



Arthur F. Bentley, 1870-1957

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## THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

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ARTHUR F. BENTLEY, 1870–1957

ON May 21, 1957, Arthur F. Bentley, a great political and social scientist, died at Paoli, Indiana, at the age of eighty-six. He had been the honorary vice-president of the Conference on Methods in Philosophy and the Sciences and had been closely associated with John Dewey from 1935 to Dewey's death in 1952. Dewey had found two of Bentley's books, *Linguistic Analysis of Mathematics* (1932) and *Behavior, Knowledge, Fact* (1935), so helpful while working on his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* that he singled out the writings of A. F. Bentley as among the few works to which he felt a special debt. Dewey also collaborated with Bentley in a joint critique of contemporary theories of logic and scientific method: *Knowing and the Known* (1949). Since Bentley taught at Columbia as visiting lecturer in philosophy in 1941–42 and published many of his most influential essays in the pages of this JOURNAL, it seems appropriate that this appreciation of a distinguished social scientist and theorist on scientific method should appear in this JOURNAL.

To appraise the significance of a philosopher and social scientist who has recently died requires detaching oneself from his ideas and personality and putting them into a long-range time-perspective. Arthur Bentley in his life-time inspired great affection and admiration from many who came to know him. His passionate interest in scientific and philosophical questions sometimes led him into fierce controversy and opposition to various scholars with whose views he disagreed. But throughout his life he gave all he had, intellectually, emotionally, and physically, to advancing the cause of knowledge in the many fields of inquiry in which he became interested and to which he contributed. The general public too often thinks of "the intellectual" as a pure mind, devoid of passion and free from strong emotional stresses. But Bentley, like Bertrand Russell, Charles Sanders Peirce, and William James, fused reason and passion. When Bentley opened up a new line of investigation, his enthusiasm would often lead him to push himself to the breaking point. Although he overtaxed his strength on several occasions, each time he had the satisfaction of completing the work he had undertaken. The community of schol-

ars to whom he addressed his successive works has benefited both from the results of his inquiries and from the example of his herculean labors and steadfast adherence to high standards of scientific workmanship.

Bentley was born October 16, 1870, in Freeport, Illinois, the son of a small-town banker, who himself was a man of unusual intellectual ability. Arthur Bentley grew up in Grand Island, Nebraska, and took his A.B. at Johns Hopkins in 1892. After studying economics and the social sciences at Johns Hopkins and at the Universities of Berlin and Freiburg im Breisgau, he received his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins in 1895. He took a brief fling at college teaching in 1895-96 at the University of Chicago. After that experience he went into newspaper work, first as a reporter, then as an editorial writer on the *Chicago Times-Herald* and the *Record-Herald*. In 1911 he retired from Chicago and journalism for reasons of health and established himself on a farm outside the small town of Paoli in southern Indiana, where he devoted himself for a few years to managing an orchard, and then to almost uninterrupted research on problems in scientific method. Like Charles Darwin he was fortunate enough to have both the private means to sustain his scholarly inquiries and the enthusiasm for scientific inquiry to justify socially his life of "leisure."

Of the six volumes and some thirty-six articles that appeared over Bentley's signature, each has left a mark on the scholarship of the last sixty years. A full account of Bentley's contributions to American economic history, political science, psychology, sociology, the foundations of mathematics, and the theory of logic and scientific method is to be found in *Life, Language, Law: Essays in Honor of Arthur F. Bentley*.<sup>1</sup> Here I wish to single out two contributions of Bentley's that I believe have had the widest impact and seem destined to exercise an enduring influence for decades to come.

*The Process of Government* (1908) is, in my judgment, the most important contribution to systematic political theory ever made in America. In this monumental work Bentley laid a firm basis for the whole development of the study of "pressure groups" or "group pressures" that has flourished in America from 1908 to the present day. But Bentley's own approach was more subtle than that of such disciples of his as Charles Beard, whose *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*, though an oversimplification of the phenomena he studied, was the model for many political scientists during the next forty years.

<sup>1</sup> Edited by Richard W. Taylor (Yellow Springs, Ohio: The Antioch Press, 1957). See also my introduction to A. F. Bentley, *Inquiry into Inquiries* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1954).

