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## John Dewey's Concept of Truth

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**JOHN DEWEY'S CONCEPT OF TRUTH**

**BY**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ARTS IN LOYOLA UNIVERSITY**

**JULY**

**1954**

## LIFE

Peter Joseph Cahill was born in Chicago, Illinois, October 29, 1923.

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In August, 1943, he entered the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio, at which time he enrolled at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio. He was graduated from Xavier University, June, 1947, with the degree of Bachelor of Literature.

From 1947 to 1950 the author studied Philosophy at West Baden University affiliated with Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois. During the summers of the same period he took courses in French and Philosophy at Laval University, Quebec, Canada.

The author taught Latin, Greek, and French at St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio from 1950 to 1953 during which period he spent a summer taking graduate courses in French at Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM AND THE PROCEDURE

John Dewey has received his share of criticism both from opponents and friends alike. Most of the attacks have been brought on by Dewey's unconventional attitude, his denial of the absolute, his rejection of the stable, and his stress of the temporal. The critical field seems to be occupied as well by those who feel no kinship with pragmatism as by those who in theory exercise profound obeisance before the pragmatic and instrumental shrine. Somewhere in the no-man's land between complete condemnation on the part of opponents, partial rejection on the part of pragmatists, and exaggerated adulation on the part of some instrumentalists lies the sane judgment of John Dewey.

It was precisely because of the many and varying interpretations--sometimes diametrically opposed--given to the theories of John Dewey by admiring followers of his that the present writer first became interested in the man. This interest has taken concrete form in an investigation of Dewey's philosophical principles in general, and in particular into his notion of truth. For it seems obvious that if intelligent men interpret a philosopher in contradictory manners, either the philosopher is unusually inept,

er, and this is the case here, he has an unusual concept of truth which of its nature allows, nay, invites relatively different interpretations. At the same time, fairness and impartial investigation require that Dewey's position be explained in itself.

Since the epistemological core of any philosophical system is in its conception of truth and the attainment thereof, this work shall attempt to explain what John Dewey means by truth and its equivalent terms, and how he seeks to arrive at it.

In our explanation of Dewey's doctrine concerning truth, emphasis will be laid upon personal and social factors which entered into its formulation. Our reason is that influences not strictly philosophical played a great part in forming Dewey's idea of truth. Dewey firmly believed that "philosophy originated not out of intellectual material, but out of social and emotional material."<sup>1</sup> For him the appeal of philosophy lay in its origin from and its power over personal and social experiences. He constantly stresses the influence of persons, of the times, of his environment, and of his own reaction to all these influences. "Upon the whole," he tells us, "the forces that have influenced me have come from persons and from situations more than from books."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey, Reconstruction in Philosophy, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1920, 25.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," Contemporary American Philosophy, Vol. II, ed. George P. Adams and Wm. Pepperell Montague, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1930, 22.

Hence, these incidents of personal experience which influenced him in the formation of his ideas must be understood if we are to understand Dewey.

Of course, philosophical writings played their part in forming his ideas. Comte, Hegel, Darwin, and Huxley had their influence on Dewey, and each of them played a definite role in Dewey's formulation and adoption of his concept of truth. In the psychological sphere the influence of Spencer and James was felt. But by and large the contribution of these men was technical. Whereas philosophers provided him with the framework, experiences in concrete situations provided him with the matter of his philosophy, in addition to being the cause of his interest and the stimulus to his investigation. Dewey's philosophy "was created by working back and forth between one field of experience and another."<sup>3</sup>

Our intention, therefore, is not to maintain that various social factors are the sole and exclusive causes of the development of both Dewey's philosophy as such and of his theory of truth. Certain logical and metaphysical preconceptions are present in his writing, as are also the influences of various philosophical theories. Thus Dewey's acceptance of evolutionary

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ratner, "Dewey's Conception of Philosophy," The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1939, 73.

naturalism with its associate theory of biological and behavioristic psychology inevitably led him to certain pragmatic conclusions. Such connections will be shown in their proper places. But behind Dewey's acceptance of certain principles and theories lies a trend of mind, a certain psychological attitude which not only allows him to be heavily affected by social factors, but almost demands it. This attitude was manifested by his own statements, and, above all, by his interests which began on the social level and ended there. Besides, social factors always received priority in Dewey's thinking, and it was to solve and change social conditions that Dewey adopted principles of evolutionary naturalism and biological psychology.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in a question of emphasis, it

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<sup>4</sup> The most recent Dewey critics concur in this opinion. Cf. W. T. Feldman, The Philosophy of John Dewey, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1934. Throughout the entire work the author alludes both directly and indirectly to the sociological influence.

Jerome Nathanson, John Dewey, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951, 5: the author goes so far as to say that if Dewey had been born earlier, he would not have become the professional philosopher of the type we claim him to have been. Equally significant is the fact that Nathanson begins his book with the chapter titled, "Philosophy and Human Problems," in which he gives a history similar to that which we will give.

Cf. Gail Kennedy, "Introduction," Classic American Philosophers, ed. Max H. Fisch, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951, 329 ff: the author corroborates the opinion given in this chapter.

Cf. William Savery, "Significance of Dewey's Philosophy," The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, Northwestern University, 1939: the writer explains, as so many other critics do in the same volume, the influence of Darwin upon Dewey as being primarily caused by external factors of change and progress in a growing world.

As early as 1913 Professor A. O. Lovejoy, "Bergson and



seems better to stress the influence of social factors as determining his concept of truth rather than to appeal to the influence of set philosophical principles isolated from their environment.

In explaining the factors influencing Dewey's concept of philosophy and his concept of truth, as well as in explaining the concept of truth itself, his own writings are the most important sources. His most pertinent work is Logic: The Theory of Inquiry which is the summary of previous ideas as well as his most definitive philosophical book. Reconstruction in Philosophy, an earlier work, is also important. This book gives Dewey's early notions and is very useful in indicating the beginning and growth

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Romantic Evolutionism," University of California Chronicle, XV, 438, had indicated that the present century marks a reaction from the eternal and its consideration to a concentration of considering the things of time. The innuendo of the article was made more explicit by later Dewey critics. It is significant that Professor Lovejoy had engaged in controversy with Dewey around the turn of the century on the subject of truth.

Something of a suasive argument might be drawn from the words of Philip P. Wiener, Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1949, 20: "The social nature of thought is an essential part of Peirce's evolutionist philosophy and enters into his definition of truth. Unlike Dewey, however, Peirce scarcely deals with any specific social problem." It is difficult to see where this social nature of thought would arise if not in the concrete circumstances by which Dewey was at least captivated, if not thoroughly influenced.

In the same book Wiener quotes Oliver Wendell Holmes after reading Dewey's Experience and Nature: "I thought it great. It seemed to me to feel the universe more inwardly and profoundly than any book I know, at least any book in philosophy." 186. Mr. Holmes refers to a feeling for the social factor of the universe.

of Dewey's concept of truth. The Quest for Certainty and Experience and Nature, published after The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, give what might be termed Dewey's almost-final concept of truth. Here, titles are misleading, for we find more important information on the subject of truth in The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy than we find in The Quest for Certainty.<sup>5</sup>

Even those sources which do contain Dewey's doctrine on truth present their own difficulties. In the first place, Dewey is not easy reading. An article in Time Magazine commemorating Dewey's ninetieth birthday states, "His blunt and bulky style was never easy. 'Incredibly ill written,' said Justice Holmes of one of his books."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Dewey's terminology presents a problem. He is addicted to new and vague terms, the meaning of which can only be found by comparison, compilation, and careful observation of context. Since his approach is something peculiarly his own, his terminology follows this individualistic pattern. However, constant study and comparisons of practically all of Dewey's works have revealed certain basic conceptions in Dewey's thought. Following the genesis and growth of his philosophy has provided a satisfactory distinction between the accidental and essential, the

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<sup>5</sup> For an accurate and comprehensive list of Dewey's most important works and their contents, cf: Max H. Fisch, Classic American Philosophers, Appendix, 475-477.

<sup>6</sup> "Perpetual Arriver," Time, LIV, October 31, 1949, 35.

temporary and permanent ideas. Much, it is true, is obscure; or if not obscure, capable of varied and indefinite interpretations. But there is a unity in his work. This unity, especially in the subject with which we are dealing--what John Dewey means by truth and its equivalent terms--becomes apparent in a careful study of the social, personal, and intellectual factors influencing Dewey's conception of truth.

Among the most important secondary sources of Dewey's philosophy we have found The Philosophies of F. R. Tennant and John Dewey by J. Oliver Buswell, Jr; the articles by Arthur E. Murphy, Dominique Parodi, William Savery, and Wilfrid Sellars in The Philosophy of John Dewey; John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom edited by Sidney Hook; and John Dewey by Jerome Nathanson to be especially useful. The most important and accurate explanation of Dewey's philosophy as a whole is given by H. S. Thayer in his work, The Logic of Pragmatism. The best critical work on Dewey, though it is short, is The Philosophy of John Dewey by W. T. Feldman.

And since extra-philosophical influences played such a large part in the formation of Dewey's concept of truth, a knowledge of his personal history is important. Here, The Philosophy of John Dewey, a collection of essays on the philosopher, is invaluable because his daughter Jane, in her essay, "Biography of John Dewey," provides us with a significant and personal history

of her father. His own article in Contemporary American Philosophy is likewise helpful, as are also statements scattered throughout his works which throw great light upon the effects of personal and social factors in the formulation of his philosophical concepts.

## CHAPTER II

### FACTORS INFLUENCING JOHN DEWEY'S NOTION OF TRUTH

#### 1. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL HEREDITY

When Dewey was three years old (1862), Lincoln called a day of prayer to counteract "the country's depression after the terrible defeat of the Union forces at Fredricksburg."<sup>1</sup> Lincoln, thought he may not have realized it at the time, gave a speech which embodied the spirit of the times and which involved a rejection of dogma and a freeing of the minds from doctrines which seemed to be useless, ill-adapted to the critical and changing times.

So, calling the people to prayer, Lincoln told them: "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so must we think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country."<sup>2</sup>

Victory for the Union ultimately came. But the state of complete freedom from doctrines and dogmas of the past never became perfect

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1 Horace M. Kallen, "John Dewey and the Spirit of Pragmatism," John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom, ed. Sidney Hook, New York, The Dial Press, 1950, 3.

2 Ibid., 4.

Naturally there were philosophers who tended to blame an adherence to dogmas of the past for any and all evils. Most American pragmatists agreed with Lincoln's statement and applied it even further. They thought that due to the unsettled state of the union, beliefs which were handed down to Americans from their ancestors were antiquated. If the nation was to be formed, the past must be abandoned. This was a new nation where survival depended on intrepidity of spirit.

The occasions were new, the difficulties high and the thoughts and actions had to be new. Ancient dogma, established habit or mere brute strength were alike insufficient. A man was on his own. His family were on their own. To stay alive they had to study out new ways of new doings. They had to discard whatever in the past tethered and strangled; they had to alter and strengthen that from the past which could liberate and sustain. They had to search and seek for alternatives to routine. Survival became everywhere a consequence of readiness to change, of being free to take thought and of taking it, alone for oneself, and again by choice, together with one's neighbors.<sup>3</sup>

The America of those days was a nation of growth, change, and invention--an America of new methods. Vast areas of wilderness were conquered first by the railroad, then by the telegraph, and ultimately by the telephone. The forces of nature had to be subdued. As in any sudden process of growth, change was the characteristic. It is easy to see how this same change would be applied to ideas also. The very survival of the people was based

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3 Ibid., 8.

on change. It could almost be said that staying alive depended on changing ways and methods. Modes of knowing, doing, and living were vitally changed.<sup>4</sup> It was into this atmosphere that John Dewey was born. His parents lived their lives in the shadow of an America which was modernizing.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally the members of Dewey's family, most of whom personally experienced many changes in the essentials as well as the amenities of life, fostered the spirit of new methods in the youngest Dewey. This influence went as far back as the grandparents. For Dewey's grandfather ". . . was a temperamental dissenter from established conventions; a free thinker who gave money toward the erection of every church in his village."<sup>6</sup> That this unduly independent attitude left a permanent residuum in Dewey's mind is evident from the fact that Dewey used to quote frequently a saying of his grandfather: "'Some day these things will be found out, and not only found out but known.'"<sup>7</sup> Quite obviously

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4 Ibid., 8-9.

5 Cf. Jerome Nathanson, John Dewey, 5: "All this was of critical importance in the life of Dewey. Had he been born fifty years sooner, whatever else he might have become, it is not likely he would have been the professional philosopher we know; or, if he had, he would have faced quite a different job from the one that confronted him."

6 Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 20.

7 Ibid., 21.

Dewey's grandfather was no more satisfied with the state of certainty in knowledge than Dewey was to be in his early philosophic days.

Dewey's mother and his wife also wielded a strong influence in the family and on him. His mother was a woman who had been reared in an extremely individualistic atmosphere. The training she transmitted to John consisted largely of doing whatever she thought right.<sup>8</sup> His wife's influence was even more decisive. Besides influencing Dewey in the field of behavior she had a profound effect on concentrating his attention on his personal environment and surroundings. "She was undoubtedly largely responsible for the early widening of Dewey's philosophic interests from the commentative and classical to the field of contemporary life."<sup>9</sup> Dewey later on admitted that his wife exercised a tremendous philosophical influence over him. "Whatever skill Dewey acquired in so-called 'intuitive' judgment of situations and persons he attributes to her."<sup>10</sup> From his wife likewise he acquired his dislike of dogma and of ideas considered as true in the past.

Summarizing the influence of Dewey's grandparents, of

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.



his mother, and of his wife, we may say that it partook of the rugged, independent attitude that northern New England, especially Vermont, would foster in a man who would make his way in this simple country area. Dewey inherited attitudes from a line of ancestors that began in 1630. These ancestors unquestionably were individualists whose personal reflection governed their actions. All of them more or less struggled with what might be called pioneer country. Their thoughts naturally were centered on the field of living in the concrete circumstances of change and progress. They felt independent of the past. Circumstances had placed them in a community where there were no traditions. Consequently, they might almost be called a law unto themselves. That the surroundings, both personal and natural, would create an independent, constructive attitude in a thinking individual was inevitable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Dewey believed strongly that her father was vitally influenced by cultural heredity. Speaking of the whole Dewey family she says, "But if we consider cultural rather than biological heredity there is no doubt of the importance of the pioneer background in their lives." *Ibid.* 4. Other observers agree with Dewey's daughter. "Born and bred in northern New England, Dewey has retained an appreciation of the values of the family and local community. These values he hopes may be carried over into the larger groupings of the nation and the world." William Kelley Wright, *A History of Modern Philosophy*, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1941, 530. The trend of the times, the environment, and home conditions strengthened Dewey in a desire to abandon the past and forge his own philosophic future. All those who have studied Dewey thoroughly agree that the environment, first of Vermont, then of Chicago, and later of New York, played a great part in shaping his thought and philosophic doctrine.

## 2. THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHING AND STUDY IN UNIVERSITIES

When John Dewey entered the University of Vermont, the established philosophy was based "upon the writings of the Scotch school."<sup>12</sup> Dewey apparently was little affected by the standard teaching which predominated for over half a century. Nevertheless, Dewey's time was not spent in vain. For here Dewey read Comte and Huxley from whom he received his first definite philosophic influence. The "three stages" of Comte did not especially interest him, but what Comte said about finding a social function for science definitely found favor with the young Vermonter.

