



## Dewey's Version of Pragmatism

Michael J. Quirk

Dewey's brand of pragmatism, which he called "instrumentalism", needs to be distinguished from the pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, as well as the instrumentalism of the Logical Positivists. Peirce is generally considered the first pragmatist-instrumentalist because of his advocacy of the "operational criterion of meaning". Operationalism, also known as "verificationism", is the idea that "meaning" is not an entity which exists in some "Platonic heaven", waiting to be apprehended by knowing subjects, but a part of the process of inquiry itself: a concept or a sentence "means" something only insofar as it can be verified by the procedures or operations of human inquiry. Peirce is a pragmatist insofar as meanings arise from human activity (in Greek, *praxis*), and Dewey borrowed generously from Peirce in this regard. But unlike Dewey, Peirce was a self-described "scholastic realist" and a metaphysician. There is a reality-in-itself which has a definite character independent of what any individual thinks about it (although not independent of "thought-in-general"), that knowers apprehend in the act of knowing, and their knowledge of this reality-in-itself becomes more and more adequate as human knowledge evolves in sync with reality. Dewey would reject Peirce's unique brand of realistic metaphysics—indeed *all* metaphysics—as still ensnared by "the spectator theory of knowledge", and hence inadequately pragmatic.

James, unlike Peirce, was less concerned with metaphysical speculation about the ultimate nature of reality than with the real-life problems and difficulties of ordinary human beings—i.e., with questions like "Does my life have any meaning?", "Does God exist?", and so on (Some scholars have suggested that in this respect, James is almost an "existentialist" à la Sartre and Camus). And he wrote for a general rather than a "professional" philosophical audience, filling the same role as edifying pop-psychologists do today (although, I might add, on an infinitely higher level of discussion and with much more rigor and integrity). This was not exactly Dewey's aim. He wished to enlist James's pragmatic, engaged philosophic reflection in the service of *participatory democracy* and the solution of social problems. Whereas James was an individualist in his philosophical interests, Dewey was more communitarian.

### Instrumentalism

The Logical Positivists, were, like Dewey, fierce partisans of "the scientific method", and also adherents of "operationalism" and "verificationism". Yet, for the positivists, "verification" was a relatively simple procedure: one simply made controlled observations of the world we experience (i.e., experimentation), took stock of the sense data which are

given in these observations, and determined whether these data confirm or disconfirm the hypotheses one was testing. Dewey's "verificationism" is entirely different. It construes "verification" *not* as a passive "looking-at" the sensibilia "given" in experience—in fact, he rejects all this as another example of the hold of "spectator theories of knowledge". Rather, verification is an integral part of the process in which human *agents* interact and cope with problems that are thrown up by their environment—practical, rather than theoretical problems.

## **Intelligence**

The practical, engaged conception of intelligence that is the pivot-point of Dewey's philosophy comes through in his psychological writings. Compare Dewey's psychology of impulse/habit/intelligence with the stimulus/response schema of behaviorists and the id/ego/superego triumvirate of Freud. Unlike the behaviorists, Dewey did not understand human action as resting on unmediated reflexes: human interaction with the environment can be *intelligent* interaction, in which the environment is seen as posing a *problem* about which the agent can *get clear*, and adjust both her means and ends to the demands of the situation. Intelligence cannot be reduced to unintelligent, mechanical S/R reflexes. And like Freud, Dewey admitted the omnipresence of "impulse", but he denied that it was best understood as an alien force (the "id", literally translated out of Latin, means "the IT" -- the not-me) to be tamed and subjugated by the ego. Dewey's problem-solving, situated psychology makes impulse much more malleable to the aims of the ego (note Dewey's influence on the later school of "ego-psychologists"). "Sublimation" is a much more workable psychic strategy for Dewey. Both behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis mistakenly depict human beings as machines reacting to stimuli or blind impulse, rather than beings organically *interacting* with their environment, *intelligently* assessing their situation and coping with it.

Above all: notice how Dewey's psychological theses set the stage for the way in which he alters the presuppositions of traditional philosophy. For Dewey, humans are first and foremost problem solving animals: it is only because we continually find ourselves thrust into situations that are "both precarious and stable", which pose a challenge to us as agents, that we can take stock of *facts*, formulate *theories*, experimentally *test* them, and so on. It is not the case that first we know what is the case, and then use that knowledge to help us act: our knowledge derives from our *doing things*.