Meanwhile, Bentley's own more flexible methodology was fully appreciated only by a few *avant-garde* thinkers like M. R. Cohen and Karl Llewellyn. But after a forty-year period of being unappreciated, Bentley, unlike Veblen and C. S. Peirce, was able to witness an upsurge of intense appreciation of *The Process of Government*. From 1945 on, some of the most perceptive political scientists began to rediscover and apply Bentley's insights. Berttram M. Gross's *The Legislative Struggle*, David Truman's *The Governmental Process*, and various essays by Charles Hagan, Earl Latham, Richard W. Taylor, and others demonstrate the final triumph of Bentley's views and approach over those of his predecessors in this field.

One reason for the new wave of enthusiasm for Bentley was that he repudiated any simple, rigid classification of social groups. He not only rejected as universal principles Marx and Engel's theory of classes and the class struggle, but was free of the tendency of Beard and his followers to regard social classes or groups as more or less fixed entities. The Beardians and the Marxists have what might be called a pre-Darwinian approach to classes. Bentley regards classes as the product of social inquiry into the different ways in which human beings join with one another to satisfy their varied, changing interests. To Bentley there are no given "basic" social groups or classes; there are as many different classes as there are problems that scholars are interested in exploring in terms of any interest—religious, political, cultural, or economic—that leads different individuals to join in a common action. Hence, any number of individuals in a given territorial area can combine and recombine in a thousand different ways; there is an indefinite number of classifications and "classes" that are useful to social scientists at different times or for different purposes.

This unique combination of tough-mindedness and open-mindedness enabled Bentley to be the most devastating political realist of his time and yet to escape the dogmatism and limitations of a Beard, on the one hand, or a Pareto, on the other. Bentley's ruthless candor in pointing out the way in which all forms of government respond to the pressures of different social groups and hence in some degree are representative of the "lower orders" over which the "élite" groups rule, exposed him to the charge of being an extreme relativist and one who might condone various forms of dictatorship. These critics missed the unique position that Bentley upheld in American political science. He insists on portraying the "whole truth" about political behavior, yet he joins to this unflinching realism a genuine idealism, a concern for improving the welfare of all exploited groups. In *The Process of*

*Government* Bentley chose deliberately not to advance any reform program of his own. Instead he regarded this book as "an attempt to fashion a tool" for viewing political phenomena from the perspective of objective sociological method.

Ironically enough, he wrote in the early 1920's a book entitled *Makers, Users and Masters in America*, which criticized the existing system of profiteering and concentration of economic power. He proposed that the economic position of small farmers, small businessmen, and industrial workers be improved through their being organized into pressure groups that would be able to bargain effectively with the big business interests. Unfortunately, this volume was turned down by the publishers to whom it was submitted, and as a result hostile interpreters of Bentley's "realism" have not realized that he was unmistakably on the side of democracy. Nor have those critics of American philosophy who have maintained that pragmatism never developed a full-fledged political theory realized that such a theory was embodied in *The Process of Government*.

The second contribution of Bentley's that already has shown itself to be an important instrument for research and analysis is his way of describing and analyzing phenomena as "transactions." In *Knowing and the Known* he and Dewey characterize and contrast the transactional as against the interactional or self-actional point of view as follows: "*Self-Action*: where things are viewed as acting under their own powers. *Inter-action*: where thing is balanced against thing in causal interconnection. *Trans-action*: where systems of description and naming are employed to deal with aspects and phases of action, without final attribution to 'elements' or other presumptively detachable or independent 'entities,' 'essences,' or 'realities,' and without isolation of presumptively detachable 'relations' from such detachable 'elements'" (p. 108).

The transactional approach proposed by Bentley and Dewey was speedily put to effective use by himself and Dewey in various essays on scientific method, and by Adelbert Ames, Jr., and his co-workers in the psychology of visual perception. This procedure eliminates sharply demarcated "knowers" on the side of the knowing-activities, and all dogmatically proclaimed "ultimate reals" on the side of the known-objects. The perceiver is not isolated from the thing or event perceived; perception is shown to be based on preconception. The individual is seen as distinguishable but inseparable from the society of which he is a part, and that society is seen as an integral part of an evolving physical and biological world.