"Reading Comte and his English expositors first awakened in Dewey his characteristic interest in the interaction of social conditions with the development of thought in science and philosophy."<sup>13</sup> As a practical illustration of this, Dewey, in his last year of college, had written a paper, "The Limits of Political Economy," bearing the imprint of Comte who always held that political economy was subordinate to sociology, the theory clearly maintained in Dewey's paper.<sup>14</sup> Along similar lines Comte left Dewey certain that science, and this included philosophy for Dewey, must have a

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12 Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 11.

13 Ibid., 12.

14 Ibid., 12-13.

social function. Here, then, for the first time, Dewey found stated what was to be one of his foremost considerations. Truth must affect social life in a vital way. Now the only way in which truth could reorganize social life was, in Dewey's opinion, if truth in some way or another changed so that it might keep pace with the growth of civilization. Comte's writings "about the disorganization of existing social life and the necessity of finding a social function for science remained a permanent influence in his thought."<sup>15</sup> And equally important for Dewey was the fact that Comte expressed for him "the interaction of social conditions with the development of thought in science and in philosophy."<sup>16</sup>

If Comte satisfied Dewey because he gave a social function to philosophy, Huxley intensified this satisfaction by explaining clearly just how truth should grow and develop by his felicitous comparison of truth to the human organism. In other words, all of life was of a pattern. The human organism, since it was a part of external reality, must have the same characteristics as reality. Therefore, the growth and change of social conditions were reduplicated in the human organism as such and particularly in the thought processes. It was, in large and rough outline, what was later to be called the theory of biological adaptation.

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15 Ibid., 12.

16 Ibid.

Reading Huxley had provided this thrilling insight which was to complement the influence of Comte. Dewey's debt to Huxley did not go unconfessed.

Subconsciously, at least, I was led to desire a world and a life that would have the same properties as had the human organism in the picture of it derived from the study of Huxley's treatment. . . . At all events, I got great stimulation from the study. . . . I date from this time the awakening of a distinctive philosophic interest.<sup>17</sup>

This philosophic interest of Dewey had begun with a changing social world. Now he was at the stage where he thought that philosophic principles suitable for a particular period must keep pace with that period or be abandoned. Since social conditions had been so drastically altered, philosophy too, if it were to survive, must adapt itself to its new climate.

After this period of study at the University of Vermont, Dewey moved to Pennsylvania where he became a school teacher. Not yet a philosopher by vocation, he was spending much of his time in reading, reflecting, and writing. At this same time philosophy was coming into its own in the United States as an independent branch of study. Greatly responsible for this blossoming of philosophy as a self-respecting profession was W. T. Harris who was later to become Commissioner of Education, and who had spent most of his early years propagating Hegelianism. Harris had

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17 Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 13.

established headquarters at St. Louis where he was editing the magazine, Speculative Philosophy. And it was to W. T. Harris that Dewey sent some of his philosophic writing to see whether or not a career as a professional philosopher might be open for him. Harris expressed the opinion that Dewey "showed a philosophical mind of high rank."<sup>18</sup> With this approbation, Dewey began his career.

Dewey set out for Baltimore to attend the Johns Hopkins University, a school in complete accord with the spirit of the times. Original work was the keynote. Students were not to be shackled to the past in their investigations or in their thought.

President Gilman constantly urged upon the students the feasibility and importance of original research. The very possibility of students' doing anything new, anything original, was a novel and exciting idea to most of these young men.<sup>19</sup>

For John Dewey the intellectual horizon was opening wider. Here in the university atmosphere he found the opportunities for intellectual development which his surroundings and personal reflection had merely suggested. Here he saw visions of a bright new world where outmoded truths of the past would yield to new truths, truths capable of vivifying a struggling civilization.

It was at Johns Hopkins that Dewey studied under Profes-

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18 Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 14.

19 Ibid., 15.

sor George S. Morris who had made a synthesis of Hegelian idealism and through whom, after the soil had been prepared by Torrey, Hegelianism made its most emphatic impression on Dewey. Consciously and unconsciously Dewey had been seeking a philosopher who could satisfy his emotions and his intellect. Hegel, he thought, did just that. For "From the idealism of Hegel. . .he obtained. . .that fusion of emotions and intellect for which he had sought unsuccessfully in his boyhood religious experience."<sup>20</sup> Hegel somehow or another supplied a unity in Dewey. We may suppose that Hegel's process of objective evolution of the Absolute was just the logical explanation of reality that Dewey sought. Furthermore, Hegel satisfied Dewey personally. New England culture had emphasized divisions of self from the world, of soul from the body, and of nature from God. For Dewey this extreme dichotomy was a painful oppression.<sup>21</sup> Relief was provided by Hegel's treatment of human culture, a treatment which dismantled the established dividing walls and which consequently satisfied and attracted Dewey.<sup>22</sup> To Dewey it seemed that Hegel had faced precisely the same problems that now confronted him. Hegel lived in a period of intellectual and social ferment, and, as far as Dewey was presently concerned, had provided a philosophic system consonant with the changes taking place in the social order. Hegel, in

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20 Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 17.

21 Dewey, "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," 19.

22 Ibid.

his way, was the conciliator of the social and scientific. Dewey set the same task for himself. Consequently he sifted the Hegelian ideas and carefully analyzed what he found. Hegel held that the Absolute expressed itself in everything--individuals and society, matter and spirit. Because it was essentially fusive and collective, its most perfect manifestation was found in the society called the state. We may say that this was one feature of Hegelianism that never impressed Dewey favorably, especially since Hegel regarded "the twin appearances of the Prussian state and of himself as its philosopher as the most complete manifestations of the Absolute up to that time."<sup>23</sup> But the empirical application implied by Hegel, namely that a cultural environment shaped "the ideas, beliefs, and intellectual attitudes of individuals,"<sup>24</sup> was adopted and favored by Dewey.

To explain why Dewey was so greatly influenced by the German idealism of Hegel is not merely to affirm a similarity of temperament. It is, however, a question of prior influences placing Dewey in a condition receptive of idealism. Given the influence of Comte who postulated an historical evolution and of Huxley who provided the parallel evolution in the human organism, the basic ideas of Hegel--evolution and organic growth, biological

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<sup>23</sup> Nathanson, John Dewey, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 17.

growth in history, and an historical approach to history--would provide a framework for Dewey in his approach to the application of philosophy to living. Later Dewey would abandon Hegel. But he would not forsake the fundamental historical approach of Hegel.<sup>25</sup>

At this time, Professor Morris, who had introduced Dewey to Hegel, returned to the University of Michigan. An offer of a teaching post there in 1884 gave Dewey the opportunity to rejoin Morris at Michigan and continue his personal contact with the professor. While at Michigan, Dewey began his slow separation from Hegel. "Caird's skillful liberation of the function of negation from entanglement in the Hegelian dialectic especially influenced Dewey."<sup>26</sup> Significantly enough the effect of this liberation was immediately exercised by Dewey in his work in ethics. The Study of Ethics, published in 1894, illustrates an almost complete separation from idealism and an espousal in rather rough form of biological adaptation. The work is based upon the theory that the function of intelligence is to act as a mediator between human impulses and their consequences--a theory which is in embryo the heart of his instrumental pragmatism. And this marked a definite

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jerome Nathanson, John Dewey, 7 ff: Professor Nathanson believes that Hegel gave Dewey an attitude more than principles.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 22.



change in the philosophical approach of Dewey. He was no becoming less of a Hegelian and more of an instrumental pragmatist.

Meanwhile, Dewey had gone to Minnesota for a short time, and then he returned to Michigan after the death of Morris. But in 1894 he set out for the University of Chicago to join his good friend and collaborator in the book, Ethics, James Hayden Tufts. Here he fell under the influence of George H. Mead who was principally concerned with the effect "of biological theories upon scientific psychology."<sup>27</sup> Mead held that processes of knowledge must be considered from the point of view of action and re-action of organisms. He "started from the idea of the organism acting and reacting in an environment."<sup>28</sup> Dewey was so enamored of these theories that they remained in his mind awaiting the perfection and scientific explanation which was to be amply provided by James. Mead's theory was to find its full fruit in a scientific psychological explanation given by James. Hence, it was at this time, six years before the turn of the century that Dewey began to make explicit his own doctrine under the influence of Mead which was modified through subsequent contact with Darwin and James. Up until this point Dewey was for the most part a Hegelian, with touches of the biological approach aroused by Huxley. Now Dewey

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27 Ibid., 25.

28 Ibid., 26.

would turn thoroughly to instrumentalism, the philosophy that he was to champion more or less unchanged for the rest of his life.

The occasion of Dewey's abandoning of Hegel and espousal of instrumentalism was two-fold: first, his study of ethics at Michigan which was to be continued of necessity over the next years in conjunction with a deepening knowledge of James' psychological approach; secondly, his transference to the University of Chicago where he was able to put into practice his embryonic theories. For when Dewey went to Chicago University in 1894, he was assigned several courses in ethics. To prepare for these courses in "psychological ethics," "the logic of ethics," and "social ethics,"<sup>29</sup> he pursued an intensive study of ethics. Parallel with this study of ethics ran the influence of James' Principles of Psychology, "dealing with conception, discrimination and comparison, and reasoning."<sup>30</sup> Here Dewey found the essentials of the pragmatic theory of knowledge explained by Darwin's faithful follower, William James. For a long time Dewey had been dissatisfied with Hegel's thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Hegel's explanation did not adequately explain human development, for Dewey felt that organic growth in nature and in individuals should somehow provide him with a basis for a philosophical approach. He

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29 Ibid., 32.

30 Ibid., 29.

believed that the philosopher should be a part of nature, in contradistinction to Hegel's stress on the objectivity of the Absolute Mind working its way through experience, almost independent of individuals. Whereas Hegel had stressed the march of the Idea through the world, Dewey felt that somehow or another the individual grew and adapted himself to environment in a more biological fashion than was manifested by the relentless march of the Absolute through external reality. Furthermore, the human organism should have more control over environment than was allowed it under Hegel's theory of the Absolute Idea.

It was at this juncture that William James' biological explanation was to play its part. The "stream of consciousness" advanced by James provided a two-fold answer for Dewey. First of all, James gave the human parallel to growth and continuity in nature. Secondly, this evolutionistic and biological approach of James seemed a logical explanation of how the human organism could at one and the same time adjust itself to environment and yet adapt environment to satisfy its own needs. Thought, then, was simply explained as a biological function, one which happily enough, was parallel and continuous with nature. This could all be found admirably expressed by James when he had said, "The pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment are thus the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality in a

phenomenon."<sup>31</sup> Consequently there need be no forced explanation of the unity in reality. Dewey no longer needed the Absolute Idea which did the synthesizing in the Hegelian scheme. While abandoning this feature of Hegel he could still retain the historical approach of Hegel which he found so congenial. All mental activity could be explained now by the almost automatic reaction of the organism in the concrete situation. Intelligence was simply a type of reaction to environment. Its distinctive trait is that it always takes into consideration future results or consequences.

At this time, fortunately enough for Dewey, the University of Chicago included Pedagogy in the department of Philosophy and Psychology. So Dewey was able to form what was popularly known as the "Dewey School," but which he called, not without accuracy, "The Laboratory School."<sup>32</sup> Add to the influence of James, experimentally verified by teaching in the Laboratory School and by the study and teaching of ethics, the influence of his experiences in the social settlement, Hull House, and you have Dewey in his almost final form--convinced now that knowledge can be explained biologically; convinced also that knowledge has an instrumental value; and in debt to the biological principles of

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<sup>31</sup> William James, The Principles of Psychology, New York, Henry Holt and Co., Vol. I, 1890, 8. *Italics in original.*

<sup>32</sup> Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 27-28.

James for the explanation.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of the foundress of Hull House, Jane Addams, was that not only the underprivileged, but the wealthy and cultured people should share in learning that "democracy is a way of life, the truly moral and human way of life."<sup>34</sup> Contact with Hull House kept Dewey's mind focused along sociological lines. Here he could see in the concrete the working out of instrumental pragmatism. His contact with the problems of the world, as always, was for him a step in the more exact formulation of the function and nature of philosophy. One more power of influence remained, and that was to be felt shortly.

From the University of Chicago Dewey went to Columbia in 1905 where he came in contact with F. J. E. Woodbridge and lived in another new philosophical atmosphere. Realism was ably represented by Woodbridge, "a thorough classical and Aristotelian scholar, and an original and stimulating teacher of the history of philosophy."<sup>35</sup> Woodbridge led Dewey to examine Aristotle and the philosophy of the Greeks. He became convinced through his

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Philip P. Wiener, Evolution and the Founders of Pragmatism, "Darwinism in James' Psychology and Pragmatism," 97-128, for a detailed explanation of the influence of Darwin and James on instrumentalism.

<sup>34</sup> Jane Dewey, "Biography of John Dewey," 29.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 35.

study of history that the history of philosophy provided a practical verification of his instrumental pragmatism. Discussions with Woodbridge made "their intellectual association of peculiar importance in further developing Dewey's thought."<sup>36</sup> In this environment Dewey continued to work out his philosophic ideas, now in the light of past history. We may say that in these days Dewey was able to work out an apologia for his philosophy.

On the social level, too, New York took up where Chicago had left off. Dewey could not help but be interested in "the acute conflict existing between political and social democracy and irresponsible finance capitalism."<sup>37</sup> He translated interest into action by entering politics, joining the La Follette campaign, espousing woman suffrage, and becoming a charter member of the Teachers Union.<sup>38</sup> A wide span of activities kept him socially conscious. Whereas in Chicago he had witnessed the change and growth of life accompanying the rise of industry, in New York he saw the financial background making growth possible. Both of these factors he studied in their relations to concrete social conditions and in relation to the practical attitudes of mind which brought about the success of the young America.

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36 Ibid., 36.

37 Ibid., 39.

38 Ibid.

Over the years Dewey had done a great deal of travelling in foreign countries. To take one typical example, a trip to China strengthened Dewey in his desire to forsake anything that was absolute, not because it was absolute, but because it belonged to a past civilization--one completely and radically different from his own world.

The change from the United States to an environment of the oldest culture in the world struggling to adjust itself to new conditions was so great as to act as a rebirth of intellectual enthusiasms. It provided a living proof of the value of social education as a means of progress.<sup>39</sup>

It was becoming more and more clear to him that old ideas were useless ideas. They could not keep pace with a changing world. If they could not transform and assist the changing world, then those ideas must be rejected. He had proof in a young country and in one of the oldest. "Nobody cared for the customs and culture of the past, and everyone believed that progress was certain and would be rapid."<sup>40</sup>

### 3. SUMMARY

As has been mentioned, Dewey, in retrospect, admitted the influence that philosophers had on him. It was not always a

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39 Ibid., 42.

40 Wright, A History of Modern Philosophy, 531.

strict chronological influence. As the problems came up, Dewey recalled his reading, his personal contacts, his early mentors, and concrete conditions. When he rethought his philosophy, he would piece together the answers provided by other philosophers. His very first philosophic interest stimulated by Comte and Huxley indicated a pattern. Dewey's philosophic taste had started with an interest in social conditions and all other factors influenced him along that line and only in as much as they were able to do something in concrete circumstances. This demanded, therefore, first an explanation and then a working out of the explanation. Dewey had suspected that as the world grew, so did the human organism. Since the organism was part of reality, it should have the same characteristics. Comte and Huxley had long ago provided the beginning of an answer. Hegel had supplied the historical approach. Mead and James supplied the full-blown theory of biological adaptation. Woodbridge had acquainted Dewey with the history of philosophy, a history that seemed replete with examples of the failure of philosophy to grow and advance with the social milieu precisely because of the absence of any understanding of the true nature of reality and of biological adaptation. All Dewey's experiences of subsequent years had merely deepened and made more articulate his first philosophic feelings. Persons, readings, reflection, social conditions had all joined hands to give Dewey an instrumental pragmatism, at the basis of which lies



a theory of truth intrinsically bound up with the influences that generated it. It is to that theory of truth that we now turn.

