

# Philosophy of Science

VOL. 16

January, 1949

NO. 1

## EDITORIAL

### PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE AND LIBERALISM

In these days of our intellectual growth, it is easy to discern two quite distinct motivations within science. On the one hand there is the desire to make proposals and arrive at conclusions that are well within the bounds of acceptable and reliable procedures. On the other hand, there is the constant desire for revolutionary changes of viewpoint that will involve new insights and create new problems. And it has become increasingly difficult to maintain both objectives in a fruitful way. The author of a revolutionary thought cannot, by the nature of his idea, expect to present clear-cut evidence and arguments that will be universally acceptable to his colleagues. If his thoughts are revolutionary at all they must come as a shock and a challenge to the *status quo* of the scientific society. To the conservative scientist who is anxious to develop his science in an orderly fashion, these suggestions and proposals that are "poorly" argued and loosely defended, appear as threats to the very foundations of his science. He is willing to grant any freedom of speech to his colleagues that will not threaten his own work; but the revolutionary in science is forever threatening foundations. Thus the conservative physicist abhors the projected vacuum of a sociology of knowledge that threatens to judge modern physics as an aspect of present day class struggles; the metaphysician feels obligated to fight tooth-and-nail any proposals to "reduce" metaphysical and epistemological issues to scientific problems; and so on.

This is the dilemma of modern liberalism: how to maintain a freedom for the introduction of revolutionary ideas, and simultaneously to preserve freedom to develop along conservative and well-practiced lines. From the point of view of real development, both the conservative and the revolutionary need each other. Conservatism without revolution is empty; the old ways tend to become trivial game-playing without any real point. Revolutionism without conservation is blind. A revolution is a state that is already meaningless or completely disintegrated, is no revolution at all.

Philosophy of science should play the liberal role within science today. It should enable the conservative to strengthen his position to the utmost, and it should enable the revolutionary to give expression to his conceptions that are not rigidly confirmed within the accepted mode. For this reason, the field, and its journal, cannot and should not become "respectable" in the eyes of the "competent experts"; on the other side, it cannot and should not encourage ill-ad-

vised attacks on creeds already outworn. Its function is to keep alive the conflicts of general viewpoints that may give rise to a more powerful and fruitful science of the future. For this reason, philosophy of science is *not* professional philosophy, *nor* professional science, which are both in the main conservative in their outlook. Its aim is the liberalization of science and the scientification of liberalism.