements relative to their alternatives. There is complete agreement concerning the relative value of alternative "descriptions."

But there is complete disagreement concerning the absolute value of facts or, more accurately, their value relative to other things. To the scientist facts have a very great intrinsic importance; the keen curiosity of scientists about facts of every kind is the origin and inspiration of all science. The scientist delights in recording, remembering, and contemplating facts. A bare statement of facts is so complicated that he cannot contemplate it; he seeks therefore rules, relating the facts to each other, which enable him to contemplate facts as a whole. These rules, relating facts to each other and not to anything else, are not merely an explanation of the facts; they are the only possible explanation; they satisfy completely his intellectual desires concerning the part of the universe that is of greatest importance to him.

Others find little or no intrinsic value in facts. If they found no value at all, they would not concern themselves with science; science would be left to scientists and no question would ever arise concerning the value of its "explanations." But facts have a value for them; they have a utilitarian value for everyone; to mathematicians facts are often the starting-point of interesting investigations. (It is a curious circumstance, but for our purpose irrelevant, that mathematicians, in following out arguments suggested by facts, often hit on rules relating facts to each other for which scientists have sought in vain.) They are not content with rules relating facts to each other; they want to relate facts to other things, namely the things in which they find intrinsic value. The explanations of science, just because they are explanations to those with a sense of the intrinsic value of facts, are no explanation at all to those who lack that sense.

The question whether one valuation is right and the other wrong seems to me meaningless; the values concerned are ultimate; there is no common valuation to which both can be referred. I see no harm in philosophers and mathematicians seeking to find in science a significance other than that which scientists attribute to it; indeed, it may actually help science, as does the interest of mathematicians. The harm arises only when philosophers seek to prove that science cannot have for scientists the significance on which depends the very existence of science.

Yours sincerely,

NORMAN R. CAMPBELL.

WATFORD,
HERTS.

January, 1936.

PHILOSOPHY

TO THE EDITOR OF *Philosophy*

MY DEAR EDITOR,

In the limited space at my disposal, allow me to comment briefly on only one of the issues raised by Professor Hallett in his review of my book *The Philosophy of Spinoza* in *Philosophy* for July 1935.

Professor Hallett objects to my contention that Descartes's description of the contrast between the geometrical method as employed by him in metaphysics and the syllogistic method as employed by the Schoolmen is, on the showing of his own words, nothing but the Aristotelian distinction between a scientific syllogism and a syllogism which is dialectical and contentious. He argues that it is improper to speak of geometrical demonstrations as syllogistic and testifies to his "uncomfortable feeling" which "almost reaches certainty" that I have "not . . . understood the logical principle involved." I dare say that the dogmatism of his assertion and his "uncomfortable feeling" do credit to his supreme faith in his own convictions, but they do not represent the true status of the problem. Aristotle, in fact, did consider geometrical demonstrations as syllogistic and the matter is still a subject of discussion among logicians. Professor Hallett's statement that "no geometrical proof is syllogistic except in incidental features such as the quotation of the authority of a prior truth" reflects the following statement in Joseph's *Introduction to Logic* (ed. 1916), p. 311: "In geometry we never syllogize except when we rely upon the result of a previous demonstration whose steps we do not realize in the case before us." Without going into the question whether even on the basis of Joseph's statement it is wrong to describe Descartes's geometrical method as syllogistic, I need only refer to discussions on the subject in such works as Ueberweg's *System of Logic*, pp. 397 ff.; Sigwart's *Logic*, I, pp. 362 ff., II, p. 190; Erdmann's *Logik* (3rd ed.), pp. 681 ff.; and Joyce's *Principles of Logic*, pp. 186, 199, to show that the matter is not so simple and one-sided as the reviewer imagines. Joyce, on p. 199, states the case as follows: "Several recent logicians have maintained that much of the reasoning employed in mathematics is not syllogistic. . . . We believe this view to be erroneous." Whatever merit or demerit my characterization of Descartes's geometrical method may have, it certainly cannot be impugned on the basis of the argument advanced by Professor Hallett.

Very sincerely yours,
HARRY A. WOLFSON.

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