## CHAPTER III

### NOTION OF TRUTH IN JOHN DEWEY

#### 1. DEWEY'S NOTION OF TRUTH IN GENERAL

Three major difficulties confront anyone who would attempt to discover just what John Dewey means by truth. First of all, despite the fact that Dewey's notion of truth has remained fairly constant through his seventy-five years of writing, there has been some modification over the years. From 1911, when Dewey wrote an article for the Weekly Review of the University of Pennsylvania entitled "The Problem of Truth," until the appearance of his final and definitive work, Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, which appeared in 1938, there has been a growth in Dewey's thought. Various books throughout this period represent this growth at its various stages. The investigator has the choice of following the genesis of the growth of truth as such or confining his efforts first to the predominant philosophical and non-philosophical attitudes that have influenced Dewey, and then to the precise expression of this influence in his final work. Because Dewey wishes to hold firmly only the position stated in his last work, our efforts have taken the second alternative. In view of what Dewey explicitly states in the preface of his Logic, the prudent investigator

will be following his mind most closely in proportion as he follows and studies the notion of truth as presented in Logic: The Theory of Inquiry. Of this work and its relation to his philosophy Dewey says:

This book is a development of ideas regarding the nature of logical theory that were first presented, some forty years ago, in Studies in Logical Theory; that were somewhat expanded in Essays in Experimental Logic and were briefly summarized with special reference to education in How We Think. While basic ideas remain the same, there has naturally been considerable modification during the intervening years.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, when references are made to other works, these references shall be only to features which have not been changed by Dewey's last position.

The second difficulty facing the investigator is the fact that Dewey was reluctant to use the term "truth." Consequently, he employed several equivalent terms to eliminate the possibility of being considered as just another philosopher in accord with traditional philosophy. Close on the heels of this problem is the third difficulty, which is Dewey's inclusion of truth and its equivalent terms in his explanation of the problem of knowledge. In other words, like the potsherds of the archaeologist, Dewey's theory of truth must be disentangled for its surroundings--a project not always easy.

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1 Dewey, Logic, iii.

In making the transition from environment to knowledge to truth Dewey's general concept of truth is far different from the traditional and clear cut concepts of logical, ontological, and moral truth. When Dewey treats of truth, he does not distinguish. His truth is something taken from live situations and which ultimately affects action and shapes events. Truth is a general term for Dewey, as he admits.<sup>2</sup> As early as 1925 Dewey had begun to make clear and precise the general notion of truth.

Sometimes the use of the word "truth" is confined to designating a logical property of propositions; but if we extend its significance to designate the character of existential reference, this is the meaning of truth: processes of change so directed that they achieve an intended consummation.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, the general notion of truth for Dewey is identified with successful activity. But this successful activity itself is identified with knowledge and therefore knowledge would be a term equivalent to truth, for knowledge is the close of inquiry, the attainment of truth.<sup>4</sup>

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2 "On the one hand, truth is something which characterises ideas, theories, hypotheses, beliefs, judgments, propositions, assertions, etc. . . . This is an intelligible and to me the only intelligible sense of the term truth." John Dewey, "Reality and the Criterion for the Truth of Ideas," Mind, July, 1907, N. S. XVI, 333.

3 John Dewey, Experience and Nature, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1929, 160.

4 "The word knowledge is also a suitable term to designate the objective close of inquiry. But it, too, suffers

In this process of equivalating truth to knowledge and knowledge to the end of inquiry, Dewey adds another factor. He makes knowledge equal to warranted assertion. "Knowledge," he says, "in its strictest and most honorific sense is warranted assertion."<sup>5</sup> Warranted assertibility is the term most frequently used by Dewey instead of the word "truth." He chooses this term because he feels that it is free from ambiguity.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, is the strict meaning of the term "warranted assertibility?" Dewey answers slowly.

When knowledge is taken as a general abstract term related to inquiry in the abstract, it means "warranted assertibility." The use of a term that designates a potentiality rather than an actuality involves recognition that all special conclusions of special inquiries are parts of an enterprise that is continually renewed, or is a going concern.<sup>7</sup>

And like a going concern, to carry out the metaphor, truth is a kind of settlement much the same as the resolving of problems

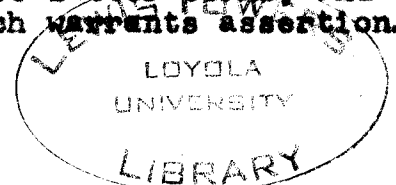
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from ambiguity. When it is said that attainment of knowledge, or truth, is the end of inquiry, the statement according to the position here taken, is a truism." Dewey, Logic, 7-8.

5 Ibid., 143.

6 "What has been said helps to explain why the term 'warranted assertion' is preferred to the terms belief and knowledge. It is free from the ambiguity of these latter terms, and it involves reference to inquiry as that which warrants assertion." Ibid., 9. Italics in original.

7 Ibid., 9.



that goes on daily in everyone's personal experience. And like life itself, truth is not merely one successful operation, but rather the accumulation of resolved situations. Though it is accurate to say that truth is in individual settlements of situations, it is more accurate to say that truth is rather in a process, just as life itself does not consist of an instant of activity, but of a flow of activity. For this reason Dewey's theory of truth is rather a description of successful activity, be it in a particular or in a general line. Thus, as H. S. Thayer remarks:

What is ordinarily called a "true statement," Dewey calls a warranted assertion. And what is usually called a theory of truth, for Dewey constitutes a description and account of those existential conditions and the operations performed that generate warranted assertions.<sup>8</sup>

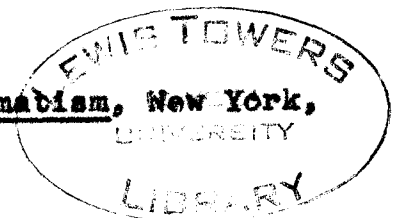
Hence there are valid reasons behind a warranted assertion. The conclusion is warranted because of certain consequences that ensue, consequences which validate the assertion.

Still on the level of general description, we turn from truth in the concrete to truth in the abstract where we find Dewey making a distinction between truth and validity.

There is a distinction made in my theory between validity and truth. The latter is defined, following Peirce, as the ideal limit of indefinitely continued inquiry. This definition is, of course, a definition of truth as an

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<sup>8</sup> H. S. Thayer, The Logic of Pragmatism, New York, The Humanities Press, 1952, 64.



abstract-idea.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, when Dewey distinguishes between validity and truth, he makes a distinction in the abstract order. But when this abstract truth becomes workable in concrete circumstances, validity and truth are identical. The abstract truth is a means for concrete value, namely that it resolves a particular situation. Dewey wanted no part of ideas or things alone, disconnected from their environment. He did not want to abstract. He felt that ideas had value or truth only in so far as they affected social conditions.

From this consideration of truth in general and especially in the terms equivalent to it, we see two things: (1) truth is found in concrete situations; (2) it consists of the successful resolution or settlement of those concrete situations. Precisely because of the dynamic nature of live situations, Dewey perforce cannot do more than merely suggest the general nature of truth. At this point it becomes necessary to describe truth, to tell what qualities it exhibits by its presence in existential conditions and operations.

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<sup>9</sup> John Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge and Value," The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1939, 572. Italics in original.

## 2. THE QUALITIES OF TRUTH

It is quite clear that since truth is taken from experience on the strictly empirical level, truth will have to assume some sort of pragmatic shape. It will have to be that which works. Now that which works is that which may be verified. Hence Dewey says that conceptions must be verified in experience.<sup>10</sup> The first quality of truth, then, is that it work or provide a solution to a problem. <sup>Truth</sup> It is something which not so much merely answers a question, but rather provides a solution to a practical problem. When an idea or conception solves a problem, there is truth. And only that which has been proved to be a satisfactory answer to a problem is warrantably assertible. "For it is that idea, which reflection and experiment terminating in judgment have verified as a solution to a problem, that is warrantably assertible."<sup>11</sup>

*Quote #1*

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10 <sup>\*</sup>It is therefore in submitting conceptions to the control of experience, in the process of verifying them, that one finds examples of what is called truth. Therefore, any philosopher who applies this empirical method without the least prejudice in favor of pragmatic doctrine, can be lead to conclude that truth 'means' verification, or if one prefers, that verification, either actual or possible, is the definition of truth.<sup>\*</sup> John Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, New York, Minton, Balch & Company, 1931, 23.

11 Thayer, Logic of Pragmatism, 68.



*Quote # 1 at bottom*

The second quality of truth is found in Peirce's definition, a definition accepted by Dewey. Peirce had held that <sup>15</sup> truth was a type of voyage, a tending toward something.<sup>12</sup> ~~Truth~~ <sup>IT</sup> thus becomes a progressive action, and while it is progressive, it is necessarily unstable. We have what may be termed partial truths which have their value only because of the process of investigation and inquiry which they help to terminate successfully. Therefore, these "partial truths" are true subsequently. Because they have helped reach a warranted assertion, they are true. By no stretch of the imagination are they true in themselves, antecedent to use. Obviously this follows from the conception of truth as a voyaging, for travel is only successfully terminated when it is finished, and the stages of the journey have their value only in so far as they have helped reach the goal. For example, the general and abstract conceptions of truth, beauty, and goodness have a real value for inquiry, for creation, and for conduct.

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*QUOTE # 2*

12 "Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief, which concordance the abstract statement may possess by virtue of the confession of its inaccuracy and one-sidedness, and this confession is an essential ingredient of truth." Charles S. Peirce, Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1931-1935, Vol. 5, Paragraph 565.

They have a directive force.<sup>13</sup> But if these concepts are directive and are reminders "of the concrete conditions and operations," they too will have their truth only in so far as they satisfy actual cases, in other words, in so far as they constitute vital parts of the voyage. In our very setting out we are making an effort to achieve truth, and we attain a sufficient degree of it to modify favorably our circumstances here and now.

The third quality of truth is that it must successfully submit to the crucial test of circumstances, a quality which has been suggested above. <sup>IT</sup> Truth must have a definite relation to a concrete situation, the specific requirement being that it prove of worth in that situation. There can be no question of a merely abstract, isolated, independent truth, for

Truth and falsity present themselves as significant facts only in situations in which specific meanings and their already experienced fulfillments and non-fulfillments are intentionally compared and contrasted with reference to the question of the worth, as to reliability of meaning of the given meaning or class of meanings. . . . Truth is an experienced relation of things, and it has no meaning outside of such relation.<sup>14</sup>

13 "But in order to exercise their genuine function they must be taken as reminders of the concrete conditions and operations that have to be satisfied in actual cases. In serving as such generalized instruments their meaning is exemplified in further use, while it is also clarified and modified in this use." Dewey, Logic, 178.

14 John Dewey, The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1910, 95. Italics in original.

Note the words "fulfilments, non-fulfilments, question of the worth, experienced relation of things." Here there is question only of empirical testing. An experienced fulfilment, then, would be one where an idea is tested in concrete surroundings. A non-fulfilment would simply mean that the idea had not worked.

No one could question this theory if it were confined to hypotheses alone, for all men will admit that the knowledge of many truths is developed by testing. The ramifications of one truth are enlarged over the centuries--more in some brief periods than in others--and this development takes place precisely because of submitting hypotheses to tests. For example, the atomic theory began with general truths, deficient because of the small progress in scientific fields. As time went on, more knowledge was had of what scholastics would call the ontological truth of the atom. As facts and science advanced, each new hypothesis was tested. Successful testing resulted in the elaboration and development of the atomic theory from its general truth to the many particular truths that provide the atomic bomb. Where there is question of working on hypotheses, there is always the possibility of later truth contradicting prior hypotheses. Dewey, however, generalizes a statement which is true for the strictly empirical truth built on hypotheses, and he fully intends that this generalization apply to all truth.

This submission of truth to a testing in the existential order is an important aspect of truth in the light of what has been said in Chapter II. It gives us the fourth quality of truth, namely, that it be conditional, for Dewey's concern for truth rose from social conditions, and he was vitally concerned with the solution of concrete problems. The important feature here is not so much the solution of the problem, but rather the objective growth and change that truth undergoes from the influence of the problem itself. The general nature of truth, admittedly, remains constant, namely that it be a solution to a problem. But in the concrete conditions, truth necessarily becomes a temporary phase of a particular solution, for when the problem changes, the solution is altered. <sup>THEREFORE</sup> Hence, truth is essentially conditional. It is clear that a particular settlement will remain true only if the objective conditions in which it was achieved are completely and accurately reduplicated. And even in that case, extraneous factors may make the previously valid settlement presently invalid. This conditional quality of truth follows logically upon Dewey's agreement with Pierce's definition of truth as a voyaging, and is insisted upon by Dewey.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The settlement of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion remain settled. . . .there is no belief so settled as not to be exposed to further inquiry. Dewey, The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, 8.

Given this general nature and these essential qualities of truth, the question immediately arises: By what means is truth to be found?

### 3. THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY

The process of inquiry, together with all its constitutive parts and functions, is the means conceived by Dewey as necessary for determining a situation, that is, for solving a problematic situation or providing a settlement. The result achieved is, of course, truth. Dewey tells us that:

Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole.<sup>16</sup>

This "unified whole" of which Dewey speaks is the settled conclusion, the one that here and now provides an answer. "Inquiry terminates in reaching that which is settled."<sup>17</sup> From the general nature of truth, the terminus of inquiry is a conclusion that is relatively settled, settled as far as the truth of the moment is concerned. "The 'settlement' of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion

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16 Dewey, Logic, 104-105.

17 Ibid., 7.

remain settled."<sup>18</sup>

If the end of inquiry is the relatively settled conclusion, the condition of inquiry is an indeterminate situation-- a practical problem that needs solution.<sup>19</sup> This is what Dewey calls the "Problem-Solution." Given a practical problem, the individual may put the process of inquiry to work. The procedure in inquiry will be very practical. "The first step then is to search out the constituents of a given situation which, as constituents, are settled."<sup>20</sup> For example, when a fire alarm is sounded, the indeterminate is the procedure necessary to produce a favorable outcome. The determinate qualities are that the fire is located somewhere; the aisles and exits are at fixed places. "Since they are settled or determinate in existence, the first step in institution of a problem is to settle them in observation."<sup>21</sup> The problem-situation is approached without prejudice. Then the mind reasons on possible ways of solving the determinate problem and finally proceeds to put the "facts-meaning"<sup>22</sup> into operation. The success or truth of the outcome is determined

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18 Ibid., 8. Italics in original.

19 Ibid., 105.

20 Ibid., 108-109. Italics in original.

21 Ibid., 109. Italics in original.

22 Ibid., 112. The terms are obvious.

when the final conclusion "actually functions."<sup>23</sup>

Like truth itself, the main quality of the process of inquiry, both in particular and in general, is that it be progressive and cumulative.<sup>24</sup> Like the method of arriving at truth it is a gradual, controlled process. The control of inquiry is dependent upon a knowledge of the kinds of inquiry that have and have not worked. By comparison-contrast the individual finds out how and why other inquiries have failed to provide truth.<sup>25</sup> The very failures of other inquiries should so control later inquiries that individuals will be kept from error. Naturally this involves a continuity from the past to the present through to the future. Therefore, in addition to being progressive and cumulative, the process of inquiry is continuous.