## **Education, Social Science, and Democracy**

While non-intelligent habit is not necessarily *bad*, it's not necessarily good either, and we cannot determine whether it is or not until we've subjected our habitual modes of action to the test of critical intelligence. Hence Dewey's "progressive" educational theory which stresses training the child in rational *methods* of inquiry *as well as* factual content. Dewey never takes educational content to be irrelevant to forming an educated person: rather, *merely* being able to list "facts", without being able to *intelligently* measure their significance, or to critically establish them, is to fall back on non-intelligent habit.

Intelligence is an organic capacity which helps us *cope* with our natural and social environment. Hence Dewey, like Comte and the utilitarians, favored the use of Social

Science to help the public deal with the challenges of living in a modern, technologically mediated world. He did not see Social Science as a means in which “the masses” could be induced to adapt to the status quo, as in B.F. Skinner’s *Walden Two*: “coping” more often than not involves radically changing the existing socio-political order, as opposed to changing ourselves to “fit in”. In this respect, Dewey was close to Marx. His idea of social science differed from that of Marx, Comte, and the utilitarians in a number of respects, however. He did not think that the social sciences revealed the laws of human social behavior, the way the laws of physics disclose the laws governing the behavior of physical objects, because human behavior is a dynamic, intelligent means of adapting to changing situations. Social science is thus less a body of lawlike generalizations than a set of flexible interpretations, subject to revision as the changing human situation demands it. And unlike utilitarianism in particular, Dewey did not believe that human nature or “the good” for human beings was either fixed or unproblematically “given”. Social science, for Dewey, was essentially a *critical* enterprise, whereby we question reigning concepts of “human nature” or “the good for human beings” in light of critical intelligence. Philosophy, thus is “the criticism of criticism”—what we do when we critically reflect on the findings of social (and natural science).

Finally, Dewey was an ardent champion of Democracy: education and social science derive their point from the way in which they serve a democratic community. Dewey’s conception of democracy was *participatory* rather than *procedural*. Both present-day liberals and conservatives are partisans of what Dewey called “old” liberalism, insofar as they see democracy as a set of constraints which enable individuals to live as they prefer without state interference and without impinging upon the freedom of others to do likewise (present-day liberals and conservatives differ, primarily, on the degree to which governmental action is legitimate and necessary in enabling individuals to pursue their preferred mode-of-life). While applauding “old” liberalism’s accent on freeing the individual to pursue his or her own projects of “self-realization”, Dewey questioned whether “old” liberalism was sufficiently aware of the intrinsically social way in which self-realization occurs. He wondered whether, in being so adamantly individualistic, the old liberalism atomized society, and made intelligent inquiry into means and ends, an indispensable ingredient of self-realization, almost impossible to achieve. Dewey’s “new” liberalism is more communitarian: by *actively including* as many individuals in public, political deliberation and action, we universalize the “scientific method” Dewey was so fond of and thus make universal that “freedom of mind” which it promotes. Dewey believed that the opposition between “individual” and “community” which haunts modern political theory can be overcome if the individual sees himself or herself as a participant in the community, sharing in its common aims, criticizing and reformulating them as the changing “situation” demands it, and if this community is likewise devoted to the full development of each and every individual.

Dewey was an optimist about the ability of society to reform itself and make itself better, if not perfect: he was a meliorist. One of his sharpest critics was the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who (while in many other respects was quite close to Dewey, politically) complained that Dewey lacked a sense of “original sin”, the radical inclination of human beings toward selfishness and evil, even when these same humans are filled with the best intentions. In short, for Niebuhr, Dewey was a pollyanna optimist: critical, scientifically-informed intelligence will not “meliorate” the human condition one iota, since narrow self-regard will pervert our fondest social hopes and turn them toward evil. Given the horrible

events of the latter half of Dewey's life—the Holocaust, the Gulags, Hiroshima, and so on—many believe that history has decisively vindicated Neibuhr over Dewey. Dewey's defenders reply that his vision of universal, participatory democracy was not tried and found wanting, but never tried, and so cannot be criticized. I will leave it an open question whether Dewey or his critics are right about his social and political meliorism.

### **Critique of Traditional Metaphysics and Epistemology**

One of the main reasons Dewey's philosophy went into eclipse in the 1950's was that he did not respond to "the Kantian paradigm" in any systematic way—he did not try to refute or improve on Kant using Kant's terms of philosophical debate. That is: he did not attempt to identify alternative "foundations" of knowledge, different "transcendental conditions" for the possibility of any form of intuition or understanding. Instead of answering Kant's questions, he tried to change the subject—to stop taking the "epistemological turn" and, instead, to reconfigure philosophy as the criticism of *agents* made *by* human agents. He doesn't supply his readers with a *theory* which refutes traditional philosophies point-by-point by providing an alternative, since any alternative would be "traditional" in the same epistemologically-oriented way. Rather, he tries to persuade his readers that traditional, epistemologically-oriented philosophy fails on *practical* grounds, and fails precisely because it subordinates practical concerns to theoretical ones. Hence he spends a great deal of time deflating traditional rationalism, empiricism, realism, and idealism, and very little time talking about "experience" and "nature", his own chief metaphysical notions, except in the broadest and vaguest way.

