How to Make Our Ideas Clear

Outline by Tom Leddy 3/24/2015

1. There are two distinctions: between clear and obscure conceptions and between distinct and confused.
   1. Clear idea: “one which is so apprehended that it will be recognized wherever it is met with, and so that no other will be mistaken for it.”
   2. Yet, this would require a form of intellect seldom met.
   3. Having only enough acquaintance with the idea to be familiar with it does not deserve the name of clearness: one *could* be entirely mistaken.
   4. Logicians must mean nothing more than such a familiarity since they also require distinctness.
   5. A distinct idea is “one which contains [in its definition] nothing which is not clear.”
      1. An idea is distinctly apprehended when we can give a precise definition of it in abstract terms.
      2. These logicians have not applied modern thought to the improvement of logic.
      3. They hold wrongly that familiar use and abstract distinctness make the perfection of apprehension.
      4. We need now a method for more prefect clearness of thought such as we admire in thinkers of our time.
   6. Descartes allowed skepticism and discarded the authority of the schoolmen as the source of truth. He found in natural new foundation in the human mind. He went to the method of apriority, and observed that all ideas must be clear to be infallible.
      1. He trusted in introspection even for knowledge of external things and did not question it for contents of our own minds.
      2. But clearness is not sufficient, the ideas must also be distinct.
      3. He probably meant that they must sustain the test of dialectical examination.
   7. This distinction was developed by Leibniz: he could see that a mechanism only works perpetually when supplied by power, but did not understand “that the machinery of the mind can only transform knowledge, but never originate it, unless it be fed with facts of observation.” (78)
      1. Unlike Descartes he sought to reduce the first principles of science to formulas which cannot be denied without self-contradiction..”
      2. Abstract definitions therefore played an important role for him, requiring one for every important term.
      3. A distinct idea requires “the clear apprehension of everything contained in the definition.”
      4. But, P argues, nothing new can ever by learned by analyzing definitions, although our existing beliefs might be thereby set in order.
      5. P: true, familiarity with a notion is the first step towards clearness, and defining of it is the second. But there is a higher clarity.
      6. We should relegate the old doctrine to the cabinet of curiosities and wear something better for modern uses.
   8. The first lesson logic should teach us is how to make our ideas clear.
      1. To know what we think, to be masters of our meaning, will make a solid foundation.
      2. Those who have few ideas are happier than those who wallow in a rich mud of conceptions.
      3. A country may eventually slough its metaphysics, and through patience attain excellence.
      4. But another country whose ideas are few but well-mastered may prevail.
      5. For an individual, a few clear ideas are worth more than many confused ones. (78)
      6. A young man should be persuaded to sacrifice most of his thoughts to save the rest.
      7. A single unclear idea will sometimes act like an obstruction in an artery.
      8. Many have cherished a vague idea too meaningless to be positively false and then work one day to find it vanished, e.g. metaphysicians, astrologers.
2. The principles in the previous essay led to a superior method of reaching clearness.
   1. We found that thought is excited by the irritation of doubt and ceases when belief is attained
      1. The production of belief is the sole function of thought.
      2. Commonly used, doubt and belief refer to religious and other serious matters.
      3. I use them to designate the starting of any question and resolution of it.
      4. Example: I decide in which way I will pay my fare: if there is the least hesitation I have some small mental activity before deciding.
      5. Usually doubt arises from indecision, but I can merely fancy myself in a state of hesitancy, as when bored in the rail station, and such feigned hesitancy plays a great part in science.
      6. After images pass through consciousness we find ourselves decided on how to act, i.e. we have attained belief.
   2. Two sorts of elements of consciousness.
      1. In music there are the separate notes and then there is the air [the piece].
      2. A single note can be present in the sense that the past is absent
      3. But, when the piece is performed, it occurs in a certain time “during the portions of which only portions of it are played.” So, to perceive the piece, there must be continuity of consciousness, making the events present to us. So, although we hear the notes we do not hear the piece directly: we only hear what is presented in the instant.
      4. These two sorts of consciousness: immediate and mediate are found in all consciousness. (80)
      5. Sensations are completely present as long as they last, while thoughts, for example, are actions having beginning, middle, end, consisting of a succession of sensations flowing through the mind: they must cover some past and some future.
      6. Thought is a thread of melody.
   3. Various systems of relationship of succession can exist together between the same sensations.
      1. Thought is only one such system, the one related to producing belief.
      2. Thinking may have other results: it may amuse,
         1. Some have “perverted thought to the purposes of pleasure [so much] that it seems to vex them to think that the questions upon which they delight to exercise it may ever get finally settled” and they dislike positive discoveries.
         2. This is debauchery of thought.
         3. The soul of thought is production of belief.
         4. The only motive for thought in action is thought at rest.
   4. What is belief? It is something we are aware of, appeases the irritation of doubt, involves establishment of a rule of action or habit.