This notion of continuity in Dewey is one of the simplest yet most difficult concepts to grasp. It is a theory that he derived from the biological naturalism of James, and which he explains, for the most part, by comparison. "The growth and development of any living organism from seed to maturity illustrates the meaning of continuity."<sup>26</sup> The comparison, while simple

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23 Ibid., 110.

24 Ibid., 311.

25 Cf. Logic, 104, for the process involved.

26 Ibid., 23.

is not too informative. This much, however, is certain. For Dewey the continuous and the relational are the same. In other words, Dewey affirms that a new situation is continuous with a previous situation from which it results. A continuity, like physical growth and development, should be present in the process of inquiry. One particular process of inquiry is actually a part of a general process of inquiry; the relation is so intimate that the whole process of inquiry, progressive and cumulative as it is, is continuous.

If the process of inquiry is continuous, it is only so because nature itself is continuous. The continuity of nature is the source of the continuity of inquiry, knowledge and truth. Hence nature, we might say, bestows some of its continuity on the rational operation as a cause upon an effect. "Continuity," Dewey tells us, "means that rational operations grow out of organic activities, without being identical with that from which they emerge."<sup>27</sup> This biological supposition of the continuity of nature itself, accepted by Dewey through the influence of Comte, Huxley, and James, demands that the nature being acted upon in the process of inquiry continue in the rational order its own organic continuity. As Feldman holds, such an assumption tends to a hasty and a dogmatic unification which could lead to a blindness to the

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27 Ibid., 18.



actual diversity of concrete reality.<sup>28</sup> Dewey, however, was conscious of this problem and obviated the danger by making the theory of continuity work two ways.<sup>29</sup> The human organism and the thinking processes, specifically the process of inquiry, reflect nature which in itself is continuous. But the continuity of the rational order is in some way independent of the continuity in nature, since the rational has its own continuity which saves it from being swallowed up in the continuity of nature. Professor Woodbridge describes it well.

If we are unstable, there is instability in it; if we are contradictory, there is contradiction in it; if we are hopeful, there is possibility--one might dare to say, hope--in it; if we err, there is something like error in it; if we are incomplete, there is incompleteness in it.<sup>30</sup>

This reflective and yet independent continuity seems to be the interpretation which Dewey himself would favor, for in Experience and Nature he says:

Traits of reflection are as truly indicative or evidential of the traits of other things as are the traits of these

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28 W. T. Feldman, The Philosophy of John Dewey, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1934, 87-88.

29 "It is important to observe that Dewey works his 'continuity' in both directions. Sometimes he starts with qualities or processes found in 'lower-level' phenomena, in inanimate objects or in living but unconscious, or non-reflective, organisms; at other times, he starts from the other end, and reads back into pre-human nature those characters of human experience which were formerly regarded as distinctively mental." Ibid., 88.

30 F. J. E. Woodbridge, "Experience and Dialectic," Journal of Philosophy, XXVII, 1930, 269.

events. . . . The world must actually be such as to generate ignorance and inquiry; doubt and hypothesis; trial and temporal conclusions.<sup>31</sup>

This simple and literal explanation--that as nature and the organism are continuous, so is inquiry--seems to be the most logical explanation of Dewey's meaning. Material continuity such that inquiry would be identical with nature is difficult both to understand and explain.<sup>32</sup>

A corollary of the theory of continuity is Dewey's stress on the hazards of inquiry. Precisely because of the growth, change, and instability of reality, thought, since it will always be dealing with a truly unique situation, is always fraught with hazard.<sup>33</sup> This further characteristic of inquiry explains well why truth must be provisional. To achieve truth general rules

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31 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 68-69.

32 Cf. Feldman, Philosophy of John Dewey, 89. Here he speaks of the "identity type of continuity." This type would be hard put to explain how "an act of reflective thought is a 'projection, continuation, or complication of astronomical phenomena (an example), or in what sense the movements of the electron within the atom are a prototype of the poetic imaginings of a creative artist."

33 "Just because the reflective agent is always finding himself in 'new' situations, he can never solve his present problems merely on the basis of general rules which have been developed from past similar experiences. This argument from 'the uniqueness of every experienced situation' insists upon the provisional character of all general rules and principles." Feldman, Philosophy of John Dewey, 7.

which have been previously established must submit and re-submit to tests.

Their applicability and adequacy must be tested and retested, and no matter how successfully they may stand up against the challenge of new circumstances, they must be held only tentatively and subject to revision or rejection, when they can no longer be made to fit the facts.<sup>34</sup>

Hence, nature itself, in constant flux, demands that great care be used in the process of inquiry. To follow the tendency on the part of men to take truths which were adequate in the past as true and accurate settlements of new situations would be to fail to realize the essentially hazardous nature of the process of inquiry.

Thus far we have been considering the nature of inquiry in itself and in its essential qualities. There are still two more factors which fall under the general category of the means to obtain truth. The first of these is the agent through which the process of inquiry takes place, namely intelligence. It is from the function assigned to intelligence that Dewey takes his unusual concept of truth.<sup>35</sup> For Dewey, intelligence, distinguishing man from animals, is the primary factor lessening chance and complete hazard in the precarious state of existence. Reason, utilizing

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34 Ibid.

35 "But the essential point of pragmatism is that it bases its changed account of truth on a changed conception of the nature of intelligence." Dewey, Mind, 325.

the process of inquiry, diminishes hazard and aids in ordering and securing the good things of life. All men must have faith in the capacity of the intelligence to organize the wild and alien materials of the world. This is its proper function.<sup>36</sup> Intelligence takes the raw materials of life and uses these for a definite end. That end is to be something practical, the answer to a problematic situation. Consequently, intelligence "seizes on, organizes, directs and transforms those parts of experience which are relevant to the securing of some deliberate, planned outcome--some consummatory end-in-view."<sup>37</sup> Dewey conceived of the intellect as limited to practical and particular knowledge with definite practical ends in view. "Intelligence," he observed, "operates only in particular junctures of experience in which problems demanding action arise."<sup>38</sup> Intelligence, for him, is always joined to experience. It works with experience on nature. It is "the purposeful energetic re-shaper of those phases of nature and life that obstruct social well-being."<sup>39</sup>

The second of the final factors falling under the clas-

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36 "Intelligence is the human weapon by which the essentials of life are carved from the world." Thayer, Logic of Pragmatism, 18.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 6.

39 Dewey, Reconstruction, 51.

sification of the means to obtain truth is experience, with which and in which intelligence operates. Experience for Dewey means many things; but considered as a means to obtain truth in the framework of the process of inquiry under the agency of the intelligence it is "the interaction of organism and environment, resulting in some adaption which secures utilization of the latter. . . ."40 Every living organism, consequently, is interacting with environment. But man, as the highest of organisms, refines experience, making it serve some particular purpose. Hence it is only the interaction of organism and environment, and experience, that the end of inquiry, truth, can be obtained. As Dewey says, "It is quite obvious that experience, as an on-going affair between live creatures and their environments, provides the only access and means to what can be known about nature. . . ."41 And since experience is the only door to nature, everything must be submitted to experience, for experience opens the way to that which can be known as well as the method of knowing. Such a method, says Dewey, is one which has respect for experience.

With so great a stress on experience and such autonomy on the part of intelligence in the process of inquiry, Dewey willingly

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40 Ibid., 87.

41 Thayer, Logic of Pragmatism, 22.

burns his last bridge allowing escape from pragmatism. Logically following his earlier postulates, he denies that there is any such thing as immediate knowledge which could be a condition or cause of other knowledge.<sup>42</sup> For Dewey and empiricists in general sense data are the only things immediately known. "Empiristic schools believe that sense-perception is the organ of knowledge and that the things immediately known are the sensory qualities or, as they are now more usually called, sense-data."<sup>43</sup> The primary reason why Dewey denies immediate knowledge is because its acceptance would mean that this immediate knowledge was always true. But he has already admitted that nothing is so true that it may be exempt from further investigation. Even factual and conceptual objects which have proven true by providing solutions to problems may in the future be false, if conditions change.<sup>44</sup> Hence, to accept

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<sup>42</sup> "The considerations adduced in discussion of the pattern of inquiry and of the structure of judgment, entail the conclusion that all knowledge as grounded assertion involves mediation. . . . The position here defended runs counter to the belief that there is such a thing as immediate knowledge, and that knowledge is an indispensable pre-condition of all mediated knowledge." Dewey, Logic, 139.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> "The fact that they have fulfilled the demands imposed upon them in previous inquiries is not a logical proof that, in the form in which they have emerged, they are organs and instrumentalities which will satisfy the demands of a new problematic situation." Ibid., 141.

anything except sense-data as immediately true would destroy the progressive and essentially provisional character of Dewey's truth.

This approach to immediate knowledge does not simply mean that Dewey would be forced into a regressus ad infinitum. Let us recall again what Dewey says truth is.

Suppose we stick to the notion that truth is a character that defines an idea so far as it is tested through the action which carries to successful completion its own intent. In this case, to make an idea true is to modify and transform it until it can stand this test.<sup>45</sup>

Each idea is to be tested for what it is worth. Despite the fact that inquiry depends on previous ideas, each new process of inquiry is tested. When a new problematic situation is solved, truth is there. Hence each instance is particular and unique. There is no relying on past conclusions strictly. So Dewey is not forced to an infinite regress, either in the past or in the future. Where the scholastic philosopher would have immediate knowledge, Dewey places hypothetical material which directs inquiry and acts as a guide. These hypotheses disclose new material, "material which is more relevant, more weighted and confirmed, more fruitful, than were the initial facts and conceptions which served as the point of departure."<sup>46</sup> Obvious in this phrase is the effect

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45 Dewey, Mind, 334.

46 Dewey, Logic, 143.

of the times in which Dewey lived. They were, as has been said, times of change, times of progress beyond old frontiers. This sociological situation is reduplicated in Dewey's concept of truth.

Such, then, is the new system postulated by Dewey for the attainment of knowledge. Inquiry, which works in the indeterminate situation, which is progressive and cumulative, as well as continuous, hazardous, and provisional, is directed by intelligence in the interaction of organism and environment, experience. Hypothetical material and sense data, instead of immediate knowledge, directs inquiry and acts as a guide. The result is knowledge, truth, or settlement. With this new system established, Dewey needed a new logic to conform to his method of obtaining truth, for the concept, judgment, and proposition will have their truth only in so far as they fit within this new structure. Therefore, we turn to a consideration of this new logic in general, and in particular, to a study of truth in the elements composing the new logic.

#### 4. TRUTH IN THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY

The concept or idea for Dewey is not a static essence. Somehow or another the concept is itself so dynamic that Dewey conceives of it as the operation of thinking. Dewey, in accepting the words of P. W. Bridgman, says, "In general, we mean by any



concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations."<sup>47</sup> As an operation or set of operations the idea will always be related to action. "Ideas are not statements of what is or has been, but of acts to be performed."<sup>48</sup> In fact, says Dewey, "All conceptions, all intellectual descriptions, must be formulated in terms of operations, actual or imaginatively possible."<sup>49</sup> Quite clearly then an idea will be true in so far as it leads to beneficial or profitable operations. Hence the value or truth of ideas or concepts is judged by the outcome of the operation which in fact is actually the idea itself. Since conceptions and ideas are merely designations of any operations which are to be performed or have been performed, their truth is a derived truth, one flowing from the outcome of the operation. Because knowledge is not representational, truth will not be found in the correspondence of ideas to reality. Ideas are true only when they produce satisfactory results.<sup>50</sup> Considered absolutely and in itself the idea

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47 P. W. Bridgman, The Logic of Modern Physics, New York, Macmillan, 1927, 5. Dewey quotes Bridgman in The Quest for Certainty, 111.

48 Dewey, Quest for Certainty, 138.

49 Ibid., 118.

50 "They are sound if the operations they direct give us the results which are required. . . . The business of thought is not to conform to or reproduce the characters already possessed by objects but to judge them as potentialities of what they become through an indicated operation." Ibid., 137.

is next to nothing, or better, it is of no importance. The theory of thought merely reproducing reality is sterile since the concept is of value only when it is put into action, achieving certain results.

With this affirmation of the futility of a knowledge which is merely representational Dewey implicitly denies the value of ideas of objects which cannot be tested by empirical observations. This non-empirical-cognitive experience, while not being impossible of achievement, borders on the useless, but at the same time it can be known by its reference to empirical experience, for Dewey claims that physical objects and their relations to each other are "instrumental to non-cognitive experience."<sup>51</sup> The question itself has no interest for Dewey since his concern is with the practical, with cognitive experience that provides answers to problematic situations.<sup>52</sup>

As Dewey's explanation advances from ideas to judgments to propositions, he does not say much about the judgment. Possibly the reason for this is that he considered the idea to be an operation and hence not too distinct from the judgment. Or perhaps it is because Dewey considers the proposition to be nearer the end of knowledge, which is action of some sort. Essentially, the

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51 Feldman, Philosophy of John Dewey, 58.

52 Feldman discusses this problem in Chapter V.

judgment is made from related objects. "For we never experience nor form judgments about objects and events in isolation, but only in connection with a contextual whole. This latter is what is called a 'situation.'"<sup>53</sup>

In distinguishing between the judgment and the proposition, he says, "the content of the latter, is intermediate and representative and is carried by symbols; while judgment as finally made has direct existential import."<sup>54</sup> Since it has this "existential import," it can be best explained by Dewey's example of the word "judgment" as used in a law court, since a trial "is equivalent to the occurrence of a problematic situation which requires settlement."<sup>55</sup> Conflict about the significance of what has taken place is settled by the judgment because "it decides existential conditions in their bearing upon further activities."<sup>56</sup> In other words, the judgment, in its final form, is the settled outcome of inquiry,<sup>57</sup> so it would not be rash to say that in the ultimate judgment there is truth.

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53 Dewey, Logic, 56.

54 Ibid., 120.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 121.

57 "Judgment may be identified as the settled outcome of inquiry." Ibid., 138.

On the way to the final settlement, there are many partial settlements or judgments. These prior judgments receive their truth only from the value of the final judgment, while at the same time the final judgment depends on a series of partial settlements.<sup>58</sup> Therefore the truth of any judgment will consist in its being a final settlement or a means toward that final settlement.

The recording and statement of judgments are propositions. They are, strictly speaking, the means by which inquiry proceeds. As means, their truth will be strictly provisional, dependent on the outcome of inquiry.<sup>59</sup> And even in its finally formulated terms, though it be the expression of what was a true judgment, the proposition must maintain its provisional truth since it is essentially a means, sharing in the progressive and cumulative nature of inquiry in general which is itself provisional and subject to the revisions of future inquiry.<sup>60</sup> Reverting to his

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58 "Judgment as final settlement is dependent upon a series of partial settlements." Ibid., 122.

59 "Propositions are the instruments by which provisional conclusions of preparatory inquiries are summed up, recorded and retained for subsequent uses." Ibid., 311.