In *The Quest for Certainty*, Dewey sees the root of "traditional philosophy's" problems going back beyond "the epistemological turn" to classical Greece. Greek Mythology and religion distinguished between the holy and unholy, the the lucky and unlucky, and conflated these two contrasts: good fortune signifies being in favor with the gods and with divine forces, while bad luck shows that one is out of favor with Olympus. Hence there is an energetic effort to get in touch with the forces of luck and stability through religions rites of homage and purification. The problem began when Plato and Aristotle (unwittingly) drew upon the mythico-religious contrast between the holy and the unlucky and juxtaposed it to the contrase between permanence and change:life is a miasma of change and precariousness, and is thus less than perfectly or fully real, so instead we must seek the stability provided by "true being", which we can have access to through reason. This makes reason primarily theoretical rather than practical, and denigrates the "precarious" elements of experience as "not fully real" while it elevates "stability" into something above and beyond the pale of human action, something to be "contemplated" above all, and then used at best as a *guide* to action.

Dewey himself realized that this potted-history of Greek thought was, at best, a half truth. Plato and especially Aristotle did not make a sharp distinction between contemplation and action (*theoria* and *praxis*), and always stressed that *both* action and contemplation could be rational in their distinctive way. And both Aristotle and Plato stressed the dialectical character of thinking, the way our grasp of universals was always partial, incomplete, and distorted, and in perpetual need of correction and improvement by engaging in dialogue and debate with flesh-and-blood fellow-inquirers. But Dewey also believed that Plato and Aristotle wanted certainty, and they attained this by taking a "metaphysical

turn”: truth and our knowledge itself --and perhaps our own imperfect grasp of it-- is made possible by certain invariant, omnipresent structures of being itself. By providing a “general theory of being”, one could rest secure in our conviction that “truth is one” and “truth will prevail”, because it will show how these convictions are necessarily so. Hence Plato’s forms and Aristotle’s essences, and our (imperfect) intuition of them, provide a guarantee for our theories about nature, morality, and culture: philosophy, as a “general theory of being”, is the “theory of theories” (rather than, as Dewey would have it, “the criticism of criticisms”).

Thus the origins of “the specator theory of knowledge”, which became even more pronounced after “the metaphysical turn” gave way to “the epistemological turn”—where no self-respecting philosopher would accept anything as truth unless it could be derived from self-evident “truths of reason” (rationalism, especially Leibniz) or the “given” sense evidence (empiricism). But this radically misconstrues the knowledge-process for Dewey: refer back to his psychology of “intelligence”. Knowledge is not pure “contemplation” but contemplation-in-the-context-of-action, and contemplation-in-the-service-of-action. We’re not passive spectators on being: we’re actively involved in reality or nature (Dewey’s preferred term), shaping it as we’re being shaped by it, encountering new situations posing new problems, continuous with our past experiences of and in nature as well as different from all our previous encounters. Dewey wants to bring the philosophical estimate of human knowledge back into its concrete home context: practical problem solving. Once one does this, Dewey believes, one loses any taste for “traditional philosophy”.

Traditional epistemology and metaphysics relies on an impoverished notion of “experience”. It understands “experience” as the presentation of sensuous data to a conscious mind. But Dewey adverts to another connotation of experience in his masterwork *Experience and Nature*: “experience” as in “She is an experienced wood-carver”, as opposed to “She experienced a blue sense-datum”. “Experience” in the former sense is equivalent to “know-how” or “practical ability”—a sense, Dewey acknowledges, that Aristotle was first to explicitly grasp when he spoke of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, the skillful ability to know what to do when and as the situation requires it. This “funded” experience is the backbone of what anthropologists call “culture”—in fact, Dewey wanted to change the title of the second edition of *Experience and Nature* to *Culture and Nature*, so that his readership would not misunderstand him.