In some respects this exaltation of "transactions" may be re-

garded as a reaction to the excesses and inadequacies of the New Realism, Critical Realism, Logical Positivism, and Linguistic Analysis as practiced by G. E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The value of the transactional approach is, in my opinion, that it presents a total situation and process so that the various elements or constituent parts, human and non-human, can be seen as integrated phases of that situation and process. This procedure acts as a corrective to excessive emphasis upon either the human "actor" or his "environment." In certain cases, however, where the writer's intention or objective may be to stress the moral value of individual choice and action, a non-transactional approach seems to me justifiable. Bentley realized that the same set of events may be viewed from different perspectives, and the results of observation formulated in other ways than the transactional. But he felt, with Dewey, that the contemporary emphasis on self-action and inter-action might well be superseded by a new emphasis on trans-action.

Although many scholars have been studying Bentley's works over the past half-century in America, Europe, and Asia, there is much of great value that still has to be mined and put to use. That great pioneer in visual perception, Adelbert Ames, Jr., once wrote that, for him and his research associates at Dartmouth and Princeton, "Bentley's frontier work was a lodestar in our development." Other workers in diverse fields have expressed their esteem for Bentley: e.g., Ludwig von Bertalanffy in biology, Bertam Gross in economics, Morris and Felix S. Cohen in law, Charles B. Hagan and Pendleton Herring in political science, P. W. Bridgman in mathematics and physics, Egon Brunswik and Hadley Cantril in psychology, Leopold von Wiese and George Lundberg in sociology.

I have no doubt that future generations will honor Arthur F. Bentley not only for his great insights and profound understanding of complex problems in many fields, but also for his great courage in daring to advance challenging hypotheses that went counter to the dominant views and vested intellectual interests of his day. He paid a bitter price for his heterodoxy: his greatest work, *The Process of Government*, did not receive the acknowledgment that was its due for almost forty years. In this period Bentley was cast into an academic wasteland as dreary and as heartbreaking as that of C. S. Peirce and Thorstein Veblen. But Bentley carried on his scientific inquiries with more zest and energy than most of his more academically fortunate contemporaries. This intellectual maverick and pioneer also had a deep compassion for his fellow men. When a young reporter in the turbu-

lent Chicago of the 1890's, Bentley personally explored the miserable living conditions of the poor and unemployed; he slept in flop-houses frequented by hobos and tramps in order to understand the depths of misery that the social outcast experiences. In later years he used his money for numerous anonymous gifts of charity. He hoped that his scientific research and analysis would be a contribution both to "Kennetic Inquiry" and to the improvement of social conditions in the long run. Like Dewey, he stressed the interdependence of means and ends, and regarded scientific integrity as an indispensable condition for any enduring program of social reform.

In celebrating Bentley's union of vision, courage, and compassion, we prize those elements of his life that will live on in the lives of others who either share or can be helped to appreciate those qualities. For Arthur F. Bentley the transmission of these ideas and values will be the fittest tribute.

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PRAGMATISM, PRAGMATICISM, AND THE WILL  
TO BELIEVE—A RECONSIDERATION<sup>1</sup>

THE thesis of this paper is that Peirce and Dewey were mistaken in regarding James's criteria of "satisfaction" as inconsistent with their own theories of truth, and also were mistaken in thinking James's essay, "The Will to Believe," an attempt to justify attitudes of the sort which Peirce had described under the rubrics of "tenacity," "authority," and "reasonableness." This error results from their failure to distinguish between two doctrines both of which James held: (1) the "right to believe"—that under certain conditions belief in advance of all the evidence is justifiable and (2) the "will to believe"—that under certain conditions a belief, i.e., a readiness to act, may be a factor in bringing about consequences different from those which otherwise occur.

I

James was among the first philosophers to take the Darwinian theory of evolution seriously and to apply it with consistency to the problems of philosophy and psychology. In one of his earliest writings, "Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Cor-

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the meeting of the Peirce Society on December 27, 1956, held conjointly with the session of the American Philosophical Association at the University of Pennsylvania.