60 "The 'truth' of any present proposition is, by the definition, subject to the outcome of continued inquiries; its 'truth,' if the word must be used, is provisional; as near the truth as inquiry has as yet come, a matter determined not by a guess at some future belief but by the care and pains with which inquiry has been conducted up to the present time." Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge, and Value," 573. Italics in original.

original definition of truth as voyaging, Dewey says that really truth is only a nearness to truth. For despite the fact that a judgment recorded in a proposition may work today and tomorrow, there is no guarantee that it will work a week from now. Only when a person, in accord with Dewey's concept of the nature, purpose and source of inquiry, realizes that the truth expressed in the proposition is provisional, is he really near the truth in Dewey's sense, that is, "as near the truth as inquiry has yet come."<sup>61</sup>

Dewey hesitated even to use the word "truth," because everyone feels within himself that the word "true" means permanently true--true regardless of its use, regardless of changing conditions and influences. Consequently, Dewey emphasized that truth was provisional. And since the individual is in the process of approaching truth, he must realize that when he comes close, the truth may change, or better, conditions may intervene which call for something new. Nevertheless, the individual is still

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. "Admission of the necessary subjection of every present proposition to the results to be obtained in future inquiry is the meaning of Peirce's reference to 'confession of inaccuracy and on-sidedness' as an ingredient of the truth of a present proposition. In other words, a person who makes this admission is nearer the truth than any person who dogmatically claims infallibility for the conclusion he entertains here and now." Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge and Value," 573.

approaching truth, and he may even find in that hazardous world that he attains enough truth to control and shape his own environment and surroundings. But even when the proposition helps resolve a situation and becomes endowed with validity, the philosopher, like the scientist who welcomes the discovery of an exception which modifies a previous hypothesis, should welcome new developments in problematic situations which may modify, or even completely change previously valid ideas.

In this endless striving toward the ideal limit of inquiry, precisely what truth do propositions have as means? Dewey answers the question.

The view most current at the present time is probably that which regards propositions as the unitary material of logical theory. Propositions upon this view have their defining property in the property of formal truth-falsity. According to the position here taken, propositions are to be differentiated and identified on the ground of the function of their contents as means, procedural and material, further distinctions of forms of propositions being instituted on the ground of the special ways in which their respective characteristic subject-matters function as means. . . . But at this point it is pertinent to note that, since means as such are neither true nor false, truth-falsity is not a property of propositions. Means are either effective or ineffective; pertinent or irrelevant; wasteful or economical, the criterion for the difference being found in the consequences with which they are connected as means. On this basis special propositions are valid (strong, effective) or invalid (weak, inadequate); loose or rigorous, etc.<sup>63</sup>

Commenting on this passage, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., observes:

When Dewey says that propositions are neither true nor false but strong and effective, or weak and inadequate, it must be remembered that he has ruled out all a priori criteria by which even these supposedly directional terms could be measured.<sup>64</sup>

Still Dewey does not absolutely deny that propositions may be true or false intrinsically. He admits that in pure theory it may be innocuous enough to consider propositions as true or false.<sup>65</sup> But as we have repeatedly noticed, Dewey is not at all concerned with pure theory. His mind was always placing propositions in the stream of activity. Consequently, that a proposition constitute truth "is the last view an empiricist can possibly take who is concerned with truth and falsity as having existential application, and as something determined by means of inquiry into material existence."<sup>66</sup> X

## 5. SUMMARY

In clarifying the general notion of truth Dewey has used equivalent terms, all of which come to truth being the

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<sup>64</sup> J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., The Philosophies of F. R. Tennant and John Dewey, New York, Philosophical Library, Inc., 1950, 429.

<sup>65</sup> "For the technical purposes of strictly formal logic an assumption that every proposition is of itself, or intrinsically, either true or false may not do harm." Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge, and Value," 574.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. Italics in original.

successful settlement of a problem in a concrete situation. This settlement naturally must be verified to make it warrantably assertible. But even the final resolution is progressive and cumulative, hence it must submit to the test of its suitability in concrete circumstances. Since any given truth is not final, it must be provisional by nature.

The general means by which truth is found or reached is the process of inquiry which works in an indeterminate situation and which terminates in reaching that which is settled. Inquiry, like truth, is progressive and continuous and fraught with hazard. Reason, utilizing the process of inquiry in actual experience, is the directing agent, and must work not with immediate knowledge but with an open mind toward the provisional nature of all truth. In this process of inquiry, ideas, the judgment, have only an abstract truth in themselves, but their concrete truth is entirely functional. Hence their existential or worthwhile truth consists precisely in their utility as means toward reaching settled conditions.

Thus far the question, "What is truth," has been discussed. A very closely connected and hardly distinguishable question, "How is truth tested?" remains to be answered. In instrumentalism and pragmatism "the what" and "the how" are extremely close, since validity is really conferred by successful operation. Still there



is a distinction; at very least, the same object may be considered under two different aspects: truth as an effect, the criterion of truth as a cause and norm. This closely allied question of the criterion of truth must now occupy our attention.

## CHAPTER IV

### DEWEY'S CRITERION OF TRUTH AND ITS DETERMINING FACTORS

In general, a criterion is a standard of measurement or comparison. In the pragmatic theory of determining truth, the settled situation, the criterion, since it is inevitably partially identified with the measured, must necessarily be an aspect of the settled situation. This settled situation or resolved problem is the outcome of inquiry, or what has been earlier called truth. The question then to be asked is, How can it be decided that a problem has been solved? Or, What is this settled situation of which Dewey speaks? To answer these questions we must understand that once Dewey had rejected intellectual criteria, he set out to establish a philosophy necessarily different from any of the intellectual philosophies. His criterion of truth was the logical outgrowth of four factors: the rejection of intellectual criteria, the rejection of a priori principles, the postulation of a new philosophy, the adherence to the theory of action and reaction of organism which led him to an instrumentalist theory of knowledge. It is to these four factors and their relation to Dewey's criterion of truth that we shall turn our attention in the first half of this chapter. Once these elements have been explained, we shall

study the causes of truth and falsity in general and the criterion of truth in the field of behavior.

### 1. DEWEY'S REJECTION OF INTELLECTUAL CRITERIA

Dewey precludes his rejection of intellectual criteria with a study of past times and consequent observations of the tremendous changes that have taken place over the centuries in every field. Thus, when Dewey explains his rejection of Aristotle, whom he identified as the most articulate and efficient exponent of intellectual criteria, he first gives the conditions of science and culture in Aristotle's day, and then he contrasts those conditions with the science and culture of the twentieth century.

The competency of traditional logic as an organ of inquiry into existing problems of common sense and science is an urgent question. This chapter is, accordingly, a critical exposition of the main features of the Aristotelian logic in reference to (1) the conditions of science and culture which provided its background and substantial material, and (2) to their contrast with the conditions of culture and science which now obtain.<sup>1</sup>

Dewey here gives an undeniable preeminence to the effect that cultural and social conditions have on any philosophy. This theory is an attitude of mind on Dewey's part rather than an inductive philosophical study. Hence, his main occupation in the chapter above mentioned is simply to emphasize the obvious fact that social conditions of the present are not the same as they

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1 Dewey, Logic, 81-82.

were centuries ago. Therefore, he concludes that the philosophy of the past, and specifically, the criterion of truth, will not fit the needs of the present day because truth is basically the solution to a practical problem. As the problem changes in advancing civilization, truth must change also. And since the factor determining truth is the consequences which ensue, different consequences are now demanded; hence the need of a new criterion.

Despite the fact that a new criterion is needed, Dewey would never go so far as entirely to reject an Aristotelian logic which he considered to be both a suitable and accurate expression of rules for logic.

The Aristotelian logic as far as its spirit, instead of its letter, is concerned, is nevertheless both generically and specifically significant for what needs to be done in logic in the contemporary situation. Generically, the need is for logic to do for present science and culture what Aristotle did for the science and culture of his time.<sup>2</sup>

There is no question here of an absolute and permanent truth in Aristotelian logic as such, but rather a utility and significance deriving from its adequacy in a past day. The Aristotelian approach should be kept. But since Aristotle's philosophy, like all philosophies, arose from a certain social milieu, its literal utility vanished with the demise of the ancient civilization from which it was begotten. Aristotelianism, once beyond reproach

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2 Dewey, Logic, 95.

because of its perfect suitability to ancient Greek civilization,<sup>3</sup> was not so much rejected by Dewey as necessarily eliminated by civilization's growth.

To defend the elimination of Aristotelianism, Dewey had to prove that conditions of culture and science now are completely different from what they were in Aristotle's day. Dewey, however, satisfied himself with merely pointing out that among the Greeks "medicine, music and astronomy, meteorology, language, and political institutions were all studied with the means at command in ways freer from external control than was the case in any previous civilization."<sup>4</sup> At that time man was not something apart, but rather related to nature. Hence nature was the final consideration for the Greeks. In nature as such, there was a two-fold division: physical nature, that which underwent change; and nature or essence of individual entities, the unchanging substance with fixed characteristics. Therefore, the problem of the Greeks

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3 "It would be completely erroneous to regard the foregoing as a criticism of the Aristotelian logic in its original formulation in connection with Greek culture. As a historic document it deserves the admiration it has received. As a comprehensive, penetrating and thoroughgoing intellectual transcript of discourse in isolation from the operations in which discourse takes effect, it is above need for praise. What has been said is a criticism of the effort to maintain that logic with revisions here and there, as adequate or even relevant to the science of today." Ibid., 93-94. Italics in original.

4 Ibid., 82-83.

hinged on the distinction of the permanent and the changeable. Aristotelian logic, therefore, employed the forms of known existence which were determined "by the basic division supposed to exist in Nature between the changing and the eternal. . . . The various grades of intellectual apprehension corresponded, with their logical forms, point for point with the graded ranking of subjects in their qualitative degrees of Being."<sup>5</sup>

Since change lacks measure, says Dewey,<sup>6</sup> and marks the presence of the indefinite, it could not be known except in so far as it was enclosed. The syllogism was the form of enclosure used by the Greeks. Following on the distinction of the permanent and the changeable, one type of syllogism expressed the necessary, the other contingent knowledge.<sup>7</sup> But since only particular beings change, the species is eternal. Aristotle held that, "that which belongs inherently and necessarily to a species is its nature or essence."<sup>8</sup> At the apex of these species and natures is man who

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5 Ibid., 84.

6 Ibid.

7 "That which is fixed and permanent by nature excludes every other substance by its very nature. . . . Thus in addition to the fundamental logical form of universal (complete because dealing with what is whole by nature) and necessary propositions and relations of propositions, there are positive and negative propositions corresponding to ontological inclusions and exclusions." Ibid., 85. Parentheses and italics in original.

8 Ibid., 86.

"retains both vegetative and animal functions: sensation, appetite, and locomotion."<sup>9</sup> And above all in the Greek system was God, pure and self-moving activity. Such was the broad outline of Greek philosophy as Dewey saw it.

Dewey's conclusions about Aristotelian philosophy are three-fold: first, forms of knowledge are forms of subjects actualized in knowledge; secondly, "knowledge, in its logical forms consists exclusively of definition and classification;"<sup>10</sup> thirdly, "there is no room for any logic of discovery and invention. Discovery was thought of under the head of genuine learning, and learning was then merely coming into possession of that already known. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Since Dewey thought that for Aristotle learning merely connected two previously given forms of knowledge, such a theory would in no way advance or solve the current problems. Add to this fact Dewey's belief that modern "science destroyed the background of essence and species upon which the original logic was based,"<sup>12</sup> and you see why Dewey naturally felt thoroughly justified in repudiating Aristotelianism and with it, since he considered Aristotelianism the prototype

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9 Ibid., 87.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 88.

of intellectual philosophies, any other strictly intellectual philosophy, be it that of the Greeks, the scholastics, or the moderns.<sup>13</sup>

The necessary conclusion of this rejection is the elimination of intellectual criteria. Dewey cannot and will not allow his criterion of truth to proceed from the antecedent nature of things or from an untested correspondence of the mind to reality. His concern can be with the practical order only. If there is no a priori nor absolute truth based upon the known natures of things, Dewey is quite naturally and pleasantly, according to his predisposition of mind and temperament, forced to choose consequences as his criterion of truth. Since a truth of natures as such is valueless for him, operational truth, with consequences as a determinant, is of paramount importance.

## 2. EXPLICIT REJECTION OF A PRIORI PRINCIPLES

Clearly implicit in Dewey's reasons for rejecting Aristotelian logic and intellectual philosophy is the rejection of any a priori truth which might possibly be a criterion of truth. In his earlier periods Dewey had wavered between complete rejection

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<sup>13</sup> "The change in the conception of Nature is expressed in summary form in the idea that the universe is now conceived as open and in process while Classical Greek thought of it as finite in the sense in which finite means finished, complete and perfect." Ibid., 93.



of a priori and absolute truth and qualified acceptance. He had confessed that there might be some things which would always be true. But he goes right on to say:

We must not exaggerate the permanence and stability of such truths with respect to their recurring and prospective use. It is only relatively speaking that they are unchanging. When applied to new cases, as resources for coping with new difficulties, the oldest of truths are to some extent remade.<sup>14</sup>

What was considered as an a priori principle in the past, and which might be grudgingly called true, even by Dewey, must meet the same test as any other warranted assertion: it must have valid consequences. Hence, Dewey was taking back with one hand what he seemed to be giving with the other. Like his rejection of intellectualist philosophy in general, the particular attack on a priori truth was based on science, for men must at all times take on "the attitude of the scientific inquirer."<sup>15</sup> And this attitude expressed itself by accepting ideas as hypotheses until confirmed by consequences. Even a moral truth, if it is not "re-created to the urgencies of the passing hour,"<sup>16</sup> is false. However, when those ideas are tested, they "get a generalized energy of position."<sup>17</sup> Hence, even at this early period of Dewey's

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14 Dewey, Mind, 342.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 341.

philosophy, the truth came from the instrumentalism of the idea, not from the constitution of reality and the correspondence of the mind to that reality. It was Dewey's firm belief that "to ascribe values which are due to an instrumental and aesthetic character to some interior and a priori constitution of truth is to make fetishes of them."<sup>18</sup>

Later on, of course, Dewey became explicit and definite in affirming that there were neither ultimate nor a priori truths of any sort. Any metaphysics that concerned itself with fixed truths was bound to be barren. The essence of the pragmatism he preferred is that the mind be not subject to any foregone conclusions. Since the pragmatist believes that he can re-make the world, he does not want to submit to things that are inevitably true,<sup>19</sup> for the function of the intellect is to change external reality and be changed itself in the procedure; consequently there can be no room for a permanent or an a priori truth which might serve as a criterion of all truth.<sup>20</sup>

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18 Ibid., 342.

19 "In the perspectives of this philosophy (pragmatism), there are no last terms, no finalities, no ultimacies. In so far as metaphysics is a reasoned envisagement of finalities and ultimacies, always and every one the same, pragmatism is a philosophy without a metaphysic." Kallen, "John Dewey and the Spirit of Pragmatism," 40.

20 "Reason is now a patterned activity which alters what it works on and alters in its own being as it works, bringing

### 3. THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

Once Dewey had made a definite rejection of all intellectual and a priori criteria, he was faced with the necessity of explaining the origin, the nature and function of philosophy, first of all to justify his own rejection of past philosophy, and secondly, to establish his system. As in his study of intellectualism, which was typified for him in Aristotle, he had approached the study in the light of history, so here, too, his approach was historical and somewhat psychological. He started with man who lives in a "world of signs and symbols."<sup>21</sup> Man, however, differs from the beast in his remembrance and preservation of past experiences, for he recalls the past, especially in so far as it adds something to the present. Early man, says Dewey, lived in a world of recollections of emotional interest to himself. In this natural and somewhat primitive state man does not study the past scientifically, but rather in as much as it concerns him. Consequently, ancient man lived in a world of fears and hopes, "made of imaginations and suggestions, not significant of

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into existence not foregone conclusions but ends different from their beginnings. Reason is the art of guiding chance by choice, and surmounting fatality by judgment. . . . Reason is thus recognized as creative intelligence." Ibid.