“Experience is *of* as well as *in* nature”: in this statement, Dewey seeks to undermine the various forms of dualism that have plagued traditional philosophy, especially the dualism between a knowing subject that has experiences, and an objective nature that presumably causes experiences and is what experience is about. This presupposes that reality is neatly carved up into subjects and objects, with experience being essentially “subjective” and nature essentially “objective”. Dewey’s philosophical shift of perspective toward agent-centered problem-solving places this dualism under a great deal of stress. As biological organisms, we are constantly involved in two-way transactions with our environment: in a very real sense, the environment does not just influence but in a way constitutes the agent-organism, and by intelligently modifying its environment, the agent reciprocally constitutes it in turn. The “situation” is basic: we refine it, detect meaning in it (or invest it with meaning) only in practical processes of engagement with it. We distinguish “subjective” from “objective” aspects of experience only after such transactions take place, after intelligence reflects upon them and refines them in thought.

While “nature” is independent of us, it is not absolutely independent: experience is *part of* or *in* nature, and capable of being understood as “naturalistically” as are planets, molecules, and cells. And while experience is not identical with nature, it is genuinely *of* nature, so all the skeptical conundrums typical of modern epistemology—e.g., “how do we know that you’re really seeing a real tomato, etc.”—are byproducts of a false and distorted view of how human intelligence actually goes about its business (i.e., as situated, engaged problem-solving, rather than detached contemplation).

Hence Dewey’s dissatisfaction with so many philosophical commonplaces: Realism and Idealism, Essentialism and Nominalism, Rationalism and Empiricism. Each of these varieties either wants to maintain a strict dualism between experience and nature, or else tries to collapse one of the key terms into the other. Classical Empiricism, for example, makes most of our experiences “merely subjective” (Locke’s “secondary qualities”): the values we experience, for example—beauty or goodness—are merely “in us” rather than “out there” in the “real world as it is in itself”. For Dewey this is a major muddle. The agent-organism is involved in transactions with the environment which are *mutually* constitutive: the result of such transactions are experiences of nature which, through intelligent reflection, can be understood and rendered meaningful (“objects are events with meaning”). If values are meaningful, they are emergent qualities of these transactions, and as much an aspect of “the world” as they are aspects of “us”. For Dewey, the effort to determine what is part of “nature-in-itself”, as opposed to “nature-as-experienced-and-thus-altered-by-us” is as futile as the attempt to say what elements of experience are “true representations” as opposed to “our arbitrary projections”. Experience and Nature are inextricably intertwined: so traditional metaphysics and epistemology, which view their mission as the separation of these elements of nature/experience through taking up a “spectator’s” position on reality and knowledge, are not just impossible but *perverse* enterprises.

### **Value: Ethics and Aesthetics**

Perhaps the most fruitful way to interpret Dewey is to take his own intellectual autobiography seriously, and remember that his earlier Hegelian philosophical sympathies were transformed and enriched by his encounter with Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. From Hegel Dewey inherited the idea of thought as both the *mediation* of “raw” sensation through categories and concepts, and the idea that such mediation does not signal a movement away from reality, but towards a more adequate grasp of it. Reading Darwin, however, coaxed Dewey away from Hegel’s Idealistic construal of “mediation”: it is not the case that reality must ultimately be understood in terms of the unfolding and self-reintegration of an “absolute subject”, understood as “the concept”, since thought is one means among many by which reality can be appropriated by or disclosed to us. Darwin’s “naturalism” --the idea that reality and human nature could be understood entirely as a secular, this-worldly phenomenon without invoking ideas such as “absolute spirit”—enabled Dewey to relinquish his earlier conviction that the achievements of the mediation of reality in thought needed to be summed up in a tight, all-encompassing, necessary system, and to hold instead that rational inquiry is but one way of accessing a reality that always changes just as we ourselves change. Thought is a tool for acting well and thriving in dynamically changing situations, defeating the idealist’s call for a final, timeless, tidy system.

If that is so, if thought is an instrument that mediates our acting in the shifting “situa-

tions” that punctuate our organic life, then it might seem as if there is no room, in Dewey, for *immediate* enjoyments or apprehensions. But that is not the case: Dewey speaks of the need for recovering a sense of *qualitative immediacy*, the felt awareness of actualities, especially insofar as they strike us as good or beautiful. Of course, as soon as we reflect on these enjoyments, they are articulated in and mediated by thought. But this does not signal our alienation from their actual being—our “moving away” from the brute reality revealed by primary (“gut”) feeling—since thought informs, refines, orders, and critically organizes our “felt” encounter with reality. In short, it becomes more intelligent and adequate: experience, made more satisfactory by thought, remains both of and in nature.

This has important ramifications in aesthetics and ethics. Aesthetic theory has long operated on the assumption that it deals not with objective properties of beings, but with our subjective reactions to them. The main debate among aestheticians centered around the problem of whether aesthetic judgments were rooted in a form of sense-perception (Hume’s faculty of taste) or rationality (Kant’s construal of aesthetic judgment as subjectively universal). Both sides in this debate, the empiricists and the rationalists, assume that nature itself is not a source of aesthetic value: that such values are “projections” of a sort on a natural world that is value neutral (e.g., Newton’s and Descartes’s world of matter mechanistically moving in accord with inexorable law). But this is precisely what Dewey’s own organic form of naturalism is designed to challenge. Our experience in and of nature is shot through with aesthetic value, since it is our felt needs in an environment which can satisfy and thwart them that spurs us to act both habitually and intelligently. In our transactions with the natural world in “situations” we experience things in that world as themselves good or bad, noble or base, helpful or frustrating, beautiful, ugly, sublime, striking, etc. These “felt” immediacies are neither “subjective” nor “objective”, strictly speaking, for they “emerge” in the practical situation where agent and environment “transact” and mutually constitute each other as subject and object (among other things). Think of it this way: the value is not “out there” or “in us” as much as it is “in the situation”. When we articulate the situation in thought, what is to prevent us from saying, with equal vigor, that not only do things, like scenic landscapes, paintings, or poems, strike us as beautiful, they are themselves beautiful? Why should the subject/object distinction, which isn’t ultimate anyway, be assumed to coincide with the valuable / inert distinction? So the idea that aesthetics is “subjective”—a matter of “mere” taste or “opinion”—is radically misplaced, for Dewey.

As with any experience, “intelligence” is an important ingredient in deepening and enriching it. Simply because one “enjoys” or “likes” something (say a Raphael, or a Beethoven sonata, or a Cornell box) does not close the issue, since one can always question whether that enjoyment or liking is appropriate, or adequately understood (e.g., “How does an understanding of Greek Philosophy deepen my appreciation of Raphael’s *School of Athens*?” “Is Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* superior or inferior, as a piece of music, to the *Hammerklavier*, and why?” “Why do I see Joseph Cornell’s collage-boxes as significant and moving works of art rather than arrangements of dusty old junk?”) Hence aesthetic experience is deepened and enriched by intelligent reflection, just like any experience. In fact, all experience has an aesthetic component. The goal of democratic society, at least in part, is to secure this sort of aesthetic enrichment of life for the community at large: the project of common life as something like a work of art, unified by the purpose of the enrichment of experience.

Moral value, like aesthetic value, has likewise been misunderstood by the philosophical tradition, for much the same reason. Philosophers have started with a vision of humans as contemplative knowers rather than as organisms acting in and interacting with a precarious-and-stable natural environment, and as a result have fallen into two positions, either of which is a philosophic dead-end. Either the philosopher tries to ground value in transcendent realities (Plato's Forms, Aristotle's human "essence", the Judeo-Christian God's Will, Aquinas's natural law, Hegel's absolute) or transcendental truths (Kant's moral law) which escape the realm of time and contingency absolutely, or the philosopher takes given human desires as the font of all value, yet construes them in a subjective, arbitrary, nonrational and unintelligent fashion (Hobbes, Hume, and empiricism generally).

Dewey's problem with those "rationalists" who attempt to ground ethical experience on something transcendent and nonempirical should be easy to discern by now: they exhibit the reflexive "quest for certainty", with its contempt for the contingent and practical. Dewey's pragmatism cautions anyone who thinks you need a special kind of theory to enable you to tell good from bad and right from wrong: values emerge from our ongoing situational life informed by intelligence. Denying that values can or need be "absolute" or "eternal" does not make them less valuable, or merely subjective.

Since Dewey, like James, thinks pragmatism is a form of "radical empiricism", his gripe with the empiricists may be less easy to discern. Put simply, classical empiricists adhere to a fact/value dichotomy roughly congruent with the object/subject dichotomy. Facts are objective; values are subjective. Hence Hobbes believed that "right" and "wrong" are purely conventional terms, whose meaning is set by the arbitrary decision of the sovereign authorities; Hume felt that judgments of value were rooted in human passions, especially the emotion of "sympathy", which is a subjective state common to all human beings; and the Utilitarians believed that all moral judgments were judgments about whether one's actions produced outcomes with a favorable balance of pleasure over pain for the greatest number of people.

The problem with classical empiricism is with its impoverished notion of "experience". Hobbes, Hume, and the Utilitarians take experience to be a passively received "given", rather than the result of a natural transaction between a natural organism and its natural environment. In epistemology, the lack of a robust organic naturalism leads the empiricists into skepticism—the problem of how one can infer, from the isolated, disconnected "givens" of sense experience, the real world outside experience. Dewey's organic redescription of "experience and nature" helps him evade this conundrum: experience itself stretches into nature, since the organism is constituted in, through, and by its transactions with environment: that "stretch" is "inference". In ethics, the problem with classical empiricism is that its acceptance of the human being's *de facto* desires as a *given* (cf. Hume: passions are "original existences") marginalizes the role of intelligence into merely instrumental reasoning (helping to discern effective means for satisfying desires) but not practical reasoning, in the sense that intelligence can never help one weigh, criticize, and evaluate ends. Thus Hume: reason is, and ought to be, the servant of the passions. It can instruct how to go about getting what we desire, and inform us whether our desires conflict, but it cannot tell us what we ought to desire.

For Dewey, this completely overlooks the practical role of intelligence—i.e., as a means of criticizing and improving "habits" which equilibrate the organism within its environment. Our immediate desires are, in one sense, values: they are what we want and



like, and the empiricists are right to think that this makes them manifestly values. But that doesn't mean all wants and desires and likings are on an equal footing. It is one thing to say that something is desired or satisfying and quite another to say that it is desirable or satisfactory. What makes the difference is the mediation of intelligence. One can always go on to ask: given that I desire X, is X desirable, given all my other desires, including my second-order desires about what I would like by desires to be? For example, is my desire to swipe the money in the office football pool compatible with my desire to get along with my co-workers, and my second-order desire to be honest (not to desire something to which I'm not entitled)? All these factors come into play in deciding how to act, not just the simple thought "I want X: how do I go about getting it"?

The empiricists are right to insist that without desirings there would be no values, but they are wrong to see these desires as residing in an epistemological "subject" or pure ego (as opposed to an organism coping in a precarious/stable world), and wrong to see these desires and satisfactions unrelated to a wider network of desires, goals, and ideals, which are shared by others in a social organization.

For Dewey, to judge something to be valuable or desirable involves a prediction: that given the sort of causal interactions with the world we have come to expect, this will satisfy—"it will do". Thus value-judgments are a species of factual judgment: whether something is desirable or not, whether in the long run and the widest context it is satisfactory, is a matter of fact. Hence the empiricist fact/value dichotomy is, for Dewey, a mistake, based in a failure to be genuinely empirical, i.e., a failure to understand experience as an organic whole.

The failure to view experience/nature as an organic unity is also a source of the "means/ends" dichotomy, endorsed by rationalists and empiricists alike. Empiricists take what is "intrinsically valuable", or ends-in-themselves, to be subjective enjoyments, i.e., pleasures and pains. Whatever helps one attain these intrinsic values is a valid means, hence is good or right. Rationalists, sensing the mischief that taking the given desires of people can cause (if everybody likes cheating, does that make it good?), locate "intrinsic values" in a realm apart from nature and contingency. But for Dewey, this misses the point that every end is valuable insofar as it is a means to some other end: all ends are "ends-in-view". Likewise, "means" are acceptable not just insofar as they enable us to attain ends, but because they themselves define, constrain, qualify, and constitute the end-in-view. Dewey cites Charles Lamb's humorous essay "On the Origins of Roast Pork" to make his point. Lamb writes that roast pork originated when a house in which pigs were confined burned down. Removing the charred hogs, people burned their fingers: instinctively raising them to their mouths, they found the taste savory and appealing. Henceforth they went about building houses, putting pigs in them, and burning them down to cook the pigs and enjoy the taste. The reason why this is so ludicrous is that while the means of burning down pig-filled houses is instrumental to realizing the end of roast pork, the means is so disproportionately troublesome to the end that it changes and qualifies the end-in-view. It is therefore misleading to speak of a means/ends distinction: there is actually a means-ends continuum, where the end both legitimates the means and the means constrains the end. This is important because it shows the maxim "the end justifies the means", often taken to be supremely "pragmatic", not to be pragmatic at all. For example political Machiavellianism, where torture, subterfuge, terrorism, etc., are taken to be necessary political means ("reasons of state") is as narrow-minded as burning down houseloads of pigs to obtain roast pork, since

engaging in such cynical *Realpolitik* will only serve to turn one's own political community into a place not worth living-in. Ends-in-view are intelligently viewed in the widest possible context, which means with all their possible outcomes, and as continuous with the means used to attain them.

While I think Dewey's attempt at a nonmetaphysical ethic is basically on the right track, one good which he slights is that of character. Here, I think Aristotle is a good supplement to Dewey. One of the results of acting, for Aristotle, is the habituation of the self into a certain kind of self. Certain character traits are internal to the sort of life fitted for rational beings such as ourselves: only by possessing them will we be said to flourish or be happy. Such traits—virtues—are not merely means to the end-state of happiness: possessing them constitutes happiness. Thus they are valuable ends in themselves (at least valuable insofar as we can rationally reflect on ourselves and figure out what sort of self we are best suited to be). Indeed, only if one pursues the virtues as valuable in themselves will they work as means to the end of happiness (Honesty is not the best policy because it is not a “policy”—a mere means—at all). In one sense, Dewey recovers Aristotle's conception of virtues as both means and ends in his doctrine of the means-ends continuum. But Dewey was averse to any notion of “intrinsic good”, on the grounds that it smacked of “eternal values” and the metaphysical-epistemological “quest for certainty”. A proper (and critically selective) reading of Aristotle on “the virtues”, and how a just political community will form and foster the virtues in its citizens, shows how the notion of “goods-in-themselves” can be revived without bringing in a rigid means/ends dichotomy or by elevating a theory of morality above the rational consistency of sound moral practice. Aristotle complements Dewey in this way; both believe that the idea that you need a theory to tell you good from bad and right from wrong—so prevalent nowadays—is intellectually and indeed morally bankrupt.

(Side note: one example of how Dewey's own suspicion of theory and ideology figured in his own life was his antipathy to Leninist and Stalinist dogma. Unlike many of his colleagues on the political left, he was never impressed by the claims of doctrinaire Marxists to have articulated the trajectory of history and formulated a theory which both explains and guides the practice of the revolutionary. For Dewey, this elevates theory above “the situation” and could only be a prescription for terror. His willingness to travel to Mexico to chair the Trotsky hearings, at an advanced age, and putting himself not only at personal risk but exposing himself to the bitter denunciations of more fashionable leftists, testifies to his pragmatism: his praiseworthy skepticism of theoretical certitudes in the face of concrete experience.)

### **Why Dewey Now?**

There is presently a Dewey “revival” in the works of contemporary philosophers such as Richard Rorty, Cornel West, Richard Bernstein, and Hilary Putnam. There are several rather narrowly defined philosophical reasons for this renewed interest:

- The collapse of the strong foundationalist program in epistemology endorsed by earlier analytic philosophers (cf. the “postempiricist” analytic philosophy of Quine, Kuhn, and Sellars). The revolt against all kinds of “dualisms” in philosophy: e.g., realism/idealism, realism/antirealism, mind/body, cognitive/emotive, moral/scien-

tific, etc.

- A general dissatisfaction with “formalist” ethical and political theories.
- An unease with the skepticism and indifference toward rationality and “method” on the part of continental poststructuralists (Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard).

There are also more broad political and cultural reasons: for example, the sense that an allegiance to democracy needs to be renewed and restored:

- Dewey’s understanding of democracy as reflective intelligence of the community put into action (Dewey’s philosophy as an attempt to formulate a metaphysics and epistemology adequate to democracy).
- The participatory nature of democracy, contra those who wish to make debate about ends and “the good life” irrelevant to politics (Dewey against Rawls, Dworkin, Nozick, “rational choice theory”, etc.). Dewey as antiproceduralist, and a minority current in democratic theory (Bernstein).
- Dewey’s anticipation of “communitarian” themes (cf. Michael Walzer, Michael Sandel, *Habits of the Heart*, Alasdair MacIntyre) without rejecting liberal democracy or indulging in any nostalgia for a nonexistent utopian communal past.
- Dewey as a key figure for anyone who wishes to revive a “democratic left”. Dewey’s form of social democracy is neither Marxist in inspiration, nor a variant of “corporate liberalism”. But his social-participatory conception of the individual and his scathing critique of capitalism and the “old individualism” places him an antipodes to contemporary conservatism.

Finally, Dewey’s pragmatism reconsiders the relevance of philosophy to life. Both analytic and continental traditions of philosophy have been accused of remoteness from the common person and ordinary life—with some justice. Dewey’s attempt at changing that dire state of affairs was to divert philosophy from preoccupation with merely “scholastic” issues, and to show that, properly understood, philosophy is supremely relevant to everyday existence insofar as it is reflective intelligence. Two other philosophers who have attempted to bring the ordinary and the everyday back into philosophy—Wittgenstein and Heidegger—provide interesting parallels as well as contrasts to Dewey.

Heidegger’s *Being and Time* can be viewed as an attempt at an “ontology of everydayness”—of human beings as they move in and about the meaningful totality of implements and practices called “the world”. Yet, from a Deweyan perspective, Heidegger remained tied to metaphysics insofar as he hankered to overcome modern humanity’s “oblivion of Being” instead of overcoming practical obstacles to achieving our ends-in-view. Dewey never thought that “Dasein in its average everydayness” was something to be disdained in favor of a higher, more resolute “authenticity”, which might explain how Heidegger’s nauseating political applications of his thought are utterly alien to Dewey’s robustly inclusive sense of human community.

Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein wanted to overcome a certain traditional way of looking at philosophy’s role and value—i.e., as a super-discipline that formulates theories that constrain a priori what is legitimate in any other form of rational theory and practice. Heidegger’s obsession was with metaphysics, Wittgenstein’s with the philosophy of language—with how language can represent the world. By reconstructing philosophy as a

“therapeutic” practice rather than a body of transcendental theory, Wittgenstein “brings words back to their ordinary use” and cures the impulse to speak outside of language-games, our everyday meaningful language-practices. But for all this emphasis on “the ordinary” and “the everyday”, Wittgenstein remains “a philosopher’s philosopher”, more concerned with dissolving perplexities concerning meaning or the mind-body problem than with the day-to-day trials and tribulations of individuals and societies. Wittgenstein leaves no room for philosophy as having an explicit and necessary social/political function. For Dewey, on the other hand, once one “overcomes” metaphysics and epistemology, the most important role of philosophy remains both stable and indispensable: that of reflective social criticism. While Wittgenstein and Heidegger can both be viewed as advocates of “the end of philosophy” (or of one dominant strain of philosophy), Dewey wishes to transform and reconstruct it so that its most important function is conserved and revitalized. Think of Dewey as an exponent of the sort of “practical philosophy” found in Plato and Aristotle, without the metaphysical baggage of the former.

Finally, remember Dewey’s heritage. If much of Dewey sounds like Hegel, there is a reason for it. Dewey’s earliest influence in philosophy was the Hegelianism he picked up from his professors at the University of Vermont and Johns Hopkins. What Dewey liked in Hegel was the sense of dynamic wholeness of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, rather than the “bloodless dance of categories” (W. James) of the *Logic*. He was attracted to the idea that the real was in process, but that the process was intelligible and graspable in thought, and that that very grasping constituted the process of spirit’s self-reintegration. As Dewey matured, he grew wary of the idealistic way in which Hegel construed the dynamic wholeness of reality, and opted for a Darwinian naturalism. After Darwin, according to Dewey, we could not ignore human beings’ status as natural organisms—a highly developed part of nature to be sure, but not something more exalted than or separated from the dynamic wholeness of nature. Henceforth, Dewey was a wholehearted philosophical naturalist, believing that an explanation of both the human individual and human culture as a natural phenomenon, as attempts to cope with the opportunities and frustrations thrown up by the natural environment, was explanation enough, and any appeal to a “higher” realm of eternal values and transcendent truths was at best a naive evasion and at worst sheer dogmatism.

Dewey’s naturalism shouldn’t be equated with “naturalism” in a stronger sense, enunciated by the philosopher Charles Taylor as the belief that the categories of natural science—physics, chemistry, biology, etc.—are sufficient to explain every aspect of reality. (This sense of “naturalism” is roughly equivalent to “reductive materialism” or “physicalism”.) While Dewey was always a booster for “scientific method”, and exhorted his readers to adopt a “scientific attitude” to moral and political problems, his idea of science stressed the inherent fallibilism in scientific inquiry (cf. Charles Sanders Peirce), and should not be interpreted as a program of reducing all the human sciences to the determinism of physics. Dewey, throughout his career, battled this sort of reductionism and the sort of crude empiricism that goes along with it—i.e., that “experience” is a matter of assembling “given” bits of evidence into facts that straightforwardly confirm or disconfirm our theories. This conception of experience is apt to be devoid of value, which is taken to be something we presumably “project” on experience from the depths of our arbitrary subjectivity, and for Dewey this is drastically unfaithful to actual human experience. Dewey labored to show how the bifurcation of experience into “fact” and “value” is wrongheaded, and as such he is just as apt to be a cheerleader for art as for science. The goal of “scientific method” in life it

to reflect intelligently on our practices in order to aesthetically enhance them --to approach a social order in which “the unforced flowers of life” may freely bloom and flourish.

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For more information contact us at [info@sophiaomni.org](mailto:info@sophiaomni.org).