      1. Thought comes to a rest when belief is reached.
      2. Since belief is a rule for action which requires further doubt and thought, it is also a starting place for thought.
      3. So it is thought at rest, even though thought is action.
      4. The final upshot of thought is exercise of will.
      5. Different beliefs are distinguished by different modes of action.
      6. No mere difference in manner of consciousness can distinguish otherwise similar beliefs.
      7. Belief that objects are arranged in fig. 1 and the belief that they are arranged in fig. 2 are the same belief [since the two figures are the same]
         1. To assert one and deny the other is a false distinction.
         2. Do not mistake the sensation produced by our own unclearness of thought for a character of the object we are thinking, seeing the quality as essentially mysterious.
         3. We may no longer recognize the object if it is now intelligible.
         4. Opponents of rational thought are interested in perpetuating this deception.
   5. A similar deception is to mistake mere difference in grammatical construction for a distinction of ideas expressed.
      1. I said a thought is an action and consists in a relation, and yet a person who performs an action is not a relation: there is no inconsistency here, only grammatical vagueness.
   6. Whatever is connected to thought and irrelevant to its purpose is not part of it.
      1. A unity to our sensations which does not call to act is not thinking.
      2. The identity of a habit depends usually on likely circumstances but sometimes on improbably ones: every stimulus to action is derived from perception, every purpose is to produce some sensible result.
      3. The tangible and the practical are the root of every real distinction of thought: all distinctions of meaning consist in possible differences of practice.
   7. Consider transubstantiation
      1. Protestants believe the sacrament is flesh and blood only metaphorical.
      2. Catholics believe it is literal although they possess sensible qualities of wafers and wine.
      3. P: we have no conception of wine except what may enter into a belief that this is wine or that wine possesses certain properties, and we should act as we believe it to be, sensible perception leading to sensible result.
      4. So we mean nothing by wine but what has certain effects on our senses.
      5. To talk of it as being really blood is to talk senseless jargon. [82, 15]
      6. We cannot have an idea in our minds which relates to anything but conceived sensible effects of things [he must mean we can’t have an idea that is proper]
      7. Our idea of anything is our idea of its sensible effects.
      8. Otherwise we mistake a mere sensation accompanying the thought for a part of the thought itself.
      9. It is foolish for the Catholics and Protestants to think themselves in disagreement about this. [He seems to be siding with the Protestants, however.]
   8. The rule for the third grade of clearness of apprehension is: “consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.”
3. Consider calling a thing hard.
   1. We mean that it will not be scratched by many other substances.
      1. Its whole concept is in its conceived effects.
      2. There is no difference between it and a soft thing along as it is not tested.
      3. Consider a diamond’s whole existence in soft cotton.
      4. Would it be false to say it is soft? This would not be a foolish question in logic.
      5. There. such questions bring logical principles into sharper relief.
      6. What prevents us from saying that hard bodies remain soft until they are touched when their hardness increases until scratched?
      7. There is no falsity in such speech, although modification in how we use words like “hard” and “soft”….but not in their meanings.
      8. Such ways of speaking only represent awkward arrangements of facts.
   2. The question of free will is: Could I have resisted by an effort of will the temptation to do what I did and about which I am now ashamed? This is not a question of fact but only of arrangement of facts.
      1. Arranged so as to be relevant to the question should I blame myself. it is true that if I had willed to do otherwise I should have done so.
      2. But differently arranged it is equally true that when a temptation has once been allowed to work, it will.
      3. I believe that determinism denies important facts and the other side does not, but my point is that the question was the origin of the doubt and controversy, and it is solved in this manner.
   3. Weight is another easy case.
      1. To say a body is heavy means, in absence of opposing force, it will fall.
      2. This is the whole conception of weight.
      3. This is aside from the account of gravity.
   4. What about the idea of Force?
      1. This idea was developed in the 17th century based on a cause.
      2. It shows how to explain all the changes of motion, and how to think about all physical phenomena.
      3. The idea is essential to modern thought.
      4. What is the immediate use of thinking about force? Accounting for changes in motion.
      5. Change of motion never takes place abruptly: changes in direction always through a curve and velocity through degrees. These changes are compounded according to rules of parallelogram of forces.
      6. Peirce explains it in three paragraphs which I shall skip in this outline.
   5. His solution: If the actual changes of motion which the different particles of bodies experience are each resolved in its appropriate way….
   6. This is the only fact which the idea of force represents.
      1. Whether we say force is an acceleration or causes an acceleration is a mere question of propriety of language, like the same thing being said in French and English
      2. This sort of issue has muddled men’s minds, some saying that force is a mysterious entity, which simply means the author has despaired of getting clear about it.
      3. Against Kirchoff, we cannot understand the effect of force and fail to understand force itself.
      4. The function of the word “force” is to affect our actions via effects of force.
      5. “if we know what effects of force are, we are acquainted with every fact which is implied by saying that a force exists.’