21 Dewey, Reconstruction, 1.

a world of objective fact intellectually confronted."<sup>22</sup> This was a primal state of stories and legends without any appreciable significance. Soon, however, this original material of stories and legends was consolidated, and experiences which pertain to the majority of men were "socially generalized,"<sup>23</sup> since they concerned the community. This generalization of experience gave birth to tradition. At the same time individual reflections began to focus on the community as a social unit. Then came the formation of a government, and the beliefs of the group, formerly amorphous, were systematized to obtain social unity.

Whether this is literally so or not, it is not necessary to inquire, much less to demonstrate. It is enough for our purposes that under social influences there took place a fixing and organizing of doctrines and cults which gave general traits to the imagination and general rules to conduct, and that such a consolidation was a necessary antecedent to the formation of any philosophy as we understand that term.<sup>24</sup>

This consolidation was and is at one and the same time a basis and a result of the formation of any philosophy in any civilization. Consequently, the particular pertinence of the philosophy is woven from the social fabric, both as its cause and effect.

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22 Ibid., 7.

23 Ibid., 8.

24 Ibid., 9.

However, given this general organization, Dewey claims:

There is still lacking the motive for logical system and intellectual proof. This we may suppose to be furnished by the need of reconciling the moral rules and ideals embedded in the traditional code with the matter of fact positivistic knowledge which gradually grows up.<sup>25</sup>

The significance of such a concept of the origin of philosophy needs no more articulation, except, perhaps, a reminder that such a notion was fundamental to Dewey. Dewey lectured on this subject, and in the first chapter of Reconstruction in Philosophy, summarized his theory.

If this lecture succeeds in leaving in your minds as a reasonable hypothesis the idea that philosophy originated not out of intellectual material, but out of social and emotional material, it will also succeed in leaving with you a changed attitude toward traditional philosophies.<sup>26</sup>

As has been clearly implied in the earlier section of this chapter, the general criterion of philosophy and its truth or value will be the success it has in solving practical problems.<sup>27</sup>

Since philosophy will have no abstract meaning whatsoever, it cannot consider truth as such, nor being, nor the

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25 Ibid., 9-10.

26 Ibid., 25.

27 "Instead of the disputes of rivals about the nature of reality, we have the scene of human clash of social purposes and aspirations. Instead of impossible attempts to transcend experience, we have the significant record of the efforts of men to formulate the things of experience to which they are most deeply and passionately attached." Ibid.

absolute. It will not disengage itself from singular and particular conditions by abstraction, but in fact will mainly concern itself with the singular and particular. Hence, philosophy will deal primarily with what Dewey calls "meaning" in singular and particular situations. Dewey employs this term "meaning" to replace but not to eliminate truth as the object of philosophy. For him, meaning is a broader term involving truth plus the effects an object has on a situation when the object is put into use. This meaning will at one and the same time be the end of inquiry and the criterion of truth. Since Dewey conceives the function of philosophy to be precisely the achievement of significant meaning, he goes to some length to explain a somewhat atmospheric term.

Meaning is wider in scope as well as more precious in value than is truth, and philosophy is occupied with meaning rather than truth. Making such a statement is dangerous; it is easily misconceived to signify that truth is of no great importance under any circumstances; while the fact is that truth is so infinitely important when it is important at all, namely in records of events and descriptions of existences, that we extend its claims to regions where it has no jurisdiction. But even as respects truths, meaning is the wider category; truths are but one class of meanings, namely, those in which a claim to verifiability by their consequences is an intrinsic part of their meaning. Beyond this island of meanings which in their own nature are true and false lies the ocean of meanings to which truth and falsity are irrelevant.<sup>28</sup>

There seem to be two threads of thought here. One is that there are some objects which are true in their nature, hence free from

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28 Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, 4-5.

the criterion of utility or meaning. But Dewey would add that the truth of such objects would be useless since, like abstract propositions and judgments, they have no vital effect on the social situation. Hence, if they are to have any truth, it will be the truth they might have as means, in which case a better term would be suitability. Secondly, Dewey seems to point out a second class of objects in which truth and falsity would have no point. Now this could mean that the consequences alone are important, and these would be called valid, not true. Or it could also mean that the relation to consequences on the part of these objects is not a necessary one. In other words, this class of objects would have a relation to consequences only when they had been put into action, not before. An example of the second type would be all practical judgments that have nothing to do with behavior as such, as, for example, the statement that John Brown is the author of a certain book. The first type of object would be judgments that fall under the category of moral reflection. Despite the lack of clarity in the passage, one thing stands out: in either type of object the important factor is the consequence. Whether it be intrinsic or extrinsic to the meaning, the point is that the determining factor for all truth is the consequence in action. And it is precisely with the consequence that the new philosophy postulated by Dewey must constantly and primarily deal.

It is important to note that what has been said above has come from statements Dewey made about the history of philosophy. He has pointed out that philosophy originates in social problems, has the function of solving these problems, and grows by its adaptation to changes in civilization. Therefore, this conception of philosophy in its growth and function, coupled with his rejection of intellectual criteria, postulates a pragmatic criterion. For his philosophy is concerned with consequences which will serve at one and the same time as its end and its criterion.

#### 4. THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE CRITERION OF TRUTH

Having proceeded thus far in a negative manner, Dewey's first step in a positive direction is the establishment of his own schema in The Quest for Certainty from which his theory of knowledge will proceed. Dewey's concept of the complete function of knowledge is enlightening. He begins with the thought that, "the chief consideration in achieving concrete security of value lies in the perfecting of methods of action."<sup>29</sup> Such a theory takes exception to the belief that before operation we can know what knowledge must be and then use our concept of the nature of knowledge to judge conclusions in the abstract. In reference to such an a priori assumption as opposed to his theory drawn from

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29 Dewey, Quest for Certainty, 37.



the sociological situation, Dewey says:

The theory in question makes no such assumption. It asserts that by some operations conclusions emerge in which objects once uncertain and confused are rendered clear and stable. Alter names as much as you please; refuse to call one set of consequences knowledge and another error, or reverse appellations, and these consequences remain just what they are. They present the difference between resolved and clarified situations and disordered and obscure ones.<sup>30</sup>

Dewey, in his use of the terms, "uncertain and confused," "clear and stable," is saying the same thing as the theory he denies, with this exception: the theory he attacks holds that conclusions can be uncertain and confused before they are put into operation if, for example, there has been a defect in the reasoning process. Dewey, however, holds that the criterion determining certainty is trial. Therefore, as Dewey's theory stands, knowledge in itself has no meaning. Internally, isolated, in its own nature it is nothing. Inquiry and knowledge have validity only within situations. There can be no differentiation among the parts in the process of inquiry. One critic, however, states very well what happens if there be no differentiation in the entire process.

In order to recognize problems and values within any given process, the various parts of the process must be differentiated, otherwise the directional meaning of the terms, "problem" and "values" would disappear.<sup>31</sup>

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30 Ibid., 219.

31 Buswell, Jr., Philosophies of F. R. Tennant and John Dewey, 387.

Dewey seeks to give direction to nature not by differentiating the parts but rather through the efforts of the intelligent agent who acts through the process of inquiry to change existence in some way. When the problematic situation arises, the process of inquiry starts. Constructive and re-formative thought then becomes part of existence.

Consequently reason, or thought, in its more general sense, has a real, though limited, function, a creative, constructive function. If we form general ideas and if we put them in action, consequences are produced which could not be produced otherwise. Under these conditions the world will be different from what it would have been if thought had not intervened.<sup>32</sup>

At this point an individual study of each element within the process of inquiry will help clarify just what Dewey means when he establishes consequences as the criterion of truth.

When an idea has a part in the reshaping of environment, Dewey says it is true, "for it is precisely the capacity of the idea as an aim and method of action to determine this transformation which is the criterion of its truth."<sup>33</sup> The idea is always projected for some purpose. When the idea actually operates it becomes true.

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32 Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, 25.

33 Dewey, Mind, 338.

The judgment too must meet this same criterion. Judgments institute definite existential situations. Normally, before a final settlement is reached, many partial settlements have taken place upon which a final judgment is dependent. All of these judgments preceding the final judgment have the same criterion. "The consequences they produce in the conduct of further inquiry is the criterion of their value."<sup>34</sup> The final judgment is something crucial and critical for it is about an individual situation under special conditions at a given time. It is this judgment, involving other temporal judgments, which gives a determinate resolution and ramification to the problematic situation.<sup>35</sup> Since the objective consequence is valid, the judgment is true.

According to Dewey, in both common sense inquiry and in strict scientific inquiry there is what might be termed a reciprocity of criterion. Both types of inquiry utilize facts and ideas which are the products of previous inquiries. Scientific inquiry

differs from common sense in the scrupulous care taken to ensure both that the earlier conclusions are fitted

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<sup>34</sup> Dewey, Logic, 122.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 134. Temporal here means that the subject-matter of the judgment undergoes constant reconstitution in the process of judgment.

in advance to be means for regulation of later inquiries, and the care taken to ensure that special facts and conceptions employed in the later ones are strictly relevant to the problem in hand.<sup>36</sup>

Common sense proceeds in a more casual manner. But each type of inquiry sets out to discover the basis which entitles habits and attitudes to operate causally. Earlier conclusions prepare the way for later judgments. A subsequent judgment which operates effectively would have as its criterion prior judgments of the same nature and partial settlements upon which the final judgment is based. If consequences prove that prior judgments were ineffectual, the strict and formal criterion would be the consequences which follow the final judgment.

The judgment, Dewey says, uses the general which is "conceptual or ideational in nature."<sup>37</sup> However, the concepts involved do not represent material "that is found to be antecedently 'common' to a number of singulars."<sup>38</sup> Dewey conceives the necessity of the concept as being suggested by but not derived from singulars. "This conceptual dimension is, furthermore, held to be logically an objective necessary condition in all determination of warranted beliefs or knowledge. . . ."<sup>39</sup> The judgment

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36 Ibid., 246.

37 Ibid., 263.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

unites the various possibilities of operation. Here there is still no question of validity or warranted assertibility. It is only when this final judgment operates that the question of truth enters. The final value of ideas and judgments comes not from internal consistency, but from consequences.

Hypotheses are conditional. They have to be tested by the consequences of the operations they define and direct. . . . But their final value is not determined by their internal elaboration and consistency, but by the consequences they effect in existence as that is perceptibly experienced.<sup>40</sup>

Propositions for Dewey are likewise instrumental. They are the means of overt activity in the process of inquiry. "Propositions as such are, consequently, provisional, intermediate and instrumental."<sup>41</sup> Dewey divides propositions into two types: the material, which is "existential, referring directly to actual conditions as determined by experimental observation,"<sup>42</sup> and the procedural, "which are non-existential in content in direct reference but which are applicable to existence through the operations they represent as possibilities."<sup>43</sup> The very nature of the proposition is constituted by operation, for the

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40 Dewey, Quest for Certainty, 165.

41 Dewey, Logic, 283.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 283-84. Italics in original.

proposition in itself is a symbolization and is not complete and final. Since inquiry "is concerned with objective transformations of objective subject-matter,"<sup>44</sup> the proposition has the same end. Propositions are "products of provisional appraisals, evaluations, of existences and of conceptions as means of institution of final judgment which is objective resolution of a problematic situation."<sup>45</sup> From the repeated use of the word "provisional," it is clear that Dewey always conceives propositions strictly as means, hence he does not use the description "true" when speaking of propositions.<sup>46</sup>

In summary, then, we see Dewey does not admit that mental coherence alone could give us truth, but it could give only an hypothesis. A theory only pretends to correspond to reality until it has been put into action. <sup>QUOTE # 5</sup> If, in acting upon this notion, we are brought to the fact which it implies or which it demands, then this notion is true.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>45</sup> "But at this point it is pertinent to note that, since means as such are neither true nor false, truth-falsity is not a property of propositions. Means are either effective or ineffective; pertinent or irrelevant; wasteful or economical, the criterion for the difference being found in the consequences with which they are connected as means." Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Dewey, Philosophy and Civilization, 24.

It follows that reason has a constructive function. When we form general ideas and put them into action, new consequences follow so that the world is different from what it was before. In the instrumentalist theory thought functions "in the experimental determinations of future consequences."<sup>48</sup> Hence, the validity of these principles derived from experimental operation is determined by "the coherence of the consequences produced by the habits they articulate."<sup>49</sup>

Once again the distinction between the criterion of truth and truth itself must be called to mind. We are here concerned with two aspects of what really seem to be one and the same thing: consequences in the order of operation both constituting and determining truth. In so far as consequences constitute truth, they are one thing; in so far as they are a measure according to which truth is judged, they are another thing--not separable, it is true, but distinct as aspects.

##### 5. DETERMINING CAUSES OF TRUTH AND FALSITY IN GENERAL

Given a rejection of intellectual criteria and the conception of philosophy and knowledge as essentially functional

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48 Ibid., 26.

49 Dewey, Logic, 13.

in concrete surroundings, that which will determine truth and falsity will in general have to be something in the realm of successful operation. If the outcome of inquiry terminates in an empirically beneficial conclusion, truth has been reached. But if an inept means has been used to reach the desired end, this discrepancy between means and end will cause error.

There always exists a discrepancy between means that are employed and consequences that ensue; sometimes this discrepancy is so serious that the result is what we call mistake and error.<sup>50</sup>

The discrepancy referred to is the fact that "the conceptions employed in deliberate inquiry, must be present and actual, while consequences to be attained are future."<sup>51</sup> But the question still remains: what precisely determines when something is false, when there is a state of error? Granted that the cause will be a lack of proper use of means or insufficient and incorrect means, the question still to be determined is what criterion judges whether truth or falsity is present.

Many critics of Dewey maintain that Dewey says that if a thing works, it is true. Others say that if it offers satisfaction, it is true. Both of these statements are correct in a sense. But Dewey denies that by satisfaction he means a theory of

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50 Ibid., 39.

51 Ibid.



merely personal satisfaction.<sup>52</sup> The satisfaction Dewey speaks of is the satisfying of objective conditions, in other words solving the problematic-situation. William Savery explains well that actual workability is the criterion for all propositions.

According to my proposed generalizations true propositions would be classified as follows: (1) those that are verified, (2) those that will be verified, (3) those that can be (physically) verified, (4) those that might be (logically) verified.<sup>53</sup>

This verification means that the proposition does solve a problematic-situation. As long, then, as there is actual or possible verification of agreement between meaning and fact, truth is present.

Incompatibility of two conceptions can only be discovered by their confrontation. Hence verification and coherence may be united in a confluent theory. In empirical truth there is an actual or possible agreement between meaning and fact. . . .<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, it would seem correct to say that satisfaction, properly understood, that is, fulfilling the objective conditions necessary for successful operation, or workability, determine the validity of propositions and lead to warranted assertion. Helping in the process of inquiry is a function which all propositions, judgments and ideas must fulfill before they may be true or false. Dewey

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52 Dewey, "Experience, Knowledge and Value," 572.

53 William Savery, "Significance of Dewey's Philosophy," *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1939, 506. Italics in original.

54 *Ibid.*, 507.

provides an example which clarifies the theory.

The syllogism "All satellites are made of green cheese; the moon is a satellite; therefore, it is made of green cheese" is formally correct. The propositions involved are, however, invalid, not just because they are "materially false," but because instead of promoting inquiry they would, if taken and used, retard and mislead it.<sup>55</sup>

## 7. CRITERION OF TRUTH AND BEHAVIOR

It is quite clear from what has hitherto been said that consequences will determine the truth of behavior just as it determines the truth of knowledge and the truth of each part of the process of inquiry. But since Dewey was eminently concerned with the practical and the social, his criterion of truth has particular significance in the field of behavior. Just exactly what his criterion of behavior logically is, is well explained by Wilfrid Sellars in an ironic conclusion to his essay, "Language, Rules and Behavior."

