THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE

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To Christine, Charlotte and Patrick

Preface

Because this book is something of a hybrid in that it deals with both psychological and philosophical topics, my problem in deciding how to pitch the presentation was particularly acute. If I had started with Piaget's theory then proceeded by way of Baldwin to philosophical questions about the nature of knowledge and thence to consider genetic epistemology the material might have proved more immediately accessible to those without a philosophical background but would have resulted in a less satisfactory whole: the logical and historical order would have been quite wrong. Therefore, my advice to a reader whose only perspective on these issues has been provided by a slight acquaintance with Piaget's developmental psychology and who does not feel ready to tackle the generalities is to read Part 2 and 3 first and then go on to Part 1 and 4. Also the psychological readership might feel some impatience with what they may regard as an over-detailed historical introduction in Section 1.1. I believe, however, that anything much briefer would have had to be so general or so elliptical as to be almost meaningless.

J. M. Baldwin's work is unfamiliar to the great majority of those with either a psychological or a philosophical interest in the acquisition of knowledge; and many of those who do know of it may feel that it is best left to languish in the murky prehistory of psychology. But I have given myself the task of introducing this work because I am certain that not only is it impossible to give a serious treatment of genetic epistemology without a full consideration of Baldwin but also that the theory is interesting and important in itself. The past 70 years of psychology have, if anything, increased rather than diminished its importance. As I say in Part 4 the aim is to give the theory a 'run for its money' not to advocate a wholesale adoption of his proposals. We cannot return to a cosier era of pre-behaviourism as some may like to think, but neither is psychology yet as cumulative a discipline as many more may like to believe!

I am very grateful to Professor D. W. Hamlyn, Professor L. S. Hearnshaw and Professor Wolfe Mays for reading and commenting on portions of an earlier draft of the book. These comments did in some cases influence the scope and emphasis of the text, though not the substance.

Thanks are also due to Mrs Myfanwy Thompson for preparing the final typescript so swiftly and well.

Chester, 1978

J.R.

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