4. Consider now a question that particularly concern to logic, that of reality.
   1. No idea could be clearer in the sense of familiarity.
   2. It would puzzle most men to try to define it, although you could perhaps do it by distinguishing it from fiction.
      1. A figment is a product of someone’s imagination, his thought impressing certain characters on it.
      2. There are phenomena within our minds dependent on our thought which are real in that we really think them.
      3. Their characters do not depend on what we think those characters to be.
      4. Dreams have real existence as mental.
         1. That he dreamt x is dependent completely on the subject.
         2. The thing dreamt retains its peculiarities by virtue of the fact that it was dreamt to possess them.
   3. The real then is that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be.
   4. But this does not make the idea of reality perfectly clear.
      1. According to our rules, reality consists in the peculiar sensible effects which things partaking of it produce.
      2. The only effect [of thought] is to cause belief.
      3. So how is true belief distinguished from false belief?
      4. This appertains exclusively to the scientific method of settling opinion.
      5. People who choose propositions arbitrarily can use the word truth only to emphasize the expression of determination to hold onto their choice.
      6. Example: Scotus Erigena’s theory about Helleborus and Socrates.
      7. When philosophy began to awaken, and before the dominance of theology professors, philosophers would seize upon a position and sally forth, especially in the nominalism/ realism debate, for example in Abelard, for whom truth was simply his particular stronghold.
      8. Method of authority: truth meant little more than the Catholic faith.
      9. Their efforts were towards harmonizing such faith with Aristotle.
      10. For these people, loyalty replaced truth-seeking.
   5. To a man of science the philosophers since Descartes seemed more interested in beliefs most in harmony with their system.
      1. It is hard to convince a follower of the a priori method with facts, but accuse him of inconsistency and he may retract.
      2. “These minds do not seem to believe that disputation is ever to cease; they seem to think that the opinion which is natural for one man is not for another, and that belief will, consequently, never be settled.” [I do think that is true in philosophy, although not in science.]
      3. In doing so they show they have a feeble hold on what truth is. [Some writers on Peirce claim that he was not interested in defining truth in this essay: but doesn’t he do so here?]
   6. All followers of science hold that the processes of investigation if pushed far enough give one certain solution to each question.
      1. The processes may be quite different.
      2. The results move steadily together toward a destined center.
      3. The progress of investigation carries them by a force outside of themselves to the same conclusion.
      4. We are carried to a foreordained goal, like destiny, “the predestinate opinion.”
      5. “The opinion which is fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate is what we mean by the truth, and the object represented in this opinion is the real.” [87]
   7. Someone may say that this is opposed to the abstract definition given of reality since it makes the character of the real depend on what is ultimately thought about them.
      1. “on the one hand, reality is independent, not necessarily of thought in general, but only of what you or I or any finite number of men may think about it”
      2. And “though the object of the final opinion depends on what that opinion is, yet what that opinion is does not depend on what you or I or any man thinks.”
      3. The settlement of opinion may be postponed by perversity.
      4. An arbitrary proposition might even be universally accepted till the end of man.
      5. Yet for a successor investigative race, true opinion would be the one they are fated to come to.
      6. The reality “of that which is real does depend on the real fact that investigation is destined to lead, at last, if continued long enough, to a belief in it.”
   8. What about the minute facts of history forgotten and never recovered?
      1. Will not the shock of atoms continue though there be no mind to know it?
      2. It is “unphilosophical to suppose that, with regard to any given question….investigation would not bring forth a solution of it, if it were carried far enough.”
      3. Consider how today we know what stars are made of, and what might be accomplished in hundreds or thousands of years of investigation.
   9. “Why make so much of these remote considerations, especially when it is your principle that only practical distinctions have a meaning?”
      1. It makes little difference whether we say that a stone at the bottom of the ocean is brilliant or not. Yet it may be fished up tomorrow.
      2. Such a propositions, like the one that says the diamond is hard when not pressed, “concern much more the arrangement of our language than they do the meaning of our ideas.”
   10. We have reached by our method a clear apprehension of what we mean by reality.
       1. We can now offer a metaphysical theory of existence for universal acceptance among those who follow the scientific method of fixing belief.
       2. But metaphysics is more curious than useful, and mainly we should keep clear of it.
       3. I won’t trouble the reader with it here.
       4. I may be writing here for the proofreader.
       5. “There is no royal road to logic, and really valuable ideas can only be had at the price of close attention.” The public prefers the cheap and nasty. The reader will see in the next paper how beautifully this may be applied to the rules of scientific reasoning.
   11. We have yet to cross the threshold of scientific logic since ideas may be clear without being true.
       1. We will see how to give birth to vital and procreative ideas that advance civilization
       2. This will be an art not yet reduced to rules.