The skeletons of rules can be given a pragmatic or instrumentalist justification. This justification operates within a set of living rules. The death of one rule is the life of another. Even one and the same rule may be both living as justificans and dead as justificandum, as when we justify a rule of logic. Indeed, can the attempt to justify rules from left to right, be anything but an exhibition of these rules from right to left? To learn new rules is to change one's mind. Is there a rational way of losing one's reason? Is not the final wisdom the way of the amoeba in the ooze, the rat in the maze, the

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<sup>55</sup> Dewey, Logic, 288.

burnt child with fire?<sup>56</sup>

There are two overt implications in this statement: either an ultimate lack of any criterion of behavior, or the trial and error method. Though Dewey's words allow such an interpretation, perhaps, he would not subscribe to either theory. For him the intelligence has the responsibility of locating responsibility before overt action. In every problematic situation concerning behavior there are conflicting desires and alternative choices. Choice of the right good demands a squaring of the desired consequences with the actual consequences.

Hence, inquiry is exacted: observation of the detailed makeup of the situation; analysis into its diverse factors; clarification of what is obscure; discounting of the more insistent and vivid traits; tracing the consequences of the various modes of action that suggest themselves; regarding the decision reached as hypothetical and tentative until the anticipated or supposed consequences which led to its adoption have been squared with actual consequences.<sup>57</sup>

This almost naive explanation of consequences proceeds from one main presupposition: Dewey conceived man as an organism, the most perfect of the animal kingdom.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, as the animal

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<sup>56</sup> Wilfrid Sellars, "Language, Rules and Behavior," *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom*, New York, The Dial Press, 1950, 315. *Italics in original.*

<sup>57</sup> Dewey, *Reconstruction*, 164.

<sup>58</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, New York, Macmillan, 1930, 329-393.

reacts to stimuli and to environment, man is to react to any moral situation. In other words, the correct consequences are supposed to follow naturally the intelligent reaction of man to a problematic situation. Dewey assumes that "there is no breach of continuity between operations of inquiry and biological operations and physical operations."<sup>59</sup> Since man is continuous with all of nature, human experience is merely interaction with environment. Man has intelligence which enables him to direct his present activity toward a more profitable future. In fact, this intelligence is what we might call the proper equipment to insure that he does react to his environment in a suitable manner. Dewey's concept of man as a high type of animal organism makes it extremely difficult to arrive at a more ultimate criterion of behavior than consequences. To the thoughtful person seeing the obvious chaos not only in the lives of individuals, but also in the history of nations, a study of Dewey's criterion for behavior is not only dissatisfying, but at times frightening. However, if we keep in mind that Dewey has rejected all intellectual criteria, that he has tied his philosophy to particular circumstances, we will realize that he will always be dealing with situations only on the surface, legislating only in vague, general terms, since his criterion must have enough elasticity to fit particular instances

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59 Dewey, Logic, 19.

yet not be absolute and universal.

For Dewey the moral self, as opposed to man as an ontological entity, is the being in "the full range of relationships implied in its activity."<sup>60</sup> Being within nature, "interaction is the one unescapable trait of every human concern."<sup>61</sup> The moral self, then, is in continuous formation both by external relationships and the choices which react on the individual. But this still does not answer the question of what it is that makes the act moral. Dewey confesses that the scope of moral acts is important since "morals are as broad as acts which concern our relationships with others. And potentially this includes all our acts, even though their social bearing may not be thought of at the time of performance."<sup>62</sup> The very same criterion holds in the field of ethics which held in the process of inquiry and knowledge--experimental activity determines validity. The moral law is a law of action and its consequences. "A moral law. . . is a formula of the way to respond when specified conditions present themselves. Its soundness and pertinence are tested by what

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60 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 409. Italics in original.

61 Dewey, Experience and Nature, 134.

62 Dewey, Democracy and Education, 414-15.

happens when it is acted upon."<sup>63</sup> Every act must go through the laboratory of experience. Now since this is so, moral progress would be killed by a fixed moral law rooted in fixed natures. For moral actions are supposed to lead to the betterment of environment, to a more meaningful life. Consequently, no moral truth is fixed. "No amount of pains taken in forming a definite case is final; the consequences of its adoption must be carefully noted, and a purpose held only as a working hypothesis until the results confirm its rightness."<sup>64</sup> Morality, like knowledge, is continuous and progressive.<sup>65</sup>

All of this, however, does not tell us precisely how we know when behavior is beneficial. How do we know exactly when behavior leads to the betterment of mankind? This question is left open by Dewey precisely because of his concept of the social order, of man, and of the function of philosophy. Dewey believed that "in times like the present, when industrial, political, and scientific transformations are in process, a rapid revision of all appraisals is especially needed."<sup>66</sup> What would be

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63 Dewey, Quest for Certainty, 278.

64 Dewey, Reconstruction, 175.

65 John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, New York, The Modern Library, 1930, 284.

66 John Dewey and James H. Tufts, Ethics, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1932, 295.

the criterion of this rapid revision, Dewey fails to specify. The criterion really falls under reflective morality where the individual seeks "to discover what should be esteemed so that approbation will follow what is decided to be worth approving. . . ."67 In other words, the problem of reflective morality is to discover what is the basis for man's unconsciously approving or blaming an act. This reflection then shows "that contribution to universal happiness or welfare is the only ground for admiration and esteem."68 Hence it seems that the criterion of an act is whether it benevolently affects "all sentient creatures who are affected by an act."69 So the act must contribute to a kind of general well-being; otherwise, it is not a good act.

For Dewey in determining what does contribute to general well-being, absolutely everything must meet the test of consequences. "To generalize the recognition that the true means the verified and means nothing else places upon men the responsibility for surrendering political and moral dogmas, and subjecting to the test of consequences their most cherished prejudices."70 Consequences alone are the norm which guide us "truly."

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67 Ibid., 259. Italics in original.

68 Ibid., 262.

69 Ibid.

70 Dewey, Reconstruction, 160.

When the claim or pretension or plan is acted upon it guides us truly or falsely; it leads us to our end or away from it. Its active, dynamic function is the all-important thing about it, and in the quality of activity induced by it lies all its truth and falsity. The hypothesis that works is the true one; and truth is an abstract noun applied to the collection of cases, actual, foreseen and desired, that receive confirmation in their works and consequences.<sup>71</sup>

How are we to tell if the consequences actually do affect man beneficially? That would be an ultimate criterion requiring fixed norms and principles. Dewey wanted neither. Hence Dewey never gave a definite answer to the question. The times in which he lived were times of optimism and hope in the capacity of man for illimitable progress if he confined his interest to the present. Moreover, Dewey conceives man as an organism which would react intelligently in all situations because of his creative intelligence. Consequently, he never seemed to consider it necessary to answer the final question of what determines beneficial or injurious consequences, or what criterion is the arbiter of the universal happiness.

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71 Ibid., 156. Italics in original.



## CHAPTER V

### CRITIQUE OF DEWEY'S NOTION OF TRUTH

There are many choices open to the writer who would attempt either an evaluation or a critique of John Dewey's notion of truth. Each misconception of Dewey could be thoroughly investigated and then refuted. This, however, would be the work of volumes. There is an easier method however, and one which seems basic--from which other critiques ultimately would have to spring. That manner of refutation is to point out some misunderstandings of John Dewey and to indicate contradictions inherent in his concept and formulation of the notion of truth. In other words, we shall point out certain errors which we may say Dewey had a right to make; and others, which, in view of his system, are absolutely inexcusable, leading in fact, to the invalidation of his system.

#### 1. MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE INTELLECT

In an instrumental and pragmatic philosophy the intellect will have a special function, one determined by utility. Consequently, it might be said that the instrumentalist cannot start with the intellect and discover its nature from its opera-

tion, but rather must postulate its function from what has to be done to achieve successful activity. Dewey, as has been said earlier, attributed to the intellect the task of reshaping reality. The intellect was to have an effect on the real world. For example, Dewey condemned the Newtonian view of position and velocity in the material world since it

assumed that these positions and velocities are there independent of our knowing, of our experiments and observations, and that we have scientific knowledge in the exact degree in which we ascertain them exactly.<sup>1</sup>

This rejection of the power and task of the intellect to ascertain the natures of objective reality comes from the fear that such a theory would merely be a spectator theory of knowledge. Dewey demanded that knowledge "not merely. . .bring about a change in our own subjective or mental attitude."<sup>2</sup> Knowledge of this type, Dewey felt, would not be participated in. "The act no more entered into the constitution of the known object than traveling to Athens to see the Parthenon had any effect on architecture."<sup>3</sup>

Such a statement contains a two-fold error. First of all, a "spectator" is not limited to mere observation as he is, for example, in the case of an athletic contest. Dewey presumes that the only type of change is that effected in the visible, real,

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1 Dewey, Quest for Certainty, 201.

2 Ibid., 214.

3 Ibid.

extra-mental world. But the fact is that the knower becomes a participant in a vital activity when a real, existing subject comes into his mind in the intentional order and effects a change, making the knower a participant of knowledge and not a mere spectator. Despite the fact that the object was true antecedently to knowledge, a new and vital relation enters the picture when the knower comes into possession of the knowledge. The known object becomes an intentional part of the knower. Consequently, reality is vitally affected in so far as it enters a new relation, that of a known object. From this state the knower may make use of the knowledge. But independently of use the knowledge will be true or false depending on whether or not there is conformity of the intellect with the object. Secondly, Dewey's implication in the aforementioned objection is that what we have just answered is not what you would call a practical consequence. Some extra-mental practical consequence must follow for thought to deserve the name knowledge. What this objection of Dewey does is to eliminate the first step in knowledge and to substitute what may, but must not necessarily and universally be, the second step. Consequences sometimes follow the knowledge, but they do not constitute the knowledge. The accurate representation of the object constitutes the knowledge. But Dewey's assumption is based on the theory that knowledge must always be functional since intelligence, as we have seen, is the interaction with nature so that nature realize "its

own potentialities in behalf of a fuller and richer issue of events."<sup>4</sup> Our contention here is that he mistakenly takes the function of the intellect from the social order only. He makes affecting the social order in a beneficial way the ultimate and only function the intellect has.

This conception of the work of the intellect is an outgrowth of the "scientific method" earlier described which was inherited from Comte and established along positivistic lines. It was meant to free philosophy from the bonds of tradition and theology. Instead it has absolutely disenthroned the intellect by postulating the sociological factor as the only important and necessary consideration. Sociology and the advance of civilization are noteworthy governing motives. But they alone do not explain the function of the intellect. Nobody denies their inherent importance, increasing, perhaps, now more than ever before. The empirical and positivistic weakness lies precisely in the fact that it is an unproven assertion that the function of the intellect should be completely limited to social progress. Nowhere does Dewey give a demonstration proving the intrinsic necessity or relation between the intellect and the social order. So while Dewey's positivistic school sets out to be free from tradition and a priori principles, it has gratuitously asserted its own a

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4 Ibid., 215.

priori principle from which has sprung its entire system. What is freely asserted may certainly and logically be rejected just as freely.

Dewey starts with the object and postulates in an a priori fashion what will be the function of the acting subject. Really he should consider the faculty and what it can do. From perceiving the intellect in action, he would come to the conclusion that it was made for truth. Then he could proceed to its other functions. But to proceed from object to subject, as he certainly seems to have done, is to invert the order. The actual fact and cause of this error is that Dewey was not interested in truth or the ultimate function of the intellect. He was essentially an empiricist, one interested only in particular results.

Were he primarily a naturalist, a scientist seeking only truth, his philosophy would doubtless be a more rigorous and stable system; being primarily an empiricist, he must participate in a culture whose living patterns elude most minds and whose planning often seems futile.<sup>5</sup>

And here is the most practical refutation of Dewey, as we have mentioned above, on the point of the function of the intellect: he himself starts out with an a priori theory, a method of procedure which was one of the chief reasons why he had rejected traditional philosophy.

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<sup>5</sup> Milton Halsey Thomas, A Bibliography of John Dewey, introduction by Herbert W. Schneider, New York, Columbia University Press, 1939, xi.

## 2. MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE POWER OF ABSTRACTION

Akin to Dewey's mistaken theory of the function of the intellect is his failure to understand the power of the intellect to abstract, and hence come from particulars to universals, thereby ultimately affecting the concrete, particular problematic-situation on a larger scale than is possible when consideration is absolutely limited to the singular. For Dewey however, there were only complete singulars, and they alone were endowed with a power to affect human affairs.

The singular object stands out conspicuously because of its especially focal and crucial position at a given time in determination of some problem of use or enjoyment which the total complex environment presents.<sup>6</sup>

The stress of the paragraph, by Dewey's own choice, falls on "total." The object was never to be isolated. Hence the only profitable knowledge was that which dealt with a singular object in its significance to an entire situation. Now such a theory ignores completely the fact that man, for example, can be considered as he is in himself, with certain essential properties and other accidental properties. It is not necessary to conceive him first of all and only in problematic situations, or in relation to nature alone. It is far more worthwhile and accurate to study man in his relationships with nature and the concrete

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<sup>6</sup> Dewey, Logic, 67. Italics in original.

environment and then to proceed to consider man in himself whence will come a knowledge of the essential and accidental. It is only by such a procedure that knowledge will really be significant. Otherwise the object of consideration, be it man or some other object, will be a mass of qualities judged by an accidental and a priori criterion of consequential action, without ever coming to the ultimate consideration of what determines and makes a thing to be what it is, and what it is that makes certain singulars act always in the same manner. It is futile for Dewey to maintain that the mind must consider objects in the complexity of relationships in which the object is located. This leads neither to knowledge nor suitable action. It merely makes a fetish out of the concrete situation.

Once given this presupposition that the mind should be concerned only with concrete particulars and has only the function of solving problematic-situations, it is impossible to come to an absolute or ultimate criterion. Relativism must follow since there are so many changeable features in every concrete situation. And if relativism follows, then it will certainly follow that progress cannot be made, for a criterion of truth will ultimately become completely subjective since the only determination of truth is consequences, and satisfactory consequences will vary as place, time, circumstance, and problem change.

To take but one example, how is it that an oak tree exhibits the same characteristics the world over? In the large, the leaf is the same size, the bark the same color, the wood the same texture. A process of induction leads the observer to the conclusion that there is a constancy of properties in the arbor that we call the oak. A study of a sufficient number of them will enable the intelligent observer to come to the conclusion that the oak tree has a certain nature which is the cause of these identical properties in every oak tree. To deny that the intellect has the power of going from the singular to the universal is to go against the experience of all men. To demand that only the singular be considered, as Dewey does when he postulates the primacy of the particular, is to fly in the face of convincing evidence on the empirical level, evidence upon which everyone acts in daily life, instrumentalists not excluded. Furthermore, such a basic misconception of the intellect's power, if sincerely and continuously acted upon, would in no way lead to progress but would ultimately thwart the solution of particular problems by increasing their number and by neglecting the laws which even the positive scientists follow.

These same basic misunderstandings are apparent in Dewey's explanation of the concept and the proposition, to which we now turn our attention.



### 3. MISUNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF THE CONCEPT

Since Dewey had misunderstood the function of intelligence and of knowledge, it follows that his theory of the concept had to be in line with these false theories. We saw that Dewey adheres to Bridgman's definition of the concept. "In general, we mean by any concept nothing more than a set of operations; the concept is synonymous with the corresponding set of operations."<sup>7</sup> Dewey says that "All conceptions, all intellectual descriptions, must be formulated in terms of operations, actual or imaginatively possible."<sup>8</sup> Now as long as the concept concerns operations alone, it has a wide field of activity, for every operation which does not involve self-contradiction is either actual or imaginatively possible. If, however, Dewey means completed operations, no new knowledge is possible. Hence, he would seem to prefer the first choice, making the statement refer to future operations, hence, "we can refer only to our future acts."<sup>9</sup> Yet if the concept refers only to the future, there can be no test of its validity, since a test would necessarily fall in the past.

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7 Bridgman, *Logic of Modern Physics*, 5. Cf. Dewey, *Quest for Certainty*, 111.

8 Dewey, *Quest for Certainty*, 118.

9 Feldman, *Philosophy of John Dewey*, 54. Italics in original.

When Dewey uses the term "operation," he does not specify whether he means a physical or mental act. Dewey comes close to making a marriage of the two when he says "in order for a concept to be meaningful, it must (among other things) be possible to specify the operations by means of which the object referred to may be detected."<sup>10</sup> This would mean that the concept is mental in so far as it proceeds from the working mind, but physical in so far as it is caused by situations. But there is absolutely no proof or reason given why all conceptions "must be formulated in terms of operation;" and we believe that here is a crucial error of Dewey. He merely affirms, as we saw in the earlier chapters, that the concept must be an operation. Why must it be an operation? Because successful activity is had only in the sphere of operation. The question is, why must successful operation be the term of the concept? To this question Dewey gives no answer save his original postulate of the primacy of successful activity. The contradictions within Dewey's theory, once given his original postulates, are not of such great moment. The important thing is the reason for his postulate. But he gives neither reason nor proof but merely assertions.

What is valuable to note here is that Dewey's first

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<sup>10</sup> Feldman, Philosophy of John Dewey, 54.

relation with an object is in the order of practical judgment. The operation he specifies is a reference to action which confers a potential truth on the object. It is a reference to present, past or future qualities or relations under specified conditions. However, the fact is that practical consequences, the aspect of human activity in which Dewey is most interested, depends upon the nature of environment, the extent to which you know that nature, and your application of this knowledge to the object in the known, concrete circumstances. This requires a mental representation of the extra-mental reality from which successful activity will proceed as an effect, not a cause. Dewey, however, ignores this and implies very clearly that knowledge is an effect rather than a cause of successful activity.

#### 4. MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE PROPOSITION

To make the concept identical with operation is to make the judgment and the proposition almost useless. We saw in the preceding chapter what Dewey means by the two. A passage from Dr. Ratner will serve to recall Dewey's theory of the proposition. As Dr. Ratner observes, Dewey gives the proposition a functional use of a slightly more involved nature than the function attributed to the concept alone.

We would be totally unworthy of the spirit his philosophy inspires, if we did not have the courage to say that the immediate intellectual apprehension of propositions is

no more than the immediate perception of sense-data, a case of knowledge. . . . We do not know propositions taken individually and in isolation from their functional context. . . what we do know are propositions taken together in their relationships to one another and to the context in which their evidential value is developed and used--i.e., we know propositions in their mediate relation to the mind.<sup>11</sup>

While it is still not too clear just how the proposition differs from the concept, it is clear that the proposition in itself, apart from its relation to the mind, is exactly like sense-knowledge. But sense-data in itself gives proof only of its existence whereas a proposition, in its meaning, stating the contents of the judgment, signifies things to be as the proposition says they are, therefore as being either true or false in so far as reality is or is not as the proposition affirms. The obvious illation is that the truth and falsity of propositions depends upon their conformity with reality. We will not push this argument against Dewey but rather ask him of what the thought consists. Does it consist of consequences? Certainly not, since that would be to identify the cause with the effect. Are the contents of the proposition natures, true in themselves before the judgment expressed in the proposition, and affirmed by a copula? This would be to affirm a truth apart from that which the criterion of consequences establishes. Dewey's only answer would perforce be

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Ratner, "John Dewey's Theory of Judgment," Journal of Philosophy, XXVII, 1930, 259-60. Italics in original.

that the proposition is none of these things. It is merely a function which is justified by successful consequences, which, of course brings us to an impasse. Like Dr. Johnson, we can only explain to the gentleman, not give him understanding. But we do join a Dewey follower, and at the same time a critic, who attributes Dewey's error to the stress on "the functional aspects of thinking, to the neglect of what that thought is of."12

A more convincing argument against Dewey is the contradiction to which his theory of the functional role of propositions leads. It is quite clear that propositions, as means, must lead to warranted assertions or truth. In themselves Dewey maintains that propositions can be neither true nor false. But because of the reciprocal action of the criteria as explained in Chapter III, a warranted assertion would have to affirm the truth of a proposition. Then, since propositions are by their nature neutral, every warranted assertion would be false. As Thayer puts it:

Most surprising, perhaps, are the consequences for Dewey's well-known theory of truth or warranted assertion. For, as I have tried to show, if warranted assertions assert something about propositions, namely that they are true or that they are false, but propositions are by definition neither true nor false, then every warranted assertion must be false since. . .no warranted assertion could be true if it asserted something to be the case concerning propositions which, by definition or prior agreement, is

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12 Feldman, Philosophy of John Dewey, 112. The same objection we have proposed is given by Feldman. Italics in original.

not the case at all.<sup>13</sup>

The cause of this inconsistency in Dewey could well be said to be the fact that he has been unconsciously caught in a maze of a priori postulates which he thought he had categorically denied, but which in reality he affirms and places at the very foundation of his philosophy.

#### 5. CONTRADICTION IN DEWEY'S DENIAL OF A PRIORI AND ABSOLUTE

With great vehemence does Dewey deny both the need and the actuality of a priori principles. There are to be no such futile bases for truth in his system. The only truth is that which is tested. Consequently even a priori and absolute principles must not escape this test.

Despite this protest against a priori and absolute principles, we find Dewey involved in the unhappy situation of affirming statements which necessarily involve some a priori principles. As a matter of fact, most of his logic, as we have said, is based on these very principles. In commenting on Dewey's Logic, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr. points out this inconsistency.

On pages 256, 262, and 263 there are at least eight references to "necessary" logical relationships, references in the most familiar and ordinary style, which are completely unintelligible unless the a priori

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13 Thayer, Logic of Pragmatism, 12.

character of logical principles is assumed. Neither Dewey nor anyone else can write extensively without assuming the prior quality of logical principles. Examples might be multiplied manifold, as when Dewey uses such phrases as "logically impossible, because involving contradictions. . ." (Logic, 300), "the emergence of contradictions, as in reductio ad absurdum, is proof. . ." (Logic, 301). As Dewey progresses more deeply into the subject matter of logic, the examples of inadvertent appeal to the a priori increase in frequency.<sup>14</sup>

These contradictions are at the very foundation of Dewey's philosophical system. Naturally they are inevitable, for once he rejected, as he thought, the absolute and a priori truth, he was forced to postulate his own criterion for truth--consequences. While verbally rejecting the a priori, he accepted under another form precisely what he had vehemently rejected; for his basic principle--the only truth is that which is tested--is in itself an a priori and unverifiable principle, or it is nothing at all. The dilemma is obvious. Either Dewey has an a priori principle at the basis of his philosophy, in which case his universal criterion of consequences is not universal since at least one truth escapes the criterion of verifiability. Or, taking the other horn of the dilemma, the criterion itself must be tested, in which case the criterion becomes useless since it is a principle which cannot be verified in the empirical order; nor did Dewey himself anywhere ever submit his first principle to the test of consequences.

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<sup>14</sup> Buswell, Jr., The Philosophies of F. R. Tennant and John Dewey, 427-28. Italics in original.

Furthermore, Dewey uses precisely the a priori against which he inveighs when he rules out all knowledge of supra-sensible things, that is, the soul, God, and the very possibility of an after life which might act as a stimulus for better living here on this earth. Admittedly, from an historical standpoint, people who have believed in these realities have lived personally happy lives and have had a beneficial effect upon the rest of the world. Hospitals, schools, charitable organizations of all sorts are testimony of this. Yet Dewey, supposedly supremely interested in the advance of civilization and the universal happiness, rules out both an after life and a relation to the supernatural simply because he feels that these cannot be tested empirically. The glaring contradiction is that he rules them out a priori, not even allowing for the possibility of either empirical verification or of the practical utility of such motives.

The only way out of this maze of contradictions is to adhere completely to a theory that claims truth simply is not attainable, as Dewey came close to doing when speaking of science.

It is the basic idea of Dewey that the method of modern science becomes understandable only if we drop the conception of science as a system of absolute truths. If the scientific work of Antiquity and of the Middle Ages seems so inefficient in comparison with the science of Modern Times, the reason is to be found in the fact that the science of the ancients was a search for necessities



and essences, a "quest for certainty."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, abandon the absolute, abandon a quest for certainty, and you will have the next best thing to truth. The above is merely the expression of the principles everywhere inherent in the philosophy of Dewey.

#### 6. THE HAZARD OF TRUTH AND OF FAITH IN THE INTELLECT

Once all a priori and absolute principles had been abandoned and consequences had been placed in their stead as a criterion of truth, Dewey was logical in affirming, as we have seen, that truth is acquired only by a great risk. Dewey seems to feel that the risk and the hazard will ~~of itself~~ insure great precautions in the search for truth as well as open new fields of intellectual discovery to the intrepid individual.

QUOTE # 6

Truth is not acquired except by risk and adventure. "Fixed ends upon one side and fixed principles,-- that is authoritative rules,--on the other are props for a feeling of safety, the refuge of the timid, and the means by which the bold prey upon the timid."<sup>16</sup>

Now whether Dewey wills it or not, He puts every individual in the state of being the first man. Each person must begin the quest for

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<sup>15</sup> Hans Reichenbach, "Dewey's Theory of Science," The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul A. Schlipp, Evanston, Northwestern University, 1939, 182.

<sup>16</sup> John Dewey, Essays in Experimental Logic, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1916, 237.

truth anew for no two sets of circumstances are ever completely alike. Yet, truth is something to be invented in particular circumstances by trial and error. It would logically follow, if we reduce his explicit theory to inherent absurdity, that the most adventurous man would be he who questions all past knowledge and tests every possible truth for himself, since even the acceptance of propositions thought to be true in the past, even though conditionally accepted now, would be "props for a feeling of safety, the refuge of the timid, and the means by which the bold prey upon the timid." This procedure would in no way solve the sociological problems Dewey so desires to solve. For in refusing to accept and build upon truths discovered in the past the efforts of each individual would prove futile most of the time, and culture would decline and not advance. The thought that truth is a journey would not console men. A journey may be away from home as well as towards it. While these ideas may seem strange, they are not imagined, but are implicitly stated by Dewey, for he agrees quite thoroughly with Peirce<sup>Peirce</sup> that the only real possession of truth is had by its very absence, in other words by a continual voyage toward it.

QUOTE 7

Truth is that concordance of an abstract statement with the ideal limit towards which endless investigation would tend to bring scientific belief, which concordance the abstract statement may possess by virtue of the confession of its inaccuracy and one-sidedness, and this

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confession is an essential ingredient of truth.<sup>17</sup>

NEW PARAGR.

In answer to this we reply If truth is not a conformity between the mind and things, and if no principles or norms are necessarily true, how could one know what the "ideal limit" is? The difficulty is obvious.

SAME PARAGR.

Dewey felt that he had eliminated all difficulties by emphasizing the adventurous quest for truth. Risk, adventure, change, and beneficial consequences are all that interest him. For Dewey

there is the unceasing polemic against any traffic with "certainty" that runs as a thread through all Dewey's historical criticisms. To friend and foe this has often appeared the most characteristic feature of his treatment of the history of philosophy. . . . We have thoroughly learned that ideas are relative to a context, and that neither history nor science reveals any fixed absolutes.<sup>18</sup>

In the end, then, we must ask if we should condemn a man who comes to the inevitable false conclusions of his original assumptions? Logically, Dewey's system is fairly well knit. But his end is to reform environment, to have a vital and beneficial effect on the culture. Without truth there can be no lasting nor beneficial

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<sup>17</sup> Dewey, Logic, 345. Dewey completely agrees with this definition of Peirce. The essential statement in regard to truth is to say that we do not have it.

<sup>18</sup> John Herman Randall, Jr., "Interpretation of History of Philosophy," The Philosophy of John Dewey, ed. Paul Schlipp, Northwestern University, 1939, 100.

effects, but merely a chaos of relativistic efforts, unguided and futile because of their lack of a definite end and of a definite criterion.

Dewey's only attempt to avoid the above conclusions is to postulate a faith in the intellect, a faith that is certainly misplaced in view of what has been said at the beginning of this chapter.

QUOTE "8

The legitimate hope then, and indeed our only hope, for survival and well-being in a world half wild and half alien to human interests, will be faith in human intelligence: in its capacity to organize and control those features and materials of the world as can be brought into accord with what is humanly needed, prized, and desired. . . . For it is within the setting of nature and experience that human intelligence is nourished and discovers its vocation and function.<sup>19</sup>

But there is no logic in calling for faith in a instrument which almost by definition is incapable of finding truth. Dewey clearly contradicts himself. He teaches that certainty and truth are best attained when we realize that we do not and cannot have them.

Then he asks for faith in the power of an intellect, which has already been deprived of its proper end, to know truth and thus to control the materials of the world. With such a belief there can be no truth and no constructive efforts toward the reshaping of environment. In submitting everything to the test of action

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19 Thayer, Logic of Pragmatism, 15.

he is forced to abandon all truth, even as that toward which one is working. With Dewey there is simply no basis left for an independent estimate of truth as such.

## 7. CONCLUSION

It is quite clear that <sup>NEW PARAG</sup> There can be no truth in the philosophy of Dewey. He was so strongly influenced by the atmosphere of change and material progress that all his considerations were tied up in the concrete, particular situation. Despite the fact that he wanted to be an instrumentalist and a pragmatist, he is actually neither. For him only that is true which is verified by experience. But this very principle, this criterion itself cannot be tested empirically. Therefore, the principle he uses as a criterion is arbitrary, and as an arbitrary principle--one that cannot be empirically tested--it has no logical validity in his own philosophy. With the destruction of this basic principle, his entire philosophy falls, for it is the foundation upon which all his theories are built.

Dewey himself was a good man, and we may suppose, sincerely interested in the progress of humanity and of the individual. But his entire philosophy, supposedly centered on ameliorating social conditions, succeeds only in eliminating the most vital factor governing the action of a creature, namely, his relation

to a Creator and the happiness that comes from rightly ordering actions to the end of man, beatitude. Since only physical nature and the data of consciousness which can be empirically tested are true, this relation to a Creator is arbitrarily ruled out from the very beginning even as a possibility, since its consequences--the final attainment or loss of man's last end--cannot be verified in this life. Hence, the action of man, completely and entirely bereft of a relation to a Creator, can at best have only temporary results. He is fundamentally subordinate to a process of change, and, at best, transient, temporary progress. Because truth has been vitiated, the end of man and the nature of man have been essentially changed. Man for Dewey has become a more unusual and higher type of animal. And there is no progress or advancement or adoption of laws and methods beneficial to all in a merely animal kingdom.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. P. Joseph Cahill, S.J., has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Sept. 7, 1954  
Date

Murel R. Vogel, Jr.  
Signature